

## Shuai Chiao's Gene Chicoine: 'Stun first, then throw.'

by Steve Neklia

For those of you joining us for the first time, welcome to Grapppler's Corner, a column dedicated to the many grappling arts. Because we want to concentrate our efforts on grapplers and grappling styles that teach legitimate self-defense techniques, only certain instructors qualify for inclusion in this column. To separate the talkers from the grapplers, we plan to work out with every subject, and if we don't believe a person's self-defense techniques are practical, that person will not make it into Grapppler's Corner. With that said, here is this month's column.

this man and learn more about his unique art.

First, some background on shuai chiao: Sometimes called Chinese wrestling, it is claimed by many to be the oldest known form of kung fu. "Everything came from shuai chiao," Chicoine said. "[The other styles] evolved to a point where you could see a tremendous difference. They got away from the throwing part of it—where they could use *chin-na* (joint manipulation) to block and grab—and went into strictly punching and kicking."

To the untrained eye, modern

or throws a blow, and we block and come in. If we're just going to throw, we do the same thing [as the judo stylist]. But the way we do it isn't their way. We can block, strike and break the collarbone, bring the knee up into the pelvic area, grab the back of the head and slam you face-down into the floor or the ground. We're not just going to take you back, as in the sport part of it."

The shuai chiao combinations Chicoine described can include severely damaging hand and foot strikes, along with joint locks and breaks. "The style was never just



Karate/Kung Fu Illustrated Editor Robert Young recently called to ask if I would like to interview Gene Chicoine, head of the International Shuai Chiao Association. Chicoine was planning to conduct a series of seminars in San Francisco and had agreed to fly to Los Angeles to work on a feature article for the magazine. Young thought Chicoine would make a great subject for Grapppler's Corner. I told him I did not know very much about *shuai chiao*, but after I looked at the information he sent, it became clear that I had to meet

shuai chiao resembles judo because both arts include very effective throwing techniques. But shuai chiao goes beyond simply throwing an opponent to the mat. The shuai chiao stylist takes his opponent down quickly and aggressively. His throwing techniques are designed to be final. If done correctly, they will end a confrontation.

"Judo has only a portion of [shuai chiao's throws]," Chicoine said. "Take *osoto-gari*, which is a judo sweep. To us, that is called diagonal striking. The guy reaches

for throwing," he said. "I was commissioned to make everybody realize this, and it's taken me eight years to get to the point where I've got people who can teach it." Chicoine then explained how, decades ago in China, officials wouldn't let shuai chiao practitioners compete against practitioners of other styles because the shuai chiao people always took first place with their debilitating combinations.

Most modern-day practitioners of the art belong to the International Shuai Chiao Association

(ISCA), which boasts a world-wide membership of 39,000, Chicoine said. Most live in Asia, but more than 1,200 reside in the United States. He assumed the presidency of ISCA in 1986 after the death of his teacher, Grandmaster Chang Dung-sheng. Chicoine, who started his martial arts training in 1946 as a member of the occupation forces in Japan, currently holds a shuai chiao rank of ninth-degree black belt.

When I first met Chicoine, I had gotten the distinct impression that I did not want to mess with this guy. I don't know why, because he seemed quite friendly. As we talked more and more, I learned that he was a retired police officer who had had ample opportunity to use his skills in real self-defense situations. People who can take care of themselves usually have an air of confidence, and I had a strong feeling that Chicoine was one of those people.



As I watched him warm up with his assistant, Michael Lograsso, I was intrigued that the strikes came before the throw and that there didn't seem to be any "finishing techniques" afterward. I asked Chicoine about this, and he replied, "Sure, we throw—at the end, if we haven't already knocked you down. But you are injured long before you get flipped through the air. We like to stun first, then throw. There are some viscous techniques [in shuai chiao], and they are very effective."

Even though the shuai chiao system includes strikes, kicks and blocks, make no mistake about it: The throw is most important. Chicoine explained why: "Until you put a guy down on the ground, you haven't won. A lot of what's done in fighting—especially in this country, where they come up to you and try to tackle, grab or wrestle you—[does not address this issue]. If you can throw, the guy is gone."

Lograsso elaborated on the uniqueness of his art's throwing techniques: "There's a difference between the way judo people throw and the way shuai chiao people take an opponent down. In judo, you can breakfall, but in shuai chiao, you go down and something gets broken. Upside down, there are places you can't breakfall. [The throw] is a finishing move."

The time to start training had arrived. I asked Chicoine to concentrate on the purely self-defense



aspects of his art so I could determine if it would fit the theme of Grappler's Corner. With that, Chicoine delivered a solid straight-arm strike to the back of my neck, and as my body was jarred forward, he threw me to the ground. When I found out that was just a taste of things to come, I started wondering why I had ever agreed to do these things.

To someone who has never been on the receiving end of one of Chicoine's shuai chiao combinations, it may not look as if he possesses any great amount of power

or effectiveness. And although he later claimed he hadn't been hitting me very hard, after an hour it seemed as if my brain had been slammed against my skull, and before it got a chance to slide back in place, I would get smashed into the floor again. It seemed that I had asked the wrong person to show me the self-defense aspects of his art, because I was now finding out that shuai chiao is 100 percent self-defense.

"The original concept of all martial arts was not [to be] a sport," Chicoine explained. "They were designed to fight—to defend yourself or to attack. Exercise and the mental aspects came in later. The original concept was strictly for fighting, and to take that away destroys the art."

Apparently, nothing whatsoever had been taken away from shuai chiao. It has retained all its combat effectiveness, and I had the aches and pains to prove it.

I was quite impressed with

*As Steve Neklia grabs Gene Chicoine's jacket with both hands (1), Chicoine moves his hands inside and upward to control his attacker's shoulders (2). Chicoine yanks the attacker downward into an upward knee thrust (3), then places his right leg to the outside of the attacker's legs (4). To finish, the shuai chiao stylist throws Neklia over his hip and smashes him into the floor (5).*

shuai chiao—and equally impressed with Chicoine. My only regret was that our time together was so short. Chicoine has been around the martial arts for almost as long as the arts have been in the Western world, and as I said goodbye, I couldn't help but think that there was a whole world of grappling treasures lurking inside his brain.

*To find out more about shuai chiao, write to the International Shuai Chiao Association, 31-33 Erie Road, Tallmadge, Ohio 44278.*