

« CAPOEIRA »

The Brazilian art of self-defense

Capoeira is, today, the odd name of an odd sport. It describes Brazil's national art of self-defense, a peculiar form of wrestling which emphasizes the importance of leverage and provides for hitting, kicking and butting.

Capoeira was not created but, sharing a phenomenon common to the majority of wrestling methods, made a spontaneous appearance during the 17th century. Its basic features originated among the African slaves brought to Brazil by the Portuguese colonists at the time of their settlement on the east coast. With no weapons at their disposal, the slaves concentrated on improving their sole means of defense: wrestling. They devoted much time to careful training, carried out under the cover of their traditional dances and games.

During the XVIIIth century, the Portuguese settlement was attacked by Dutch troops and, while the opponents waged war, thousands of slaves escaped and founded their own villages. Still unarmed, they resorted to their much practiced ballet-like, wrestling to protect their newly acquired freedom.

« Capoeira » (men of the bushes) started its career as a nickname given by the Portuguese soldiers to their former slaves. The latter, well ambushed, appeared out of nowhere, ready to meet the enemy in a merciless handfight. The word « Capoeira » then extended to describe both the man and his way of fighting.

During the 18th century, this form of fighting was taken up and further developed by the Mulatto who was, and

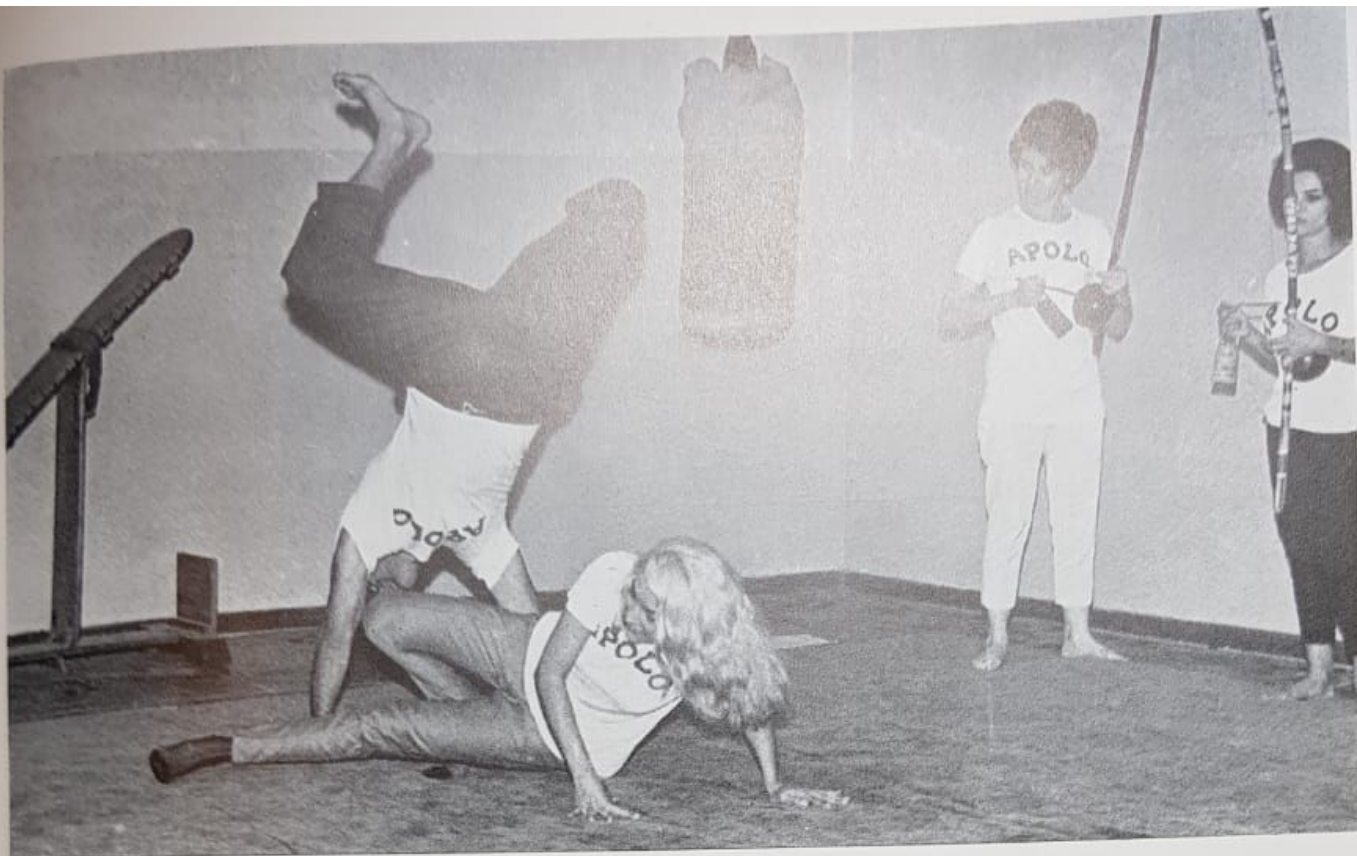
still is gifted for all sports requiring speed and nimbleness.

Logically enough — and sharing the fate of wrestling methods in Japan — « Capoeira » became a favorite of criminals. And thus, the name broadened its

meaning: it was used to designate hard-boiled criminals and, presumably by association, colonist bodyguards who, emulating the Japanese Samurais, donned peculiar robes and sowed fear among the population.



Here's a hold that certainly wins a black belt in Judo!



Capoeira is a kind of Karate. Rather than being an art of attack, it's an art of defense.
Women can also excell in this.

Capoeira, as a method of wrestling, then entered a long period of stagnation due to normal attrition of its users and lack of interest in its preservation. It was spared total oblivion by its affiliation with the national folklore: « Capoeira » continued its career as a dance, inspiring songs and rythms and thus fostering the creation of a percussion instrument called « berimbau », which has become its symbol.

Nowadays, Capoeira has evolved into a sport. It is taught in a few schools for physical education as well as in the Army. Consideration has been given to the creation of an official organization whose task will be to draw the regulations and promote the introduction of this sport abroad.

Technically speaking, « Capoeira » belongs to the group of so-called « positive defense » wrestling. This means that the defense consists in both shunning and counter-attacking. Shunning must serve the double purpose of avoiding blows and placing the wrestler in a position favoring counter-attack.

The offensive may open with an initial blow forcing the opponent to retreat and placing the aggressor in a more advantageous position. This is followed by a direct, felling blow which leaves the recipient in a most precarious situation. Five basic moves are strictly defensive, six others serve to provoke a loss of balance and there is a multitude of intermediate possibilities. The basic moves are easy to learn and require few lessons in the case of a pupil with physical aptitudes for acrobatics. However, several years will go by before he will be able to efficiently meet any given situation.

The main advantage of « Capoeira » is that it enables the wrestler to face several opponents simultaneously. Training requires no special equipment, a punching bag hanging from a roof being adequate. Practice may also be taken up by women and children.

In spite of the fact that most blows may be fatal, this sport can, if controlled by appropriate regulations, become void of real danger.

Demonstrations on the principles of the « Capoeira » will be staged next year in conjunction with the C. I. S. M. championships to be held in Brazil.

Captain
LAMARTINE PEREIRA
DA COSTA

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