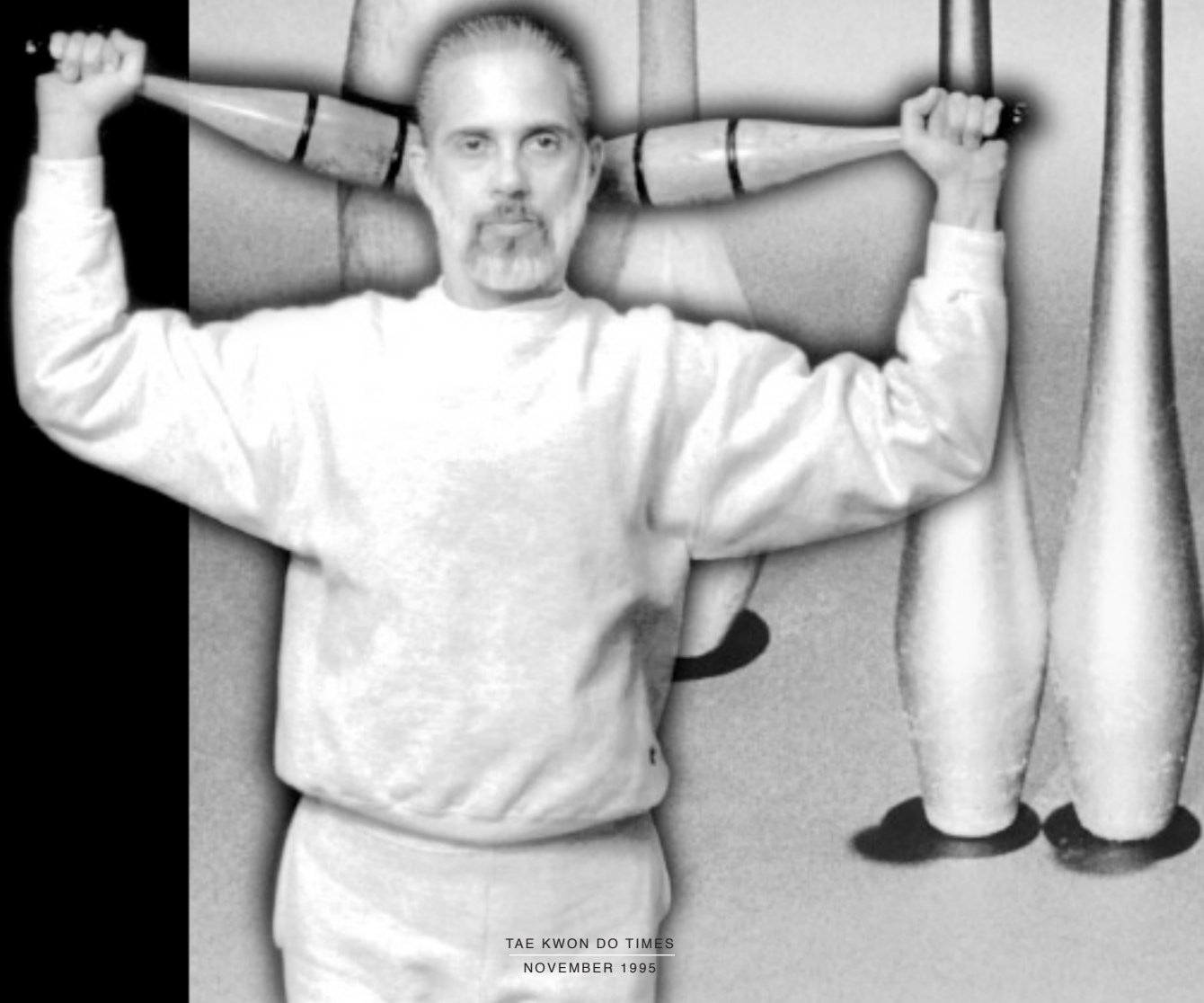


# Club Swinging

An Ancient Restorative Art for  
the Modern Martial Artist

By Edward Thomas, Ed.D.

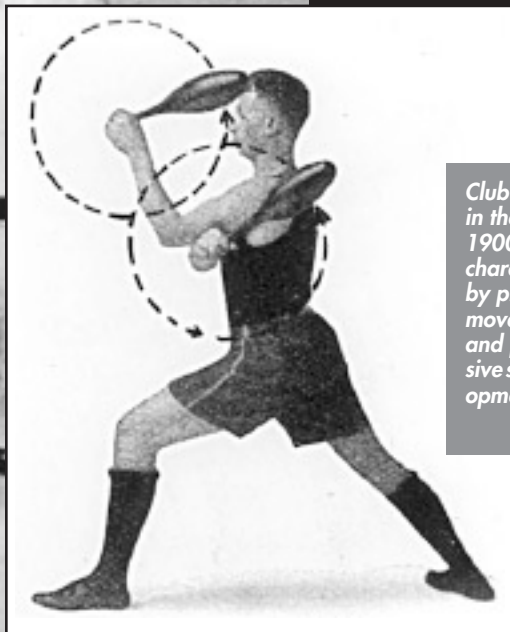


Combine today's understanding of human motion with the wisdom of ancient martial artists and you get a force multiplier that stimulates both mind and body.

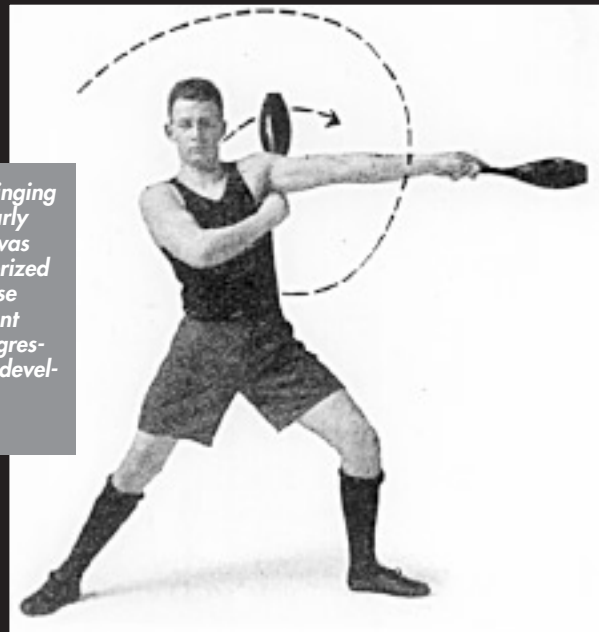
Martial artists past and present have stressed the importance of complementing external power with internal harmony. This balance between restorative and martial arts remains an essential thread running through the fabric of both Eastern and Western martial arts philosophy.

Martial arts are often defined as techniques that allow for appropriate responses to external aggression. Restorative arts bring the body toward its optimal state of harmony and compensate for the stresses of daily life. These two concepts are integrally related, and both have roots in Western as well as Eastern physical culture. The search for and celebration of these common roots and relationships allows the martial artist to better understand the universal principles that unite all fighting systems.

The rediscovery and growing popularity of Indian clubs may be the decade's most interesting development concerning modern restorative and martial arts in American culture. The clubs originated in the East, but they came to America from Europe. The story of their evolution, disappearance, and rediscovery in American society is intriguing, and the amazing effect of their practical application is relevant to any martial arts system.



*Club swinging in the early 1900's was characterized by precise movement and progressive skill development.*



*Grandmaster Kwang Jo Choi in Atlanta, Georgia, leads some of his instructors through club swinging drills.*

# CLUB SWINGING

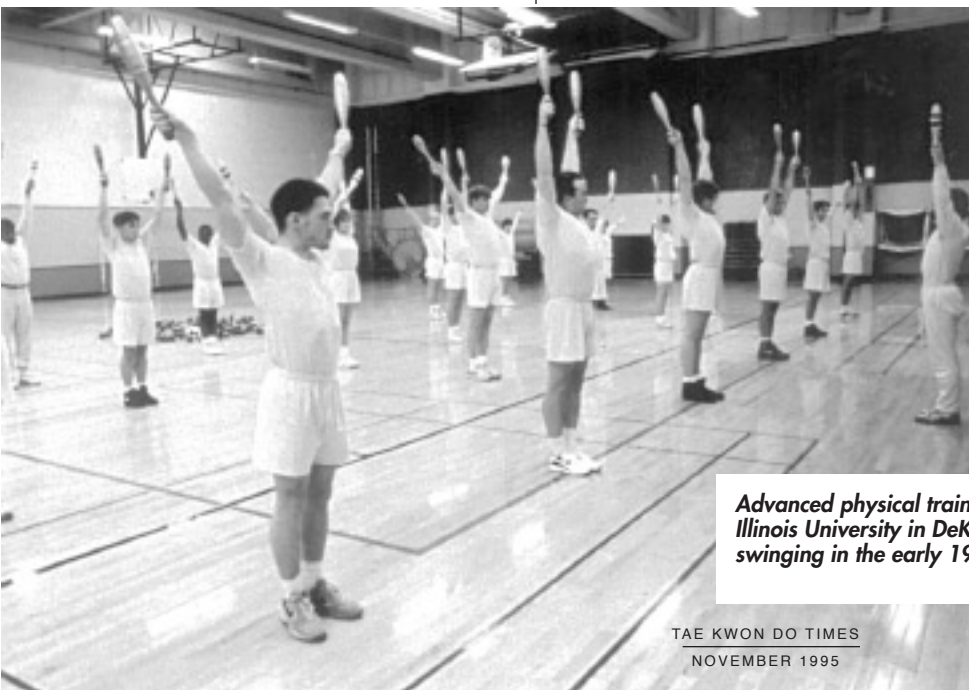
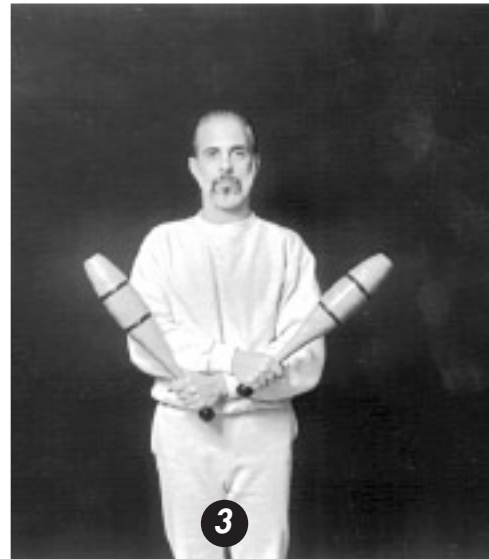
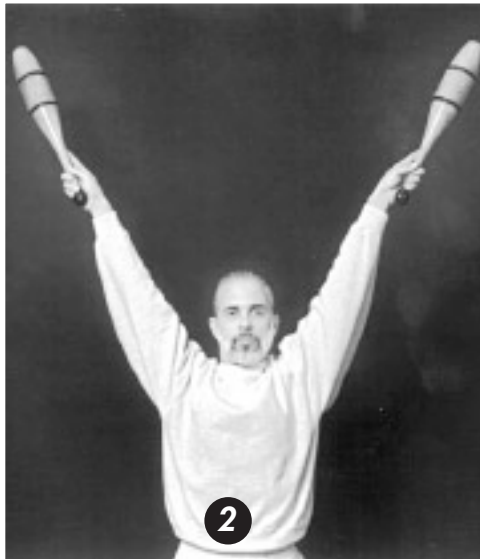
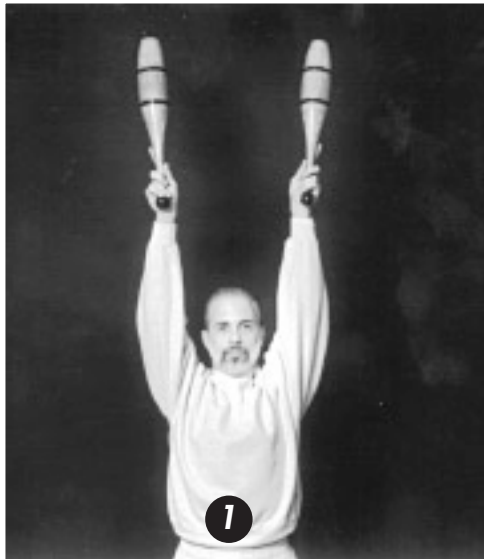


*Club drills involve both upper and lower body movements designed to challenge the highly skilled martial artist as well as the beginner.*

Indian clubs are usually made of wood and resemble either club-like weapons or bowling pins. At one time, they lined the walls of our gymnasias. Countless Americans swung them in marvelous and complicated circular patterns that stimulated the brain and invigorated the body.

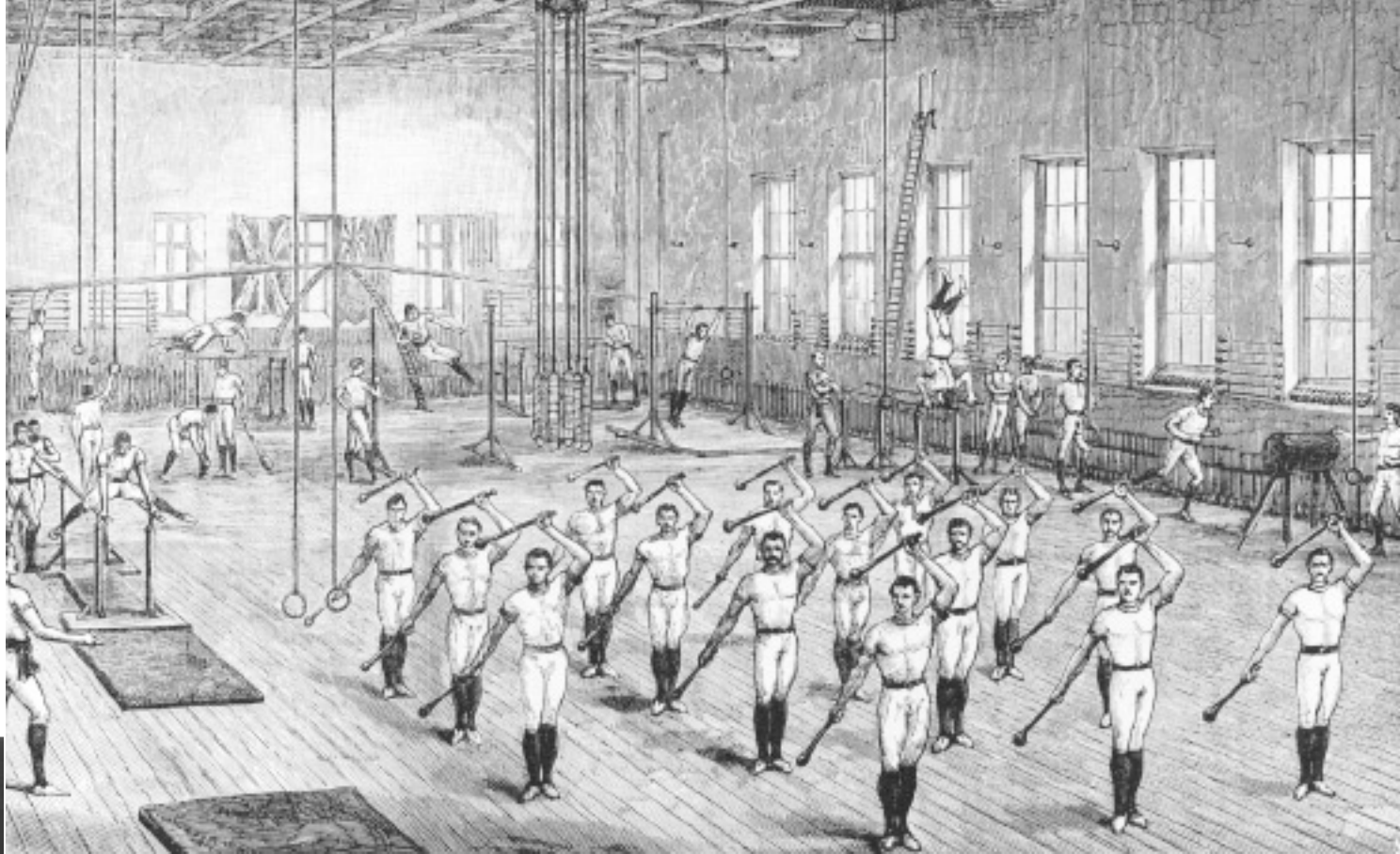
## BRIEF HISTORY

The clubs originated centuries ago in India. They were developed by soldiers, police and others whose caste required strength, agility, balance, physical prowess, and martial arts skill. British officers involved in the annexation of India were surprised to find the Indian warriors marvelously expert at swinging clubs in various graceful and fantastic motions. They noted that "...besides the great recommendation of simplicity, the Indian club practice



*The basic flow patterns lead to an almost inexhaustible series of intricate movements that enhance overall shoulder girdle mobility and muscular balance. This sequence is the double arm inside/outside pattern using two-pound clubs. Highly skilled and fit users may execute hundreds of precise repetitions in a single flow series.*

*Advanced physical training students at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois, practiced club swinging in the early 1990's.*



*A failed revolution against the monarchy in 1848 brought thousands of Germany's best and brightest patriots and their highly developed system of physical culture of the United States. Club swinging was an integral part of their training.*

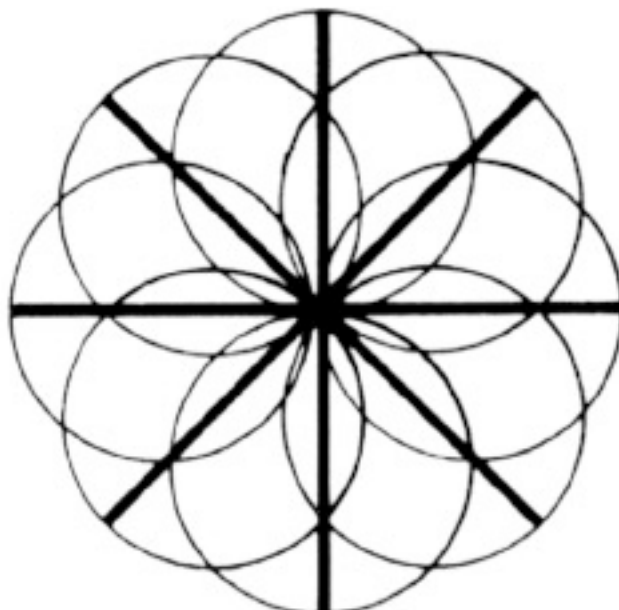
possesses the essential property of expanding the chest and exercising every muscle of the body concurrently." (Spalding, p. 77)

The British brought the Indian clubs to Europe where the Germans and Czechs eventually adopted club swinging into their physical training systems. German immigrants brought Indian clubs to the United States in the mid-1800s, and the clubs were soon introduced into both American school physical education programs and military physical readiness training.

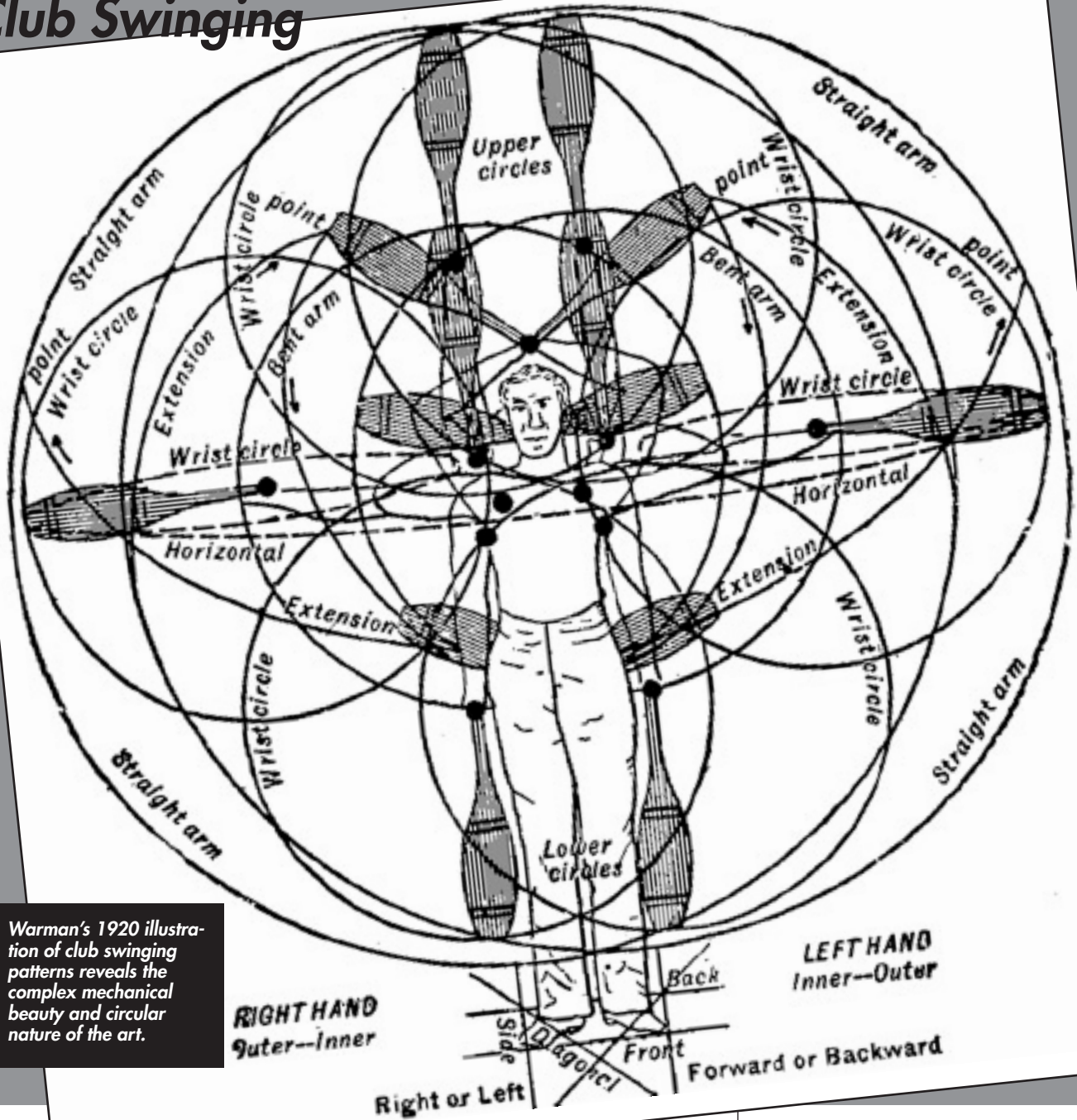
The United States Army Manual of Physical Training (1914) notes: "The effect of these exercises, when performed with light clubs, is chiefly a neural one, hence they are primary factors in the development of grace, coordination and rhythm. As they tend to supple the muscles and articulation of the shoulders and to the upper and fore arms and wrist, they are indicated in cases where there is a tendency toward what is ordinarily known as 'muscle bound.'" (p. 113)

In 1867, Dio Lewis, a pioneer in

*Right: The basic directional patterns employed in Kali closely resemble those illustrated in the early 20th century club swinging literature.*



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Warman's 1920 illustration of club swinging patterns reveals the complex mechanical beauty and circular nature of the art.

American physical culture, included Indian clubs in his system of physical education. He wrote of the clubs: "They cultivate patience and endurance, and operate most happily upon the longitudinal muscles of the back and shoulders, thus tending to correct the habit of stooping..." (p. 171).

In 1885, Baron Nils Posse, a Swedish soldier and physical educator, came to America and introduced the Swedish system of medical and military gymnastics. In 1894, he published a book explaining his system. In it Posse details the difference

between lifting dumbbells and swinging clubs. Lifting dumbbells, he explained, adds weight to the lever (this is the commonly practiced linear lifting). Indian clubs, he continued, increase the momentum of the pendulum (this is the circular nature of club swinging). In other words, Indian clubs can be described as circular weight training. Posse also called Indian club the oldest known implement for military gymnastics and related it to the broadsword (p. 24).

Indian clubs gradually disap-

peared from the American physical education landscape in the first two decades of the 20th century as sports and games replaced the European-based systems of restorative and military exercise. In 1916, Joseph Cermak joined the futile chorus of Indian club defenders in noting: "I have heard, and still hear among the professional men and women unfavorable comments about club exercises, but knowing that there is no other kind of hand apparatus that would admit such a great, almost inexhaustible variety of pleas-

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ing exercises as the clubs, believing that the clubs should have a prominent place in educational gymnastics, that by collaboration of mind and muscle in these exercises we can develop the highest degree of coordination." (Preface)

In the hands of an expert, the powerful flowing motions of the clubs somewhat resemble the patterns of Filipino Kali. This resemblance is probably because the fifth century Indian Sri Vishaya warriors invaded the Philippines and eventually merged culturally with them. The Visayan people of the central Philippines can be traced to the Sri Vishaya culture. In terms of basic movement patterns, the relationship between Kali and Indian club training is best illustrated by comparing Danny Inosanto's (1980) explanation of Kali attack angles (Inosanto) with Warman's illustration of club swinging. Both systems stress flowing circular patterns and the figure-eight motion.

## MODERN APPLICATIONS

The shoulder girdle is one of the most movable areas of the body, but it is also one of the most fragile. Strength of the shoulders should be

complemented by flexibility, and the clubs can contribute to both. When the ball and socket joint of the shoulder works in harmony with the elbow and wrist joints, an almost infinite number of circular patterns is possible. The basic club patterns are the foundation of all shoulder girdle movements, including those applicable to martial arts. The key to effective use of the clubs is concentration, precision and practice.

Many if not most Americans do not fully develop their natural shoulder girdle mobility and muscular balance. Ill-fitting furniture, poor posture, and the tragically inadequate system of physical education in our nation's schools are among the many cultural factors that keep us from realizing our highest potential. Basic club skills offer a safe and very effective means to regain essential shoulder girdle mobility. Advanced club movements include complicated arm and footwork that contribute to overall agility, timing and dexterity.

The fourteenth century French physician Tissot wrote, "movement as such may take the place of many remedies, but all the remedies together can never take the place of the effect of movement." Tissot was of course referring to rational and natural human motion. In this regard, a humble respect for the past will create a stronger and more productive present and carry us into a strong and secure future.

Club swinging was rediscovered several years ago at Northern Illinois University near Chicago. Last year it was introduced into the Choi Kwang Do martial arts system based in Atlanta and the Upper Iowa University's Fitness Leadership Degree for the U.S. Army at Fort Benning, Georgia.

Club swinging can undoubtedly improve shoulder girdle efficiency, and almost certainly help you become a better martial artist. But maybe more importantly, it is one of those links to the timeless history that binds us to long-forgotten martial artists who mastered themselves in order to better fulfill our common challenge to wisely rule this earth. Perhaps the 17th century philosopher Pascal said it best—"Those we call the ancients were new in everything."

For more information about club swinging, visit [www.indianclubs.com](http://www.indianclubs.com)

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