



**by Guru Scott McQuaid**

*'Old fighters are dangerous: it doesn't matter to them what is going to happen, because they have already lived it.'*

Beware the fighter that does not want to fight, the fighters that remain calm and even smile at a challenge, for they have been here many times before, willing to go into the trenches, because this is familiar to them, this is their home... they are now a warhorse.

A "war horse" is an equine veteran of prolonged military conflict. These animals are rigorously desensitised to battlefield chaos and bear both physical scars and a seasoned, stoic temperament. This coin of phrase is best suited to those fighters that are past their prime and are unsure of why they are still fighting. It is simply all they know. These veterans become the gatekeepers, mere shadows of the youthful skilled fighter they once were. Now they are slower, their reflexes are shot, punch resistance is lower, they carry injuries, and are heavier on foot. But they are hardened, knowledgeable, experienced, and hold no fear.

I am a war horse, and every injury, every scar reminds me that I am still alive, that I am still in the fight. I have said it many times, in martial arts, there are practitioners and fighters. I have rarely seen an individual that encompass both these traits. The martial practitioner is skilful in their art, a custodian in the history and transformation of their martial system. They are proficient in drills and maintain the form, they move through their martial art.

A fighter, on the other hand, reacts to the situation and allows their martial discipline to move them in conflict, often changing the shape of the style to suit the situation but still maintaining the form. It is these martial artists that become war horses. The practitioners become wise masters, sitting in their dojos overlooking their flock of students, bestowing their knowledge and

wisdom unto the class. They gradually fade away into the skies. The fighters continue to fight, they lose more than they win and they eventually burn out and fall on the battlefield. They are buried to the earth.

For us war horses that have fought in competitions and countless gym wars, we don't get that photo and plaque on the wall next to the masters before us. But we are equally remembered, not for our teachings or grades, but for what we done on the battlefield. That is our measure.

So what happens when the war horse no longer has the speed, the flow and the instincts? We adapt. I have to re-evaluate my tactics - failing to do so will have me relying on a broken system, because I am a broken fighter at this stage in my life. I train in the probable as oppose to the possible. That what is likely to happen in conflict rather than what is possible in combat. I spent my entire youth training in the possible, so I was ready for any outcome, but now I am a veteran, I need to be smarter and realistic in my approach. I economise my attacks, maximising the damage output with only one or two moves. The veteran's economy of movement and emotional control, often referred to as "veteran savvy", is our greatest asset. Young fighters constantly bounce, twitch, and throw high-energy strikes that can miss. War horse fighters understand their metabolic limits. We stand firmly, move only when necessary, and make every single strike count.



I'm striking with only what has been tried and tested, which means punches, knees, elbows, head-butts, no kicks above the waist. I'm hitting hard in short bursts from mid to close range. I have simply removed long range from the equation with the ideology that the opponent I am fighting is younger and therefore faster. I shall not try to pick them off from a distance as I simply now lack the explosive speed required to make it work. Covering a large distance to strike from the outside burns immense amounts of energy, risking the dreaded adrenaline dump or premature exhaustion, so take it out of your play book. Most fights are won in the danger zone, i.e. in the range of being hit, mid or close-up. So focus on these areas, making yourself a hard target to hit with body movement and angles that constantly re-adjust. By adopting this method of striking only in range you become more of a bait and trap fighter, preserving energy

as opposed to a predator that hunts and stalks their opponent.

We should no longer look to soften up our opponents to weaken them before ending the fight. This prolongs the fight and we cannot afford to drag the time out due to our lower stamina levels. I strike with maximum efficiency in areas that will stop the fight instantly. I train to fight three rounds - that is three minutes, totaling seven minutes. This is more than enough on the streets which will likely be seconds. Gone are the days of doing ten rounds of sparring and endless bag work. Our bodies are battle worn and trying to keep the same training regime that was applied in our youth will ultimately cause more injuries and wear and tear to the body. I no longer sit in low punishing stances to strengthen my legs, because my legs are not gonna get any stronger than they use to be. I won't be relying on them as much as I did in the past anyway. I move through those stances to keep the flow as you would in combat, but body conditioning is pretty much stricken from my program with the exception of a few techniques.

I eat better and healthy now than I ever did in my prime, not because I want to, but because I have to, due to my body's metabolic rate slowing down, making it harder to burn fat. To combat this, I fast. The "three meals a day" is a modern, cultural tradition, rather than a biological rule. When you constantly eat, your cells are focused on growth and processing nutrients. When you stop eating, your nutrient sensors signal your cells to go into survival mode. They begin scanning for damaged proteins, worn-out mitochondria and cellular debris, breaking them down and recycling them into fresh, healthy cell components. So fasting is essential. I maintain a one meal a day rule with the exception of weekends. I have a balanced diet but it's not all fruit, vegetables and nut. There are fatty foods and high carbs thrown in there, just not frequently. Maintaining a good weight that matches your body frame is key for a fighter. You don't want to be fighting against your own weight in the fight, be it fat or muscle, as both will use high oxygen and energy at a faster rate when adrenaline fires up your system. Carrying fat or muscle mass that significantly exceeds your natural skeletal frame puts extra stress on your joints. This will make you more injury-prone and restrict your movement in combat.

What makes a war horse fighter dangerous is that we no longer possess ego, rage or panic, which are all vices a young fighter has to learn to deal with in their journey. We are calm under pressure, calculated and unpredictable, we have felt pain, we have felt lose, we know what is to come.

I turned fifty last year, and to celebrate this milestone, I traveled to Rome and attended Gladiator school. Under the hot blazing sun in a dusty courtyard, I learned the old ways, training with a gladius sword. We sparred with heavy helmets, shields and rusty live blades, it was a challenge. But once again, it reminded me that I am a fighter, even a broken one. As long as

you are breathing, there is still fight left in you.

So never stop training because you get old. Otherwise you'll get old because you stop training.



*Published exclusively for Black Triangle Silat 2026.*