

Kajukenbo

Kajukenbo is a hybrid martial art that combines karate, judo, jujutsu, kenpo, and kung fu. It was invented in 1947 in Oahu, Hawaii, at the Palama Settlements, to deal with local crime, as well as to help the people defend themselves from U.S. Navy sailors who would drink and fight with the locals.

When Kajukenbo first started, broken bones and blood were a regular occurrence in training. The inventors were Sijo ("founder") Adriano Emperado, Peter Young Yil Choo, Joe Holck, Frank Ordonez, and Clarence Chang, who called themselves the Black Belt Society.

The name works in two ways: "ka" ("long life"), "ju" ("happiness"), "ken" ("fist"), "bo" ("style") or "ka" ("karate"), "ju" ("judo"/"jujutsu"), "ken" ("kenpo"), "bo" (Chinese and American boxing), leading to the art's philosophical meaning: "Through this fist style, one gains long life and happiness."

History of Kajukenbo

In 1947, Adriano Emperado and 4 other skilled martial artists: Joe Holck, Peter YY Choo, Clarence Chang, and Frank Ordonez, made a secret pact to combine their arts into a street fighting combination of their arts, which were:

- Adriano Emperado - Kenpo (Kosho Ryu) and Escrima
- Joe Holck - Judo (Kodenkan Danzan Ryu)
- Peter Choo - Karate (Tang Soo Do)
- Clarence Chang - Chinese Boxing (Chu'an Fa Kung-Fu)
- Frank Ordonez - Jujitsu (Se Keino Ryu)

They quit their jobs, went on welfare, and trained. They moved their training locations around to keep it secret.

When the Korean War hit, Joe Holck, Peter Choo, Frank Ordonez, and Clarence Chang were drafted, leaving only Adriano Emperado to carry the system on. Sijo Emperado, along with his brother Joe, introduced Kajukenbo to the public by opening the Palama Settlement School in 1950. The training there was notoriously brutal. Their goal was to be invincible on the street, so the training had to be realistic, and the students sparred with full contact. Some students would reportedly drink before class, as a pain reliever, and broken bones were not uncommon. The number of students soon dwindled to only a few. Those who remained developed into tough fighters with a reputation for employing their art in street fights with only a little provocation. Several students who came out of the school would become very prominent marital artists themselves, such as Sid Asuncion, Aleju Reyes, Joe Halbuna, Charles Gaylord, and Tony Ramos. The art slowly began to grow in popularity, and soon Emperado had 12 Kajukenbo schools in Hawaii, making it the second largest string of schools at the time. Charles Gaylord, Tony Ramos and Aleju Reyes, who all earned a black belt from Emperado, brought Kajukenbo to the mainland in 1960. They each opened Kajukenbo schools in California. In 1969, Tony Ramos trained with and exchanged ideas and methods with Bruce Lee. Aleju Reyes died in 1977 and Tony Ramos died in Hawaii in 1999. Charles Gaylord has since continued on with the art and has developed the "Gaylord's Method". He is the President of the Kajukenbo Association of America and has acquired a legacy to continue the art of his Sijo.

In 1959, Sijo Emperado continued adding more Kung Fu into Kajukenbo, shifting the art to a more fluid combination of hard and soft techniques. Since then, Kajukenbo has shown to be a very improvement base, continuously evolving-open style, willing to accept whatever works.

Kajukenbo Today

Kajukenbo, as it stands today, has more grappling moves than regular kenpo, and incorporates joint breaking, low blows, and combination attacks. While it does include some competitive elements, its primary focus is on realism and practicality. It is generally thought that "unfair" moves such as strikes to the eyes or groin are perfectly acceptable, as is whatever else the practitioner feels is necessary to get home that day.

Training workouts emphasize cardio conditioning and functional strength. While individual schools may show variation, it would not be unusual to train with sandbags or boxing gloves. Advanced students generally spend some time without benefit of protective gear to condition themselves for honest combat.

There is a core of self-defense techniques at the heart of Kajukenbo, and most schools eschew impractical, flashy moves and acrobatics. Most kajukenbo curricula feature counter-attacks to punches, kicks, knives, sticks, guns, and grabs.

While this base of common knowledge will keep schools' styles similar, there is plenty of room for variation. Given how different the four foundational styles of Kajukenbo are, it is impossible to fully incorporate everything and some specialization is inevitable. This openness tends to encourage schools to incorporate other arts, such as Escrima or Aikido, into their practice.

Some schools of Kajukenbo feature 26 katas that are broken down into 13 "pinyans" (also called "Palama sets" in some schools) and 13 "concentrations". Each of the concentrations have their own name such as concentration number one is titled crane strike/tiger claw. The name of each concentration is given to that kata because it features that particular strike or movement in it. For example, concentration one features the crane strike and tiger claw. Katas are incorporated into Kajukenbo to help the student refine his/her skill. Every movement in the katas has meaning behind it. For example the first movement in pinyan 1 is a right outward strike while moving to a left back stance. This movement would be used to block a punch. The katas also focus on multi-enemy combat.

An important part of some kajukenbo classes is the Kajukenbo Prayer, written by Frank Ordonez, although a fair number of schools are completely secular. In some classes it is customary to end class with reference to the Kajukenbo trinity: spirit, mind, and body (each with their own hand sign). After the trinity, students and instructors alike open their hands to represent peace, then bow their heads in respect. A stylized Kajukenbo salute is also part of many school customs: students salute the American flag and their instructors to show respect. Students and instructors alike salute black belts when they enter the training floor.

Kajukenbo Belt Hierarchy

Ranking hierarchies vary widely from school to school. One common belt order is as follows: white, yellow, orange, purple, blue, green, brown, student black, followed by the various degrees of black belt. Some schools have "in-between" belts that feature a white or black stripe running down the center of the belt. Black belt rankings and titles can also vary, but student black belt through second degree students are usually given the title of Sibak. Third through fifth degree are given the title of Sifu. Sixth and seventh are Sigung. Eighth degree black belts are Professors, and ninth degree is a Grandmaster. The founder, Adriano Emperado, holds the title of Sijo. The titles given to the black belt ranks are chinese names. Sijo, being the highest rank, means founder. Sigung means the teacher's teacher. Sifu means teacher. Sibak means teacher's assistant.