

as the nunchaku, are only for kids. I don't agree. All weapons are part of the art. I think it's important that each generation learns about weapons. And don't forget; some weapons are illegal.

Willie "The Bam" Johnson

Martial Arts Training: What do you feel are the most important characteristics you need to be successful in weapons training?

Willie "The Bam" Johnson: It's important to have the basic attributes of punching, kicking and stances.

MAT: How long can a novice expect to train before he becomes proficient with weapons?

Johnson: It depends on the individual, but that old saying is true. What you put into your training is what you're going to get out of it. You need to work hard. You need dedication. For example, if I make a mistake, I stop and correct the mistake right away.

It also helps to be self-motivated. Some people can pick up weapons right away and do fantastic, especially if they have their mechanics down pat.

MAT: There's a difference between using a weapon and understanding a weapon, right?

Johnson: Yes. While I can teach somebody a weapon in a day or two, it takes a tremendous level of commitment to understand the weapon.

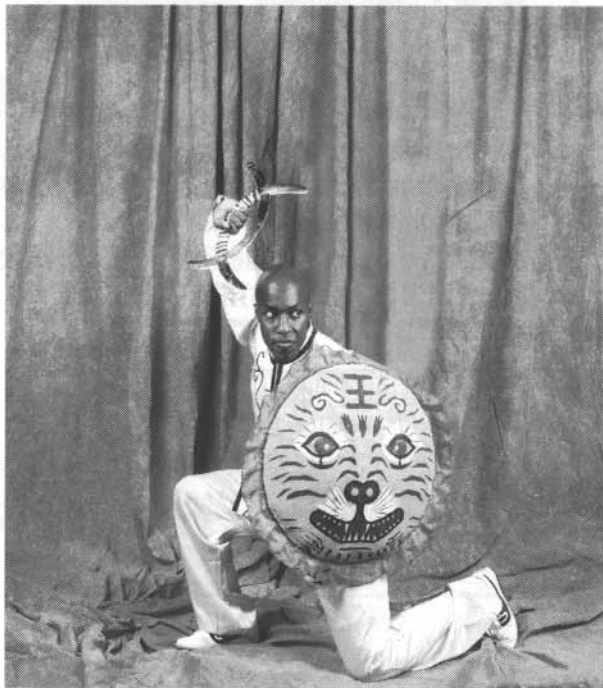
Once you are able to develop a harmony between your body, mind and spirit, you will feel more confident. You will be ready to go to competition.

But, as you said, there is a difference between using a weapon and excelling with a weapon. You can tell when someone does not have this full understanding because he doesn't have a total commitment in the execution of the weapon. When I am using my sword, even though it is aluminum, I can still do some damage with a strike because I put a lot of energy into my strikes. Most people just go through the motions. Their heart is not in it.

So you can't settle for just knowing your weapon. You have to understand it. The ultimate is to understand your weapon.

MAT: What does it take for most people to reach the next level?

Johnson: Constant work. You have to work out regularly each week. You



One of the best ways to improve your weapons skills is to break your routine down into sections and do one section at a time, says Willie Johnson (above).

have to break your form into sections or basics. You have to do one section at a time. You have to perfect each movement. Once you do this, you can flow naturally from one movement to the next. I can mess up a prearranged movement and no one knows I made a mistake because I can flow into another move. That comes from understanding the flow.

MAT: What is your routine like?

Johnson: To begin, I work on each section individually. When I'm done, I combine the sections. For example, I'll put the first two sections together. When that flows, I'll add another one. When that flows, I'll add another one until I'm doing all of them. I want to establish a continuous harmony. I want all four sections to be like one movement.

I also concentrate on my weak parts. I focus on them. I want to develop muscle memory, which will also

develop confidence.

Once you get confident with weapons, then you have to work on the applications, which allows you to develop even more confidence.

And once you get into a flow, you get speed. Once you get speed, you will get power.

MAT: How do you develop control?

Johnson: Two-person drills. To develop control, you have to develop rhythm with your partner. Let's say I have a spear and you have a broadsword. I am going to thrust the spear at your forehead. Your job is to block the spear and strike back at my forehead. You're going to block, go, block, go, block, etc. Eventually, you will pick up the pace. You'll develop a rhythm.

Obviously, you'll start off at a slower pace, but you'll gradually increase the pace from medium to fast.

MAT: How much time do you spend on drills such as these?

Johnson: Let's say I have 45 minutes. I'd spend 15 minutes for loosening up, 20 minutes for a variety of drills and the last segment for two-person drills.

MAT: What is the best way to train at home without a partner?

Johnson: When I am training for competition, I don't use a partner. The discipline is just something I am able to establish within myself.

Anyway, if you are working with a sword, you can hang paper from the ceiling and use the paper as a target. Eventually you want to establish a stopping point. You want to make the paper move without hitting it. Most people can't do that. It's simple, but people have a hard time with it.

There's also a candle drill you can do with a spear or staff. The object is to extinguish the flame without touching the candle. This develops snapping and whipping power. *MLA*

Watch for Willie Johnson's series of videotapes on weapons, forms and street self-defense.