

Martial Arts and Combat Sports

In professional circles, a distinction is often made between combat sports and martial arts. However, this distinction between martial arts and combat sports is not clear-cut. Outsiders can see this quite vividly, for example, in the fact that some karate, judo or ju-jitsu schools describe themselves as martial arts schools, while other karate, judo or ju-jitsu schools describe themselves as combat sports schools.

In accordance with the distinction between combat sports and martial arts, combat sports are characterized by focusing basically on regulated sports competitions. Usually, two persons compete against each other in these combat sports competitions. Therefore, combat sports have specific rules that precisely distinguish allowed from disallowed forms of attack which could, for example, permanently damage opponents. Furthermore, the differentiation of fighting classes (e.g. by weight, age, sex, etc.) is part of these specific rules. This differentiation into distinct fighting classes potentially creates equally strong fighting pairings and thus athletic equality of opportunity in the broadest sense. Finally, combat sports fights are characterized by the fact that there is a higher authority, namely referees and judges, who ensure that the rules are observed on the one hand and, on the other hand, determine who has won the fight on the basis of point systems, if no one wins the fight prematurely and the fight therefore continues for the full period.

Martial arts differ from combat sports in two specifics. On the one hand, some martial arts, especially from the Asian environment, see themselves as a complete system of life style or perfection and are framed by corresponding philosophical or religious world views. The actual fighting techniques often recede into the background or are understood as just a path to follow. So, athletic practicing of these fighting techniques for competitions is not a central goal.

On the other hand, many martial arts primarily deal with self-defense. Thus they focus much more than combat sports on fighting in unregulated dangerous situations (of conflict). Consequently, martial arts often include training of various behaviours that are not directly related to the actual fight (e.g. avoiding conflicts in advance, self-discipline, or general physical agility). All this is relevant for martial arts insofar as in self-defence situations, unlike in combat sports, it is usually not known in advance who will be fighting whom, in which setting this will take place, or what the rules are - and above all, often only one party wants to fight while the other merely defends themselves.

The Mixed Martial Arts researched in our project is considered a combat sport by the majority of the participants. However, the classification is not entirely clear-cut in this case either, because Mixed Martial Arts means exactly mixed martial arts in direct translation. And in the history of Mixed Martial Arts, many influential people have considered themselves as representatives of martial arts such as Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. So the discussion is not finished yet.



Selected literature

- Bihack, Axel (1998). Über das Kämpfen. Zum Phänomen des Kampfes in Sport und Gesellschaft. Frankfurt/Main [u.a.]: Campus-Verlag.
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