

BACK TO THE



FUTURE

M.A.I. TALKS TO WING TCHUN
MASTER EXPONENT AND HEAD PRINCIPLE OF THE
'NEW' PRO-AM WING TCHUN ORGANISATION
(INTERNATIONAL), NICK SMART.

M.A.I.: What made you start your training?

Nick Smart: My first images of the martial arts were through the television with programmes such as *The Avengers*, *The Man from UNCLE* and the James Bond movies. Later of course there was the Bruce Lee explosion. At that time, like most of my generation, I wanted to be like Bruce Lee. He was the ultimate role model.

M.A.I.: How old were you when you first took up martial arts?

Nick Smart: I started training in the early 1970s when I was about thirteen years old.

M.A.I.: Were you training in Wing Chun then, or another style?

Nick Smart: No, actually, I first started

training in Karate and a little bit of Ju-Jitsu.

M.A.I.: What made you switch styles to Wing Chun?

Nick Smart: Well, Wing Chun was hardly known at that time. It was a friend of mine, with whom I used to race-walk, that introduced me as he had to Karate. As teenagers we used to spar in the garden and were pretty evenly matched. He left Karate and took up Wing Chun. After only a few weeks training we sparred again and he had become better. I felt disadvantaged somewhat by him, I knew there was

something different about Wing Chun and I needed to learn it to compete with him.

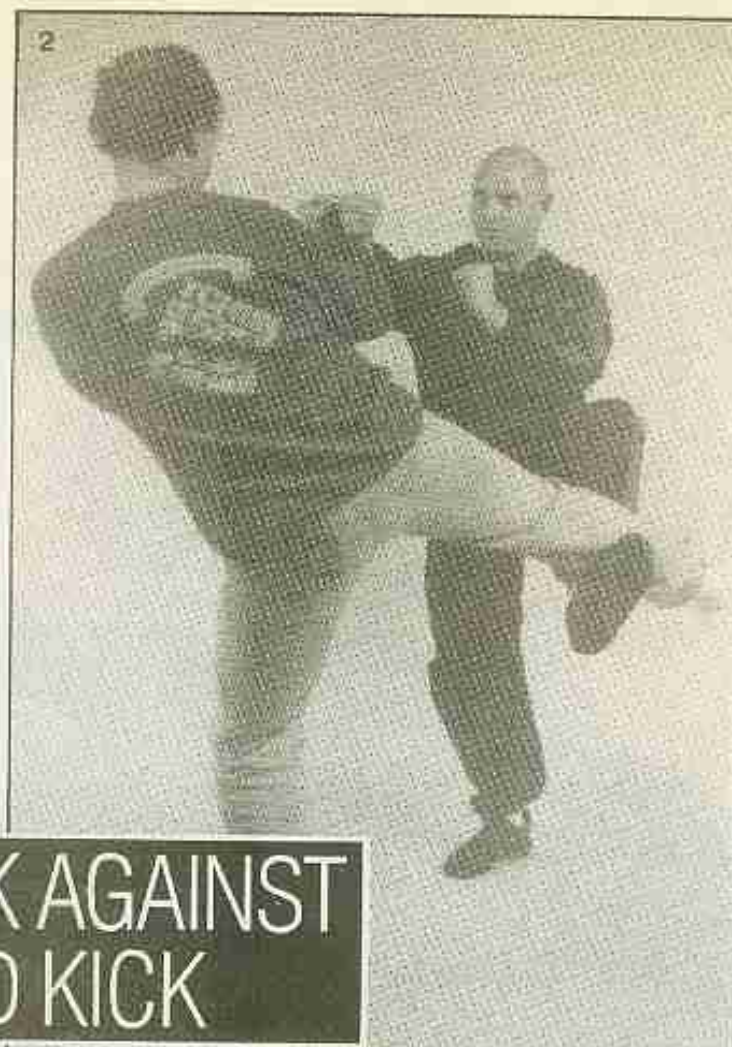
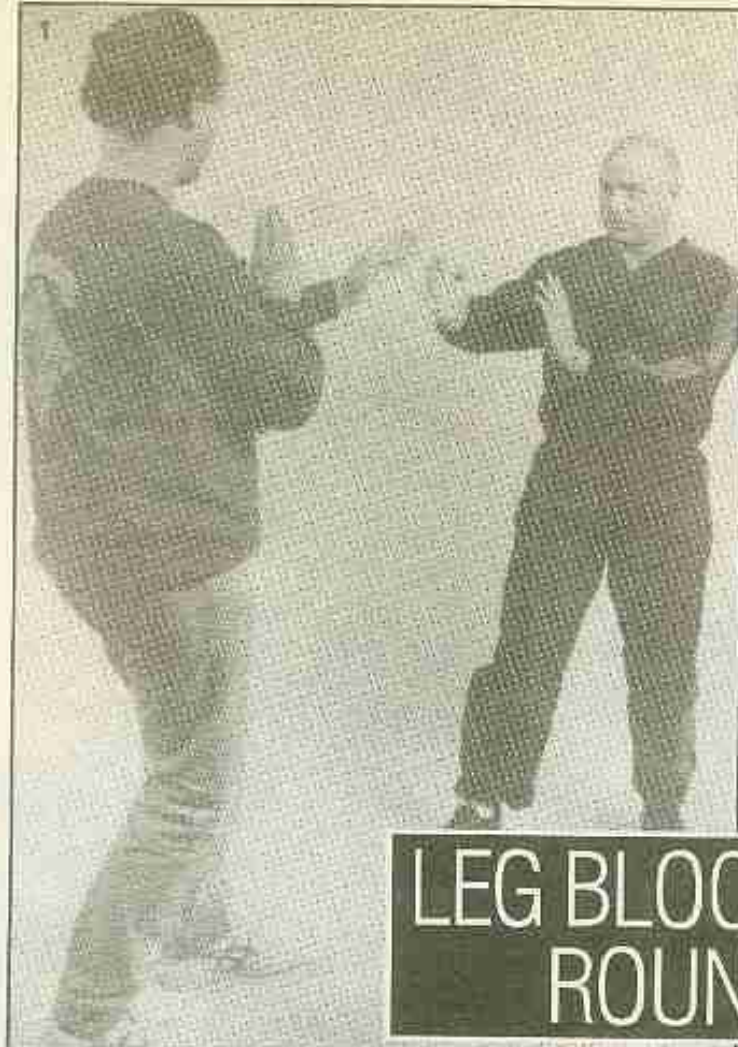
M.A.I.: When did you move on from Wing Chun to Wing Tsun?

Nick Smart: Well funnily enough, my first Wing Chun instructor went to Hong Kong to learn Wing Tsun. When he returned to England he was teaching Wing Tsun rather than Wing Chun, so I didn't really have a choice. The club closed down pretty soon afterwards and I was left without a school. Later I joined another school where I was learning Wing Chun again! I was introduced to Wing Tsun via a colleague and trained for nine years or so.

M.A.I.: Have you trained in any other martial arts during that time?

Nick Smart: A little bit of Escrima which

With clubs in fourteen countries, including Argentina, Brazil and Chile, Nick has served an apprenticeship in the martial arts that's carried him to Hong Kong, China, America and Europe. In our frank interview this well-travelled master tells of his plans to de-bunk the mysticism that still surrounds the arts.



LEG BLOCK AGAINST ROUND KICK

is a pet hobby of mine, but I don't teach it. I have a general interest in all real forms of fighting, both sport and non-sport, but not UFC.

M.A.I.: What is it you don't like about UFC?

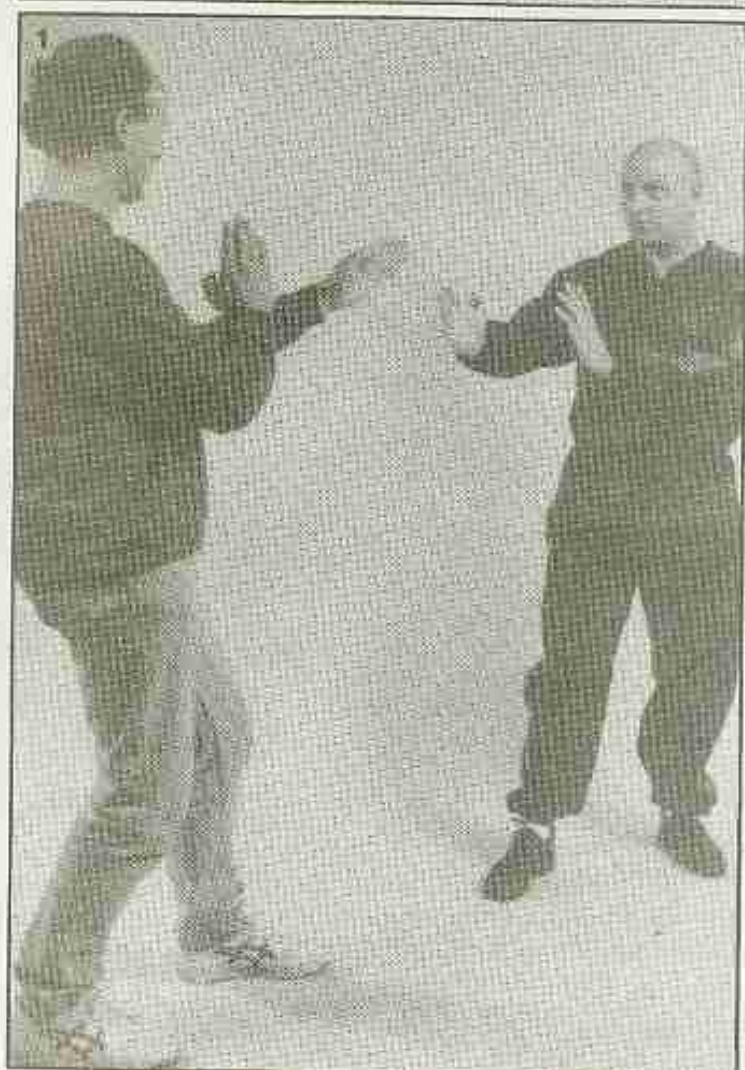
Nick Smart: It is only my opinion, but I think that more damage will be done to the image of martial arts than good as a result of the hype and showbiz that surrounds these contests. These fights look messy and violent, and don't illustrate in any way the other tangible benefits that can be gained from training in martial arts, such as character development, self protection, self discipline, overcoming your own personal limitations, etc. I understand that the promoters of the contests want to sell videos through sensationalism and I have no problem with that in itself, but feel that the side effects will be negative towards the arts in general.

M.A.I.: Why the spelling 'Wing Tchun'? Is this a new style?

Nick Smart: Of course not! The change of spelling is to separate my organisation from the association that I was formerly with. Essentially what we still teach is Wing Tsun/Chun with all its elements, but in addition to that we teach other complimentary programmes which are specific to different environments. The association I was with could not accommodate my viewpoint, so it was better that we parted company.

M.A.I.: Is Autodefence your style?

Nick Smart: No way! I have been misquoted on this. Autodefence is a quick and concise teaching programme developed to suit a public need for an introduction to self protection without the artistic content. We tailor it to suit people's needs in different situations. For instance police officers would have different needs to people in the special forces. Women in working environments may need something different again. All of them may not initially want to learn a martial art, although many students in Autodefence





do develop an interest and continue their training in the full Wing Chun system.

M.A.I.: You also teach something called 'Sport Fighting System'. What is this?

Nick Smart: This is a ring fighting system developed in conjunction with my long time friend and colleague Milan Prosenica, former European super heavyweight full contact champion. The only master to my knowledge in the history of Wing Chun/Tsun to have taken the Wing Chun concepts and tested them in the ring for over two decades with more than three-hundred fights both amateur and professional. We have taken his vast experience and developed a training system to enable people to really utilise the principles of Wing Tsun/Chun in a sports environment.

M.A.I.: Does this get confusing for the student?

Nick Smart: Absolutely not. The different applications are taught as entirely separate programmes. This enables us to more accurately deal with trainees' individual preferences within one organisation without losing the clarity behind the discipline.

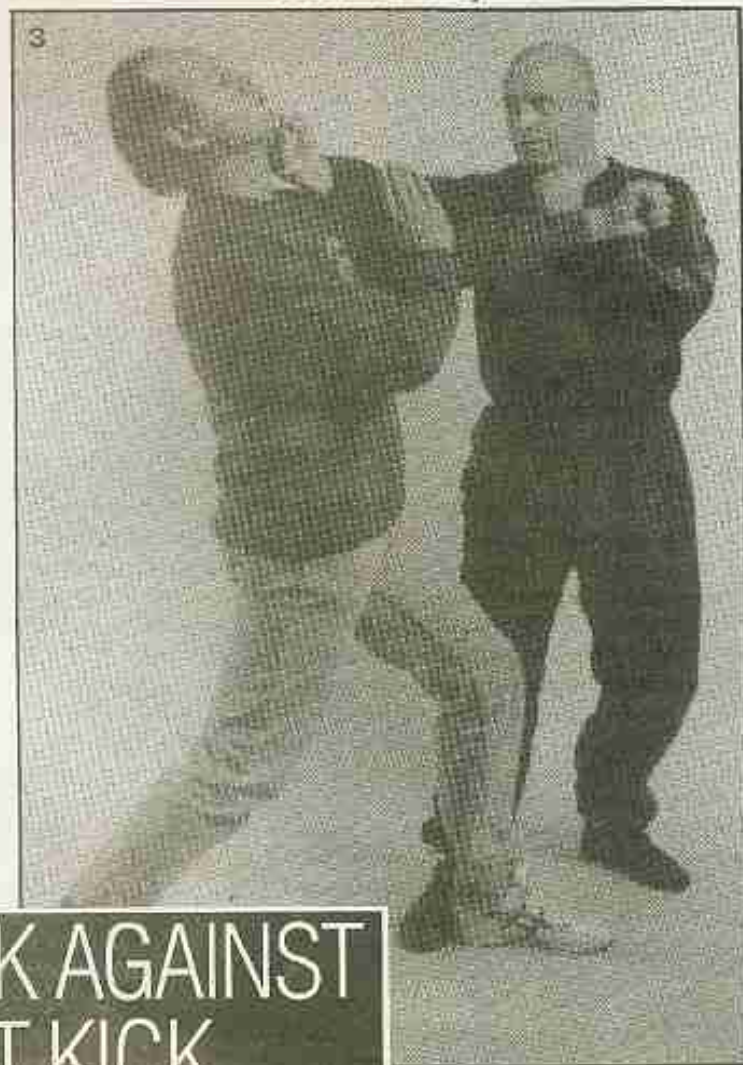
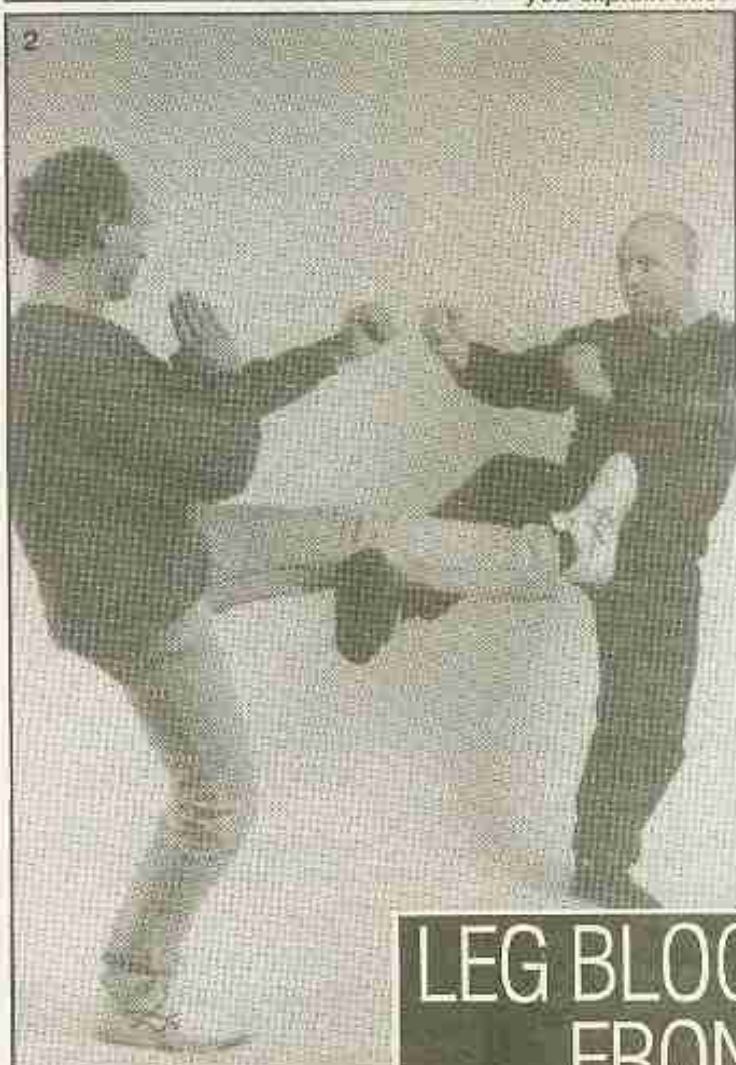
M.A.I.: Your organisational motto is "Trust, Integrity and Essence", can you explain this?

"I BELIEVE THAT MARTIAL ARTS ARE THERE TO MAKE PEOPLE MORE CONFIDENT, TO BUILD PEOPLE'S SELF ESTEEM RATHER THAN TO STRIP IT AWAY THROUGH ENFORCING SUBSERVIENT TO PEOPLE OR ORGANISATIONS VIA MYSTICAL NOTIONS"

Nick Smart: By 'Essence' we mean that we concentrate on that which makes the art what it is, rather than that which is periphery to the art. The meaning of trust and integrity are obvious. Trust and integrity flows through everything that we do and determines the quality of the relationship between trainees and trainers/instructors.

M.A.I.: What are your goals for the organisation?

Nick Smart: I want to build a cohesive group of people who interact with each other to realise their potential within the martial arts, and to completely de-bunk the mysticism that surrounds the arts. I believe that martial arts are there to make people more confident, to build people's self esteem rather to strip it away through enforcing subservience to people or organisations via mystical notions. The martial arts are martial arts - period. You don't need to become subservient to anyone to learn them.



LEG BLOCK AGAINST FRONT KICK

You only need to interact and have an open mind, the rest is nonsense.

M.A.I.: What sort of training do you offer your students?

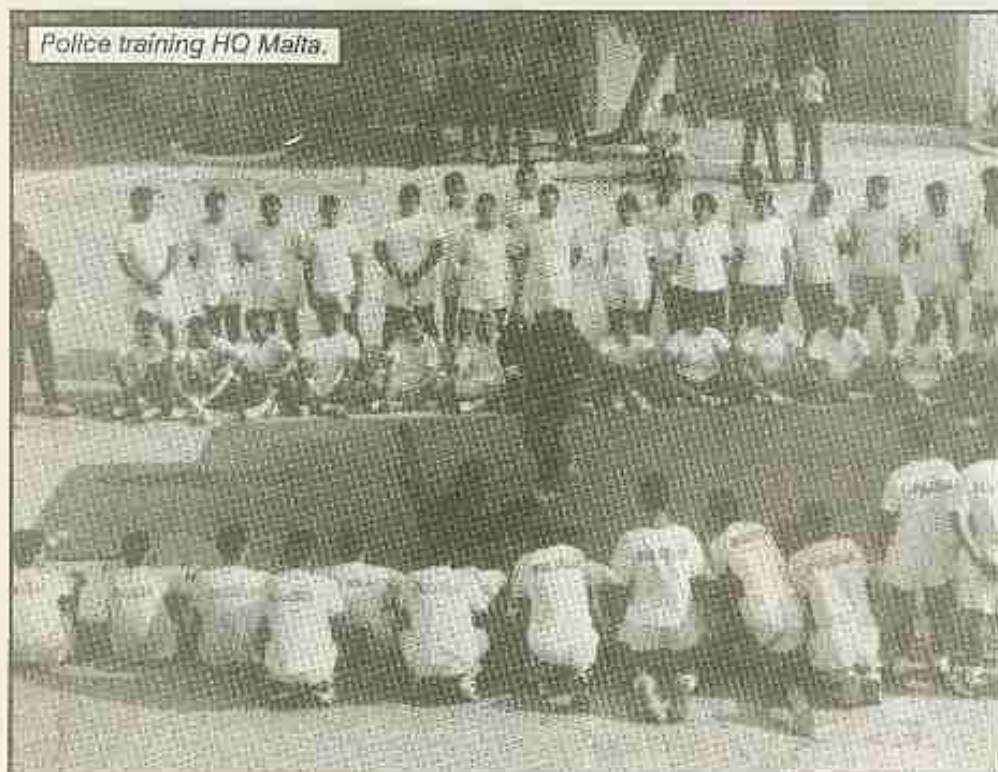
Nick Smart: We have a network of schools that offer evening classes as well as personal tuition. I also run regular regional workshops in most areas open to people who are currently training in other styles apart from Wing Tchu as well as my regular trainees. Along with this we have weekend, full-week and full-month intensive training courses for those who would like to immerse themselves in the art and progress much more quickly through the discipline, perhaps with the intention of becoming an instructor. I also have schools in other countries where similar training is given such as Argentina, Malta, Hungary, Slovenia, etc..

M.A.I.: Have you ever thought about martial arts acting?

Nick Smart: I have thought about it in the past and had opportunities, but it is not for me. It is unreality and make believe. I see myself as an all weather martial artist.

M.A.I.: Do you think martial arts have to evolve to survive?

"TRADITION IS ONLY IMPORTANT IN THAT IT LETS YOU KNOW WHERE YOU COME FROM, BUT ALL THINGS THAT COULD BE CALLED MODERN ARE ALSO IMPORTANT. DOES NOT ALL THAT IS MODERN TODAY BECOME TRADITIONAL IN THE FUTURE?"



Nick Smart: There are many aspects to the martial arts, and I do think that a discipline should have artistic, practical and sport contents to continue and grow, and more importantly offer people depth to training and options.

M.A.I.: You mentioned earlier the mysticism that surrounds the martial arts, do you think tradition is important?

Nick Smart: If you mean the traditional nodding dog, Kau Tau, we-are-not-worthy-mentality, then no way. Tradition is only important in that it lets you know where you have come from, but all things that could be called modern art also important. Does not all that is modern today become traditional in the future? Was not Wing Chun modern when first conceived?

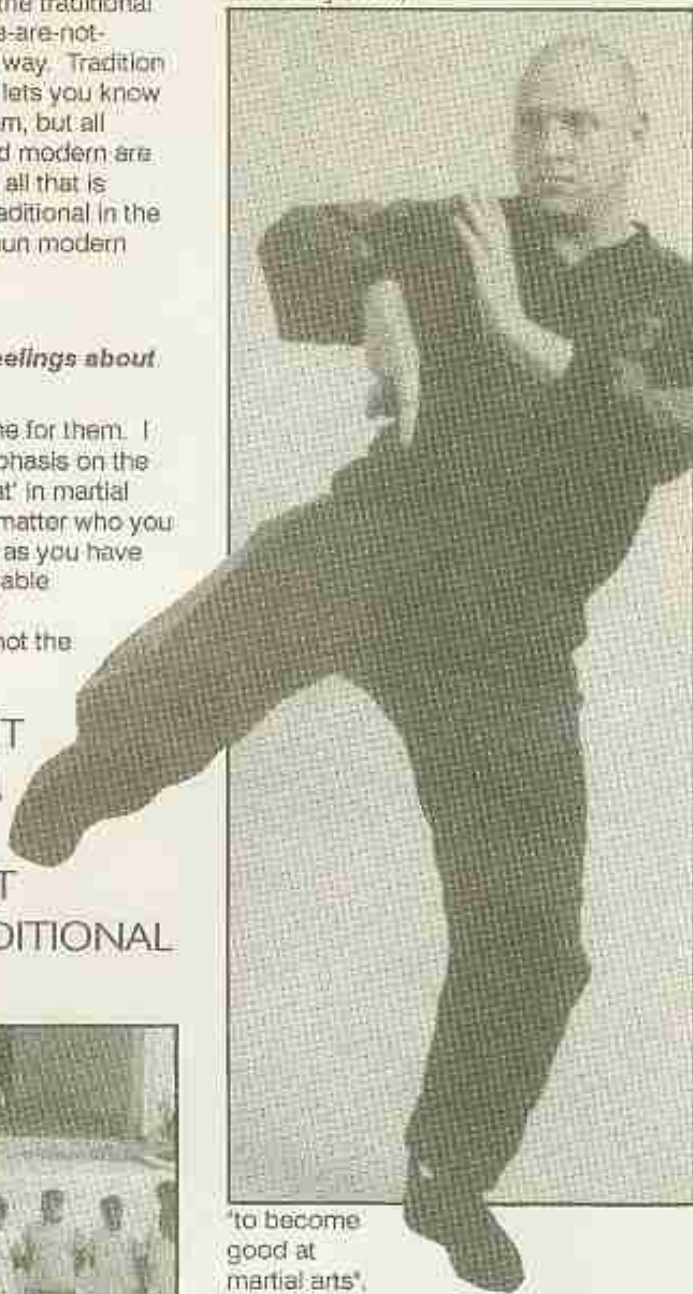
M.A.I.: What are your feelings about politics in martial arts?

Nick Smart: I have no time for them. I think there is an over-emphasis on the 'who' rather than the 'what' in martial arts today. What does it matter who you have trained with as long as you have learned good, solid, workable techniques? We need to concentrate on the arts, not the people within the

arts. Take boxing for instance, boxers don't continually talk about James Figg or James Corbett. Mike Tyson is not likely to jump up and say he does original Jack Johnson boxing and that it is the best, is he?

M.A.I.: What are your plans for 1996?

Nick Smart: To further develop the group and offer better training and options in our gyms. To introduce more people to our discipline and give them what they want,



"to become good at martial arts"

M.A.I.: To finish, what advice would you give to a new student of martial arts?

Nick Smart: Learn your basics well, but remember that the basics are there to serve you. You are not there to serve the basics.

M.A.I.: Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions.

Nick Smart: You're welcome.

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