

WUSHU GROUND FIGHTING

Discover the Chinese Path to Victory on the Ground

by Willie Johnson and Nancy Musick
Photos by Anthony Williams

To be a universal fighter, a martial artist must train to defend himself on the ground. Unfortunately, most martial arts schools fail to include such skills in their training curriculum. This neglect may come from the need to learn additional complex body movements or from the fact that students seldom think about what they'd do while on their back, especially when their ego tells them they will never end up in this position.

The Chinese art of *wushu*, perhaps best known for its high-flying kicks and showy aerial routines, also includes some of the most effective ground-fighting principles and techniques. Although regarded more as a set of defensive skills than offensive skills, wushu ground fighting teaches how to deal effectively with one or more opponents of any size.

Gaining the Ground Advantage

Many instructors say that, when you go down on your back, you must be able to kick, punch, grapple and trap, then transition into restraining holds. Silver Spring, Maryland-based wushu instructor Dennis Brown goes one step further and teaches that, while being taken down to the ground, you should be able to execute an effective technique on the way down.

To be well-rounded, students should develop such techniques in training, then refine them for actual combat. Wushu forms training can be of value because, as a student rolls, drops and falls, the exercise helps condition the student's muscles, develop body control and ingrain the complex movements.

But the best method for honing ground-fighting ability involves a partner. Those unfortu-



nate enough to live in rough, violence-plagued inner-city areas can often attest that ground-fighting ability develops rapidly when survival is at stake. However, much better results stem from adopting wushu's training methods long before you get into a real self-defense situation—in tournaments or the classroom, for example.

Remember that, once you're on the ground, your opponent must come down to you to launch his attack. When he does, the unprotected parts of his body will become targets for your strikes. If you use the right technique, you can easily gain the advantage. You have greater reach with your legs, which can jam, trap and lock your opponent's limbs. A wushu ground fighter's hands are generally employed to block incoming attacks, grab limbs, maintain balance and move his body. During close-range fighting, they also come into play for the application of restraining techniques and traditional kung fu animal strikes.

On the ground, a martial artist must keep his balance. Fortunately, this is rather easy because,

Willie Johnson (above) assumes the ground fighter's on-guard stance. Opposite: When attacked with a punch, Johnson drops to the ground and delivers a side kick to the ribs (1). Hooking his left foot around his opponent's ankle and his right foot behind the knee, he performs a single-leg lock (2), then takes his opponent down (3).