



Dr. Thomas has invested his life in the study and practice of physical culture. The Fitness Products Council of the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association named Thomas a "Quotable Authority on Fitness and Health." He is a Fulbright Scholar and an Assistant Professor of Health and Movement Science at Graceland College in Lamoni, Iowa.



InOtherWords / Ed Thomas

Vis medicatrix naturae

Ancient physical cultures are rich with wisdom about the restorative, healing power of nature. Much of today's cutting-edge physical training is rooted in these forgotten times. Enduring, immutable and priceless notions of rational human movement and the inventions that translate them into reality, often collect dust in antiquity's lost and found until we reinvent them. Indian clubs are an example. They belong to a family of timeless tools like medicine balls, kettlebells, dumbbells, weighted wands, and other hand-held devices commonly found in today's functional fitness toolbox.

Mythology and mystery surround the origins of Indian clubs. They can be traced to one of the most ancient weapons in India. It is called a gada, a symbol of invincible physical capacities and worldly power. Almost every Hindu deity including Lord Vishnu is often seen with one. Indian clubs are also known for their restorative value, and I was introduced to them for that purpose when I was growing up in Davenport, Iowa, in the early 1950s.

German immigrants brought a highly sophisticated warrior-based system of physical training called the Turnverein to Davenport in the mid-1800s. Club swinging came to the USA from Britain in around 1860, and it was embedded into the German system by the time I started learning the art at the age of eight. World War II gave functional fitness a new respect, so there were plenty of people in Davenport who were interested in club swinging and many other functional skills when I was a boy.

Physical culture and training interested me so much that I decided to study it for the rest of my life. That journey has taken me to numerous far away lands including Burma, The Hermit Kingdom. It is a remote and timeless nation located across the Bay of Bengal from India. I studied and taught physical culture there for nine months in 1988. Numerous teachers instructed me in Bando, club swinging, meditation and many other wonderful arts.

I started teaching club swinging to some of my students at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1989. A few years later, I moved north and started teaching club swinging to my physical education students at Northern Illinois University in Dekalb, Illinois. I moved to Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1993 and reintroduced club swinging to the U.S. Army.

Club swinging was an Olympic event in 1904 and 1932. The U.S. Army used it for shoulder rehabilitation during World War II, and it can be found in U.S. Army physical training manuals as early as the late-1800s. Light clubs were used first to insure precision. The purpose of club swinging is to develop integrity, mobility and efficiency of the shoulder girdle. Classical club swinging progressions follow the natural kinesiological progressions of shoulder girdle movement. Heavier clubs can be used once the movements are mastered, but can limit progress if introduced too soon.

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The 1914 U.S. Army Manual of Physical Training notes: The effect of these exercises, when performed with light clubs, is chiefly a neural one, hence they are primary factors in the development of grace and coordination and rhythm. As they tend to supple the

muscles and articulation of the shoulders and to the upper and forearms and wrist, they are indicated in cases where there is a tendency toward what is ordinarily known as muscle bound.

The shoulder girdle is extremely versatile, but it can easily become malformed, less efficient and vulnerable to injury by inappropriate training and acquired postural deficiencies. The shoulders should be strong, aligned and flexible. Club swinging can contribute to all of these and more. When a healthy shoulder girdle works in harmony with the elbow and wrist joints, overall physical performance will markedly improve. Club swinging patterns are the foundation of all shoulder girdle movements including those applicable to martial arts. The key to effective use of the clubs is progression, variety and precision.

Club swinging was widely practiced decades ago by wrestlers and boxers throughout Iowa, where world-class fighters like Pat Miletich have brought it back to life. Children studying under Sifu Julio Anta in Florida learn club swinging, and Tae Kwon Do Masters Don and Bonnie Wells teach it at their martial arts school in Ankeny, Iowa. Athletic teams, health clubs and physical therapists are also discovering the value of club swinging.

Over the years, I have produced three club swinging instructional videos. The *MotionRx* version is most recent and probably the best organized and most comprehensive. If you decide to learn my methods, keep in mind that they are incomplete. Use my system to create a better one. In doing so, we can insure that this beautiful art will prosper and benefit others who follow us.

The 18th Century French physician Tissot wrote, "Movement as such may take the place of many remedies, but all the remedies together can never take the place of the effect of movement." Tissot was, of course, referring to rational human motion. Mindful and intelligent club swinging is one of many timeless and useful ways to benefit from the restorative, healing power of nature. In other words, vis medicatrix naturae. ●



Master Don Wells, owner of Martial Arts America in Ankeny, Iowa, practices club swinging with Andrew Haler (front left), Keith Bice and Jesse Stoll (back left), and Kaitlin Haler.