

Rene Latosa illustrates the average disabling joint lock. First he starts his grab (1), then finishes the lock by twisting the opponent's arm. This is fine if the opponent just lets it happen.

Escrima Offers A New Twist on Joint Locks

Article and photos by Jane Hallander

Many martial arts today, burdened by the legal problems that can occur when too much defense is applied in a self-defense situation, have tempered their tactics to disarming and joint locking restraint techniques. These are usually techniques designed to bring attackers under control and disarm of the weapons without causing them undue injuries—a cautious and noble attitude which can under certain circumstances also get the defender killed.

There is nothing wrong with disarming and locking techniques, if the defense situation is right to use them. But that is a factor that cannot be determined before the attack happens. This is the opinion of a man with years of experience in a martial art geared solely toward self-defense. The martial art is *escrima* and the instructor is Sacramento, California-based Renee Latosa.

Training with Caballas

Latosa did his *escrima* apprenticeship with the late Angel Caballas, who is credited with first bringing *escrima* to the United States. After becoming Caballas' head instructor, Latosa decided to continue his education with his own father, another knowledgeable *escrima* practitioner. From his father he learned to separate esoteric, traditional concepts from the practical reality of self-defense—teachings that have strongly influenced his feelings about *escrima*'s weapon disarming and joint locking techniques.

Size Differences

In the old days when *escrima* was still confined to the Philippines, disarming and locking techniques were popular self-defense methods. Defenders did not necessarily stop their own attacks after taking away their enemy's weapon. More than likely they permanently disabled their

assailants with the attacker's own weapon.

According to Latosa, in those times the size and strength of the Philippine fighters was similar from person to person, giving no one an advantage over the other. The only advantage came to the person who had the best skill, either defensively or offensively.

Nowadays the size and strength of opponents differs so greatly that it is a big mistake to take for granted that a joint lock, with or without its disarming technique, will work every time on every person. For instance, in the past, women in the Philippines did not usually study martial arts; so they were not likely to try defending themselves with joint locks. However, today's modern woman may be a black belt martial artist faced with the prospect of trying to make her locking techniques work against an attacker with much greater size and strength.



However, instead of taking the risk that the opponent might successfully resist the elbow lock in the preceding pictures, Lotaso first blocks the oncoming blow (3).

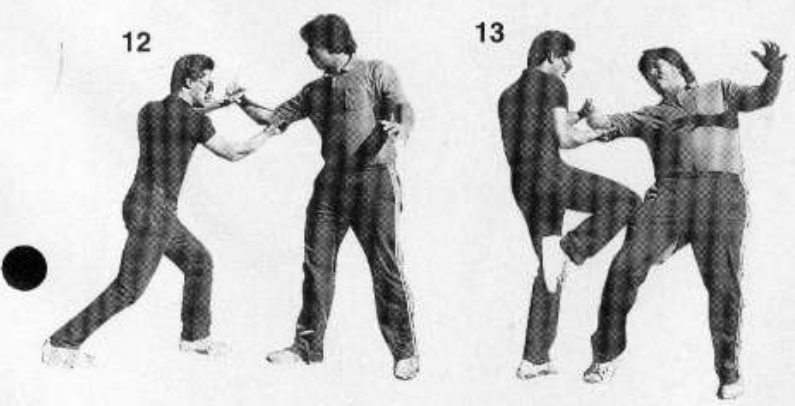
then strikes the attacker in the throat with his (Lotaso's) free hand, disabling him in that manner (4-5), making a lock unnecessary.



The classic wrist lock, knife disarm. The defender blocks the knife thrust with a cross block (6).

and twists the attacker's wrist.

taking him off balance (8).



But look what can happen if the knife attacker is good at what he does — The defender blocks with a cross block (9), but the attacker turns the knife blade upward, cutting the defender's wrist and forcing him to release his grip (10). Then the attacker thrusts forward with his weapon (11). Another classic joint lock and disarm. The defender blocks and grabs the knife assailant's arm (12), twists him into an elbow lock and knees him in the stomach to finish him (13).



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Now, here's what can happen to the above attempt at locking — The defender blocks and grabs (14),

but when he starts to twist the attacker's knife arm, the attacker strikes him with his free hand (15-16), an example that the attacker's free hand should not be overlooked.



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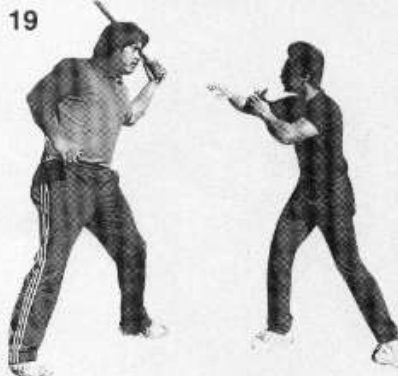


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A typical joint lock and disarm of a club attack. The defender blocks the attack (17),

grabs and hyperextends the attacker's arm and shoulder to disarm him (18).

below: (19-21) However, here's what can happen with an experienced streetfighter — As the attacker comes forward he sees the defender about to make a grab and simply changes the direction and timing of his attack to strike to an unprotected area.



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A classic elbow lock and disarm. The defender steps to the side and grabs the attacker's arm (22).

Then twists it into a lock (23-24).



Here's the way an experienced streetfighter would handle the above attempt to lock his club attack — As the defender starts to grab the attacker (25),

Latosa also emphasizes that attackers should never be taken for granted. They are quite likely to be experts in their own right with knives and clubs, and they certainly won't stay in one position long enough for anyone to apply a disarming joint lock and cart them off to jail. Anyone claiming to be above-novice in weapons knowledge will not easily let themselves get into a situation where they can be disarmed.

Working from those premises, Latosa breaks escrima disarming and locking techniques down into two basic concepts, both valuable to martial artists. The first concept is that disarming and joint locking techniques are excellent methods of teaching both coordination of hand and foot movements and the correct angle of attack.

The second concept is that no one should plan to use a joint lock for any self-defense situation. While locks are valuable self-defense aids when used with a finishing blow, they should be used only if all conditions are right and the assailant is



the attacker turns into him and knees him in the stomach (26-27),

unaware of how to stop the locking technique. In other words, the time to use a joint lock depends on sheer luck. It's best to have other alternatives available if the right opportunity for a joint lock doesn't materialize.

Next, the grab should be made only if there is something to grab. The defender must never try to make an opening when looking for something to grab. Grabs which lead into joint locks have to come naturally and only if the attacker's arm or weapon is in the right position for a spontaneous action. It is not a question of setting someone up for a joint lock, since seldom will anyone with a weapon in one hand stay in one position long enough to be set up for a joint lock.

The ideal situation for a disarming technique against a knife attack would be to catch the downward action of the knife strike with an upward block. Then if still touching the striking arm, change the defender's blocking arm into a grab that leads to a joint lock or disarm. Meanwhile, almost simultaneous to the initial block,



then strikes down to the back of the defender's neck.

the defender executes an offensive strike with his other hand, weakening the attacker before the actual grab.

Common Mistakes

Latosa cautions against several common mistakes that could be costly. Perhaps the most important caveat is to beware of the attacker's other hand. While one of the attacker's hands is occupied with the weapon, the other can often strike the defender as he or she attempts a joint locking grab.

Equally as important is not to try using the attacker's weapon (a stick for instance) for leverage. A stick or club can easily be dropped, leaving the defender with a handful of nothing.

Anyone who tries to apply a joint lock or take away a weapon should also be aware that there may or may not be a timing delay. For instance, inexperienced people attacking with a club might strike first, then draw the weapon back before they strike again, leaving themselves open for a



(29-31) Here the defender slips the attacker's club-bearing hand and grabs the weapon — a textbook disarm.

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disarming technique. But those with experience probably will not need to raise their weapon for the next strike. If the defender tries to grab the club after the first striking attempt, he may find nothing there, as the attacker quickly changes direction of the second strike, finding an easy opening in the defender's own defense.

No Compassion

Latosa also cautions against feeling too compassionate about an assailant.

Many times joint locks and disarming techniques are associated with restraint and a desire not to injure the attacker—an almost passive attitude.

Unfortunately, assailants probably don't share the same feelings, or they wouldn't be attacking in the first place, especially when weapons are used. It's pretty obvious that someone who attacks with a knife or club intends to seriously injure the defender.

Latosa encourages his students to not feel compassion, instead they must use enough force against assailants to disable them. Many times, this type of attitude makes the application of joint locks unacceptable and useless. After all, something still needs to be done after the lock is applied. The defender can't always stand there all day waiting for someone to come arrest the joint-locked assailant.

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Best Approach

Rene Latosa has found that the best approach to effective joint locks is to first teach the fighting system itself, in this case escrima, then add extra considerations like joint locks. Then his students know their capabilities with the basic techniques and power of escrima, and can work from there with other fighting tactics. **W**

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(32-35) Same situation in the previous scenario, but after the weapon is taken away, the attacker simply strikes the defender with his free hand.

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