

OLYMPIC SILVER MEDALIST ELVIS STOJKO GOES KUNG FU!

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SPECIAL ISSUE!

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Black Belt Ranks the 20 Best Street Fighters in the Martial Arts World

by Lito Angeles

You know you've wondered about it. "Could your sensei take my sensei? Could my sensei beat that self-proclaimed street fighter who insists he has a million brawls under his belt?" Well, to find out how they stack up, we asked Lito Angeles—the martial artist who must surely hold the record for most self-defense books read, most self-defense videos studied and most self-defense seminars taken—to rate the toughest of the tough. His limitations were two—no deceased fighters and no professional mixed-martial artists—and our guidance was minimal—to rate the men according to how skilled they were in their prime. After agonizing over the list for months, he settled on the following. —Editor


20 Rodney "Chico" King

A cross-training martial artist based in South Africa, he's renowned for his "street boxing" ability. He's got one heck of a body shot, a nice hook to the body that stands out. He's not a big guy, but I know I wouldn't want to tangle with him.

Gene LeBell

PHOTO BY RICK HUSTAD

TOUGHEST MEN ON PLANET EARTH



19 Marco Lala

This resident of New York is an excellent all-around martial artist. His base is *kyokushin* karate, which is the style founded by the legendary Mas Oyama. Lala has cross-trained extensively in *jujutsu* and judo, and he's combined it all into a very formidable system. His skill is evident, and he's a training fanatic. The guy's a tough son of a gun.

Marco Lala



PHOTO BY DOUG CHURCHILL

18 Tony Cecchine

Based in Chicago, he's one of the world's foremost authorities on catch-as-catch-can wrestling. His skills are well-known, and whenever anyone gets to be that good in an effective art, you can bet he's a force to be reckoned with in a street fight.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD DIMITRI

17 David James

The head of the *vee arnis jitsu* system lives in New York City. He's well-versed in all ranges of combat, which you'd expect from the successor to professor Florendo M. Visitacion. His fighting aura is phenomenal. His all-around skill at combat needs to be experienced to be believed. I know because I recently finished a weeklong course with him in preparation for an article that will be published in *Black Belt*.

David James

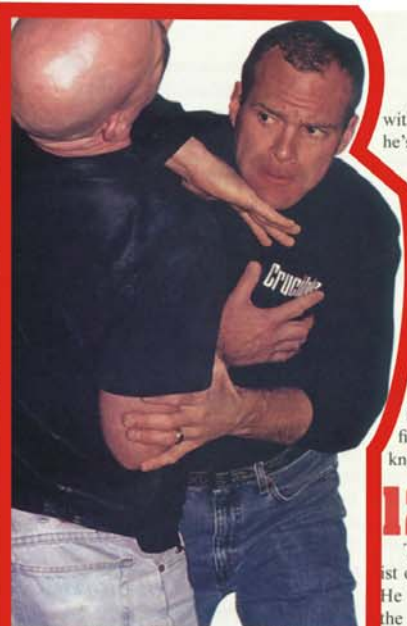


PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID JAMES

16 Richard Dimitri

This Montreal-based martial artist is the founder of *senshido*. When it comes to fighting, he covers all the bases. He studies the pre-fight aspects and the psychological component of violence. His system is holistic and very street-oriented. His trademark technique is the "shredder": You imagine that your opponent's head is a ball of steel, and you make your hands like magnets and basically maul his face. It sounds bizarre, but it's frighteningly effective.

Richard Dimitri



J. Kelly McCann

PHOTO COURTESY OF PALADIN PRESS

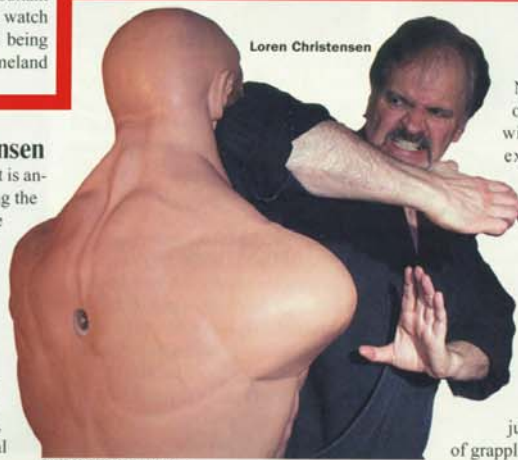
15 J. Kelly McCann

Also known as Jim Grover, he heads a Falmouth, Virginia-based reality-training organization formerly known as The Crucible. He's a close-quarters-combat expert who's great at everything: unarmed fighting, stick combat, knife work and shooting. He serves as a consultant and trainer for the military. If you watch CNN, you've probably seen him being quizzed about terrorism and homeland security.

14 Loren W. Christensen

This Portland, Oregon, resident is another cross-trainer. (Are you seeing the pattern here?) His 59 years have given him a wealth of fighting knowledge, much of which was gained while serving as a military police officer during the Vietnam War. That left him with a load of street-fighting experience. Afterward, he spent 29 years as a cop in Portland. Now he teaches and writes books about self-defense, and after comparing his material

PHOTO COURTESY OF TURTLE PRESS



Loren Christensen

Navy SEALs, he's one of the few JKD stylists with a wealth of street experience. When he was younger, he would go to seedy sections of town just to expose himself to situations that would test his skills and help him find out what works and what doesn't. He's recently become very proficient at Brazilian jujutsu and other forms of grappling.

with what I've experienced on the job, he's right on the money.

13 Lee Morrison

This English martial artist worked as a bouncer for more than a decade, and that's a tough gig, especially in Britain, where fighting used to be commonplace, almost accepted. He founded his own system, called Urban Combatives, that mixes various arts. He tempered it all with what he learned in street fights. He's known as a very powerful knockout artist.

12 Paul Vunak

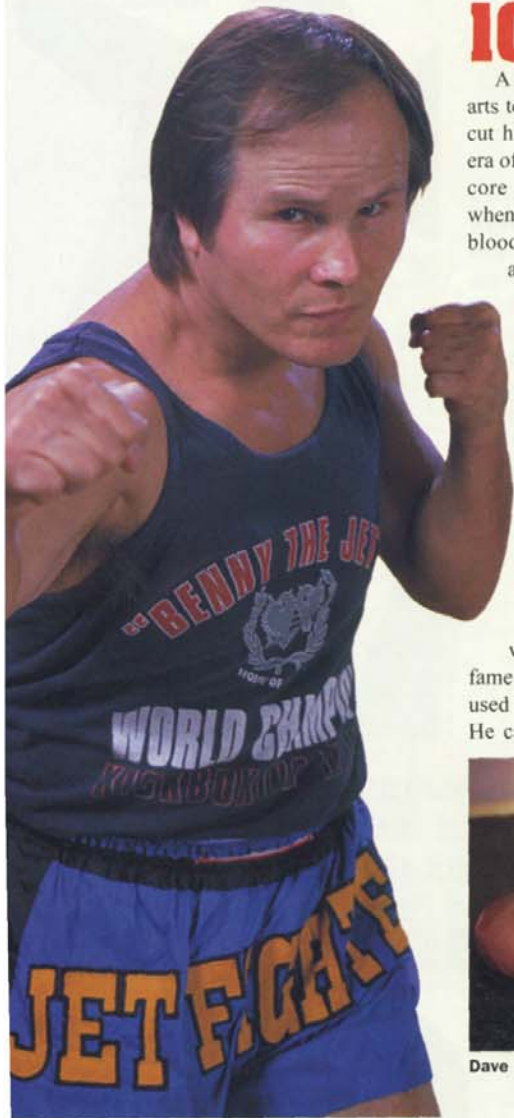
This renowned *jeet kune do* specialist operates out of Southern California. He may be the best-known fighter in the JKD clan. A former trainer of the



Paul Vunak

PHOTO BY NICK HUSTAD

“When he was younger, he would go to seedy sections of town just to expose himself to situations that would test his skills and help him find out what works and what doesn't.”



Benny Urquidez

11 Benny Urquidez

The Southern California-based kickboxing legend is also one of the world's first cross-training martial artists. Mention his name to any group of enthusiasts, and they'll agree that he's a seriously tough guy. Any Westerner who can beat Thai boxers at their own game is worthy of having the great Gene LeBell include him on his list of the best fighters in the world. I've been around Urquidez a little and felt his energy, and I know I wouldn't want to fight him.

10 Jim Harrison

A Missoula, Montana-based martial arts teacher, he's in his 60s now, but he cut his teeth during the blood-and-guts era of karate in America. He was a hardcore karate competitor in the 1960s, when tournament techniques often drew blood and broke bones. He served as a police officer in Texas for many years, where he no doubt gained lots of street experience. He's a vicious fighter who would do anything to win.

9 Dave Briggs

Another Brit, he's an excellent all-around practitioner: Chinese boxing, kung fu, kickboxing and Brazilian jujitsu. He spent 12 years as a bouncer, which is where he acquired his vast street experience. His claim to fame is the power slap, and he's often used it to effect "one-slap knockouts." He can blast anyone with it. He com-



Dave Briggs

PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVE BRIGGS

a one-punch-knockout artist who's trained extensively in judo, boxing and other arts. Now he runs a martial arts school.

7 Denis Martin

He's another old-timer from England, who's also a renowned practitioner of military-based combatives. Twenty-plus years of bouncing and hundreds of real fights have made him a legendary street fighter. He still works as a bouncer in Liverpool.

6 Carl Cestari

He just might be the world's leading expert on World War II close-combat methods. A former street cop who now lives in New Jersey, he's a tough, vicious fighter. I've experienced his techniques firsthand, and I know how easily he can put the hurt on a person. He's very highly regarded. By the way, he's probably the most private person on this list. He seldom seeks publicity, which might explain why you haven't heard of him.

Carl Cestari

PHOTO BY ROBERT BOLT



peted professionally in kickboxing and did pretty well, but he discovered it was easier to nail his opponents with a single slap and put them to sleep.

8 John Skillen

This guy, even though he's only in his 30s, is a legendary street fighter in England. He's ferocious, an animal. He's had 2,000 fights, most of which occurred during the 15-plus years he worked as a bouncer. He crushed everybody. In the most serious encounters, he was forced to actually gouge out eyes. Furthermore, he's

5 Peter Consterdine

A high-ranked practitioner of various Japanese arts, he was a member of Great Britain's International Karate Team and did very well in competition. Now he's the co-head of the British Combat Association. Another former bouncer with loads of hand-to-hand experience, he's known for his powerful knockout strikes. When he's not teaching, he works as a bodyguard for celebrities like pro soccer player David Beckham.

4 Stan Peterec

This Canadian is an all-around great martial artist. A former World Kickboxing Association light-middleweight champion, he has a near-perfect record. He also competed in three mixed-martial arts matches when he was in his 40s, and he didn't lose there, either. A bouncer for 12 years, he knows what works in real fights. His street prowess is second to none, and when that's coupled with experience from the kickboxing arena, it makes him an animal. In a good way.

Stan Peterec

PHOTO COURTESY OF STAN PETEREC



3 Geoff Thompson

Here's another man who's excellent at every facet of the fighting arts: stand-up, clinching, grappling and so on. The Brit worked as a bouncer for 10 years, and his exploits are the

Geoff Thompson



PHOTO COURTESY OF GEOFF THOMPSON

stuff of legends. His reputation revolves around one-punch knockouts. He wrote *Watch My Back* and more than 20 other books on various aspects of combat. He's one of the first martial artists to advocate the use of dialogue, deception and distraction in the pre-emptive phase of an attack. And he's got the technique—from karate, boxing, *muay Thai*, jujutsu, kung fu, judo and other styles—to back it all up.

2 Gene LeBell

This guy's a prolific practitioner of the grappling arts—he knows professional wrestling, judo and catch-as-catch-can wrestling, as well as every technique that's ever been taught in Brazilian jujitsu. The word "legend" isn't big enough to encapsulate his knowledge. Everyone who talks about him holds him in the highest regard, and he's been nicknamed the "Toughest Man Alive," but ...

1 Terry O'Neill

He tops my list. A British *shotokan* practitioner who's also a veteran bouncer and street fighter, he's had literally thousands of fights. One of the things that stick out about him is his ability to apply his karate techniques cleanly in real fights. I mean, textbook-style, like in a movie. He's effected hundreds of knockouts with his kicks. He's even knocked out guys with one kick—not by using multiple kicks to soften them up first, but by using just a single shot to the head. He's in his 50s now, but he still bounces—which means he's still knocking people out when the need arises. That's why I ranked him No. 1. In fact, everyone I consulted as I compiled this list placed him at the top. ✕

About the author: Lito Angeles is a Southern California-based police officer with more than 16 years of experience. His 30 years of martial arts training have spanned shorin-ryu karate, boxing, savate, muay Thai, Brazilian jujutsu, Krav Maga, pentjak silat and jeet kune do. For information about other articles he's written, visit <http://www.blackbeltmag.com> and click on Community, then Black Belt Authors.