

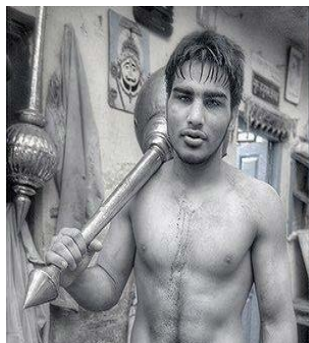
Wooden Exercise Club History and Practice



Wooden Asian clubs have been used as a form of exercise for centuries. Written documentation suggests that they have been practiced for over 300 years. It's only in the last 150 years that they have become popular in the Western World and in Great Britain. There has also been a resurgent in the last 10 years in their use in America. However, the specific time of origin is still a mystery of who exactly developed this practice.

Here is what we do know. Hinduism is the oldest known organized religion and was developed over 6,000 years ago. Research shows that Hinduism can also be traced back through writings to 5500-2600 BCE. Moreover, the ancient Sanskrit text, "Ramayana" also mentions wrestling in India and it describes the deity Hanuman as one of the greatest wrestlers of that time. Hanuman was worshipped as one of the Hindu Gods and is admired by India's wrestlers for his speed, strength and devotion to his parents. What is significant here is that Hanuman was always represented holding the "Mace". The Mace can be referred to as the "Gada" or in Persian cultures it is referred to as the "Gorz". The Mace was also used in conjunction with the clubs or "Jori" in the ancient gymnasiums or Ashrams of India. Through researching these Hindu traditions, one can certainly assume that the practice of club exercise is ancient and has been practiced for thousands of years. We can also conclude that club exercises originally had a foundation deeply rooted in India's early culture.

Hanuman



Club swinging exercise as we know it today has been represented as a form of physical culture and was first promoted in the western world around the middle of the eighteen hundreds. I have done extensive research and find it interesting that this exercise that brings health to us today originally has its beginnings in warfare and martial traditions. The use of small Indian clubs was first promoted to a western audience by the British. Some particular styles even refer to their form of practice as “The British Military Style”. The British witnessed the Indian Wrestlers or Palawan’s practicing with these implements during their regular workouts. Some even suggest the Indian military and police also indulged in the club exercise practice. Unfortunately, what the British did not bring back to England was the complete practice and exercises performed in the Ashrams including the practice of Kushti.

Kushti is a common name for wrestling all over the Middle East to include Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan. This practice was revered by the people of the Middle East and Asia. Before the British took over and ruled India, Kushti was also commonly practiced in India. This was a part of a warriors training as both sport and physical enhancement in preparation for battle. A code of conduct similar to the Japanese Samurai Code of Bushido was also part of that discipline. Warriors were not limited to the ways of just unarmed combat but also learned the archery, lance, spear, lathi, sword, dagger, axe, shield and numerous other advanced weaponry. In addition, the clubs were used in daily exercise for conditioning in unarmed combat as well. As long as mankind began to use tools, certainly at some point man would have naturally picked up a tree limb and used it as a club. As tools advanced so did the weaponry that was developed and regardless of how advanced the weapons evolved, the motion used while swinging the clubs has continued to this day.

The term “Indian Club” was coined because of the British adopting the exercise from India. However, India was not the only country where club exercise was practiced or used. In actuality, the clubs were used all over Asia in one form or another to physically condition it’s people for warfare. The Persian Empire also had its own places of gathering known as the “Zurkhaneh” which translates as “the house of strength and/or power”. The practitioners of Kushti gathered at these places of exercise. In the Zurkhaneh, the activity known as “Varesh E Bustahne” took place. Wrestling was one of the key components of this practice along with a series of club swinging and other simple equipment and calisthenics. These participants known as “Palavans” were held to a high standard, not only in the Zurkhaneh but also out in their communities.

Larger clubs were predominant with the larger and more highly conditioned athletes who participated in wrestling all over Asia. Some people claim weights as high as 50kg per club. Personally I have never witnessed anyone first hand swing clubs any heavier than 40lbs or 18kg each. Sure, people can lift a heavier club using leverage, but I have not seen where anyone can actually swing the clubs at that weight in a more controlled manner. I personally feel anyone today who has a desire to get into this regiment of daily club exercise should start with light clubs of 1 to 2 lbs. and gradually increase the weight over time.

As with all activities, there is a natural learning curve when becoming versed in the Asian club exercises. When I begin to teach the clubs, I like to first share with my students an overview of the exercises to be covered. I explain in detail how the shoulder moves and how we can develop the range of motion through stretching, strength and coordination. I emphasize the importance of good form, efficiency and controlled movements. Like riding a bicycle, the practice should be fluid controlled rhythmic movements.

My goal is to teach the students to not only learn the movements of the clubs, but to also comprehend how those movements relate to other activities and how it may benefit them in other areas of their life. I begin teaching the clubs with 5 basic movements which are quickly chained together so they are as one. I break down each movement and how it relates to ongoing daily activities. Once the student becomes comfortable with this simple five step sequence, we can easily begin to explore more complex movements. As students gain more strength, they are encouraged to develop their shoulder further through the use of heavier clubs.

I consider 1-5 pound clubs to be used as the light club swinging. The heavier clubs range in weight from 8-25 pounds. It is my opinion that clubs over 30 pounds be left for only the larger and most proficient athletes that have a minimum of a couple of years experience. The goal should not be how heavy of a club that can be lifted, but instead how well we perform each repetition.

There is no sport that I can think of where the clubs cannot aid in enhancing an athlete's performance. We can use the clubs in preparation or as a warm-up for most athletic activities like weight training and kettle bell lifts. I have trained many boxers and MMA participants, volleyball players and paddle board students who gained great benefits from this practice. The clubs are also another wonderful alternative for rehabbing a shoulder injury. I like to emphasize the importance of the clubs for not only overall health, but also for injury prevention through the development of the muscles of the shoulder. The clubs are just one of many ancient methods of exercise that helps us continue our pursuit of "Ageless Strength".

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The first five positions of the club swinging program:

Position #1



Position #2



Position #3



Position #4



Position #5

