

Review of Grandmaster Crispulo Atillo Seminars

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KAMP Karate

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Grandmaster Crispulo Atillo is a high energetic dynamo whose appetite for teaching his Balintawak System cannot be whetted. The man is 69 years old, 5' 2", 120 pounds of pure dedication to his craft. The Philadelphia Balintawak Seminar Series was fantastic and highly informative as Grandmaster Atillo filled us in on the origins of the system as he learned it from his father, Vincente Atillo, with added instruction from Delfine Lopez and Venancio Bacon. According to Grandmaster Atillo, Balintawak is merely a club name and the foundation of the art is derived from the teachings of the Saavedra's, Lorenzo and Teodoro (Doring).

The Balintawak System is based on the Saavedra Eskrima System which was founded by Lorenzo Saavedra, who in turn taught his nephew "Doring", Vincente Atillo, Delfine Lopez and Venancio Bacon through both the Labong Fencing Club and later the Doce Pares Club of Cebu. The latter 3 men separated from the Doce Pares Club after WWII and in 1952 along with about 25 others from the Saavedra lineage founded the Balintawak Self Defense Club in 1952. Young Crispulo Atillo was a charter member of the newly formed club at the age of 14. His eskrima training had begun 5 years earlier under his father Vincente. The club was named after the street where the club was located



L to R: Guro Richard Curren
Grandmaster Crispulo Atillo
Dr. Jerome Barber



Lorenzo Saavedra



Teodoro "Doring" Saavedra

and the training took place. In 1973, the BSDC, broke up into 5 separate factions, in part because of a physical fight between the younger Crispulo Atillo and the club's chief instructor, Grandmaster Venancio Bacon. One of the new divisions of the Balintawak training groups was the Atillo wing under Vincente and Crispulo.

With that history out of the way, we began the Saturday training and quickly covered the basics of stances, footwork, stick grip, strike placement and blocking format. The blocking format led into the blocking and counter-striking exercises using the 10 strike system of the Atillo System. Next Grandmaster Atillo covered the 4 methods system of counter striking, using the first 4 strikes of the system. There are 4 counters for each stick strike and these consist of blocking:

1. One countering without touching the stick,
2. Countering while touching the stick.

3. Countering while touching the opponent's hand.
4. Direct stick countering while checking.

The next phase of the training involved a series of 14 disarms from the forehand and backhand sides of the defensive position. Next we were taught the basic sparring exercises. These exercises went through 8 steps and the previously taught disarms were then added to the sparring drill at the appropriate places.

The Sunday seminar was a morning session only event and Grandmaster Atillo covered just the 14 disarms. Grandmaster Atillo is an extremely knowledgeable practitioner who loves to teach. He was offering as much information as the most skilled attendees could absorb, while keeping the lesser skilled people focused and attentive.



Over the past few years I have read a great deal of information regarding Grandmaster Atillo and some of it was not very complimentary. The man is a lightning rod of controversy because of his fight with Grandmaster Bacon and the fact that some people want to contest his version of how the Balintawak Self Defense Club was organized.

Quite frankly, Grandmaster Atillo's version of the club founding and organization seems quite logical and reasonable. All of the critics that I've read thus far are Americans. None of these people have offered any credible data to support their contentions that Grandmaster Atillo is in error.

The common theme of the critics seems to be that Grandmaster Atillo is trying to "steal" the credit from Grandmaster Venancio Bacon by claiming Balintawak as his own system. They've failed to read/listen carefully. Both Grandmaster Bacon and Grandmaster Vincente Atillo studied under Lorenzo and Doring Saavedra. Both Grandmaster Bacon and Grandmaster V. Atillo were founders of the Balintawak Self Defense Club in 1952. Therefore they were contemporaries and equals in the art although Grandmaster Bacon was elected to serve as the Chief Instructor of the newly found BSDC. Hence when the younger Crispulo Atillo claims his lineage under his father, Vincente, from the Saavedra's through the Balintawak Club of 1952, he is absolutely correct. As a charter member, but definitely not a founding member of Balintawak, Grandmaster Atillo is standing on solid ground. In no way does his claim interfere with or diminish the lineage from Grandmaster Bacon to others who trained under him. They are Balintawak people as well, but at the 1st, 2nd or 3rd generational level. Grandmaster Atillo is 1st generation Balintawak both as a club member and student of his father.

Regarding the 10 strikes that Grandmaster Atillo teaches, he explained that it was a way to separate his approach from Bacon's and the 10 strikes corresponds to the number of letters in the word "Balintawak". The truth of the matter is found in the applications of techniques and conceptual foundations on which the techniques based. In actual truth, one cannot change the principles on which Balintawak is founded. In reality there are only 3 true strikes in Balintawak. All of the others are there for instructional purposes so one can teach or learn the foundational principles of the art.

This past weekend was very informative and enlightening. I certainly gained a greater appreciation of the art and science of Balintawak. I owe a great debt of appreciation to Professor Remy Presas, for preparing me and many others through Modern Arnis for the Balintawak System. I would also love to thank Grandmaster Bobby Taboada for his insightful instruction in the art of Teovel Balintawak. Grandmaster Bobby opened the door directly into the Balintawak System for me and others at Erie Community College, Orchard Park, NY through a series of seminars and camps in the mid to late 1990's. Now I've had the opportunity to meet and train with the last charter member of the 1952 Balintawak Self Defense Club, Grandmaster Crispulo Atillo.

I would also like to inform everyone that Grandmaster Atillo will be back in Philadelphia in July 2007 for another seminar series. I'll be there because there so much more to learn and he is more than willing to teach it. The man could have served as the real life model for the "Energizer Bunny"! He was to work; he wants to train, morning, noon and night. Are you ready for some training, serious, committed training? Then Grandmaster Crispulo Atillo is your guy!

I've got 4 months to put this weekend's lessons into my practice routines and then get some refinements and new stuff in July...

I hope to see some of you at the July sessions.