

CONTRIBUTORS

James Vincent Southwood graduated in the History and Philosophy of Science from Cambridge in 2001. He has focused since then on being a Savate teacher, practitioner, advocate, and competitor. He won a gold medal at the 2014 World Championships and has silver medals from European and World Championships in 2007, 2015 and 2016. He was awarded Silver Glove grade in 2017. James is active in the organisation that runs GB Savate, serving as President from 2010-2014 and National Director of Technique from 2014-present. He has appeared in a TV series, and in newspaper articles promoting savate. Contact details are available at LondonSavate.co.uk.

Sara Delamont is Emerita Reader in Sociology in the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University. Her main research interest since 2003 has been doing ethnographies of capoeira, and since 2009, savate assaut. Her most recent, written with Neil Stephens and Claudio Campos is *Embodying Brazil: An Ethnography of Diasporic Capoeira* [Routledge, 2017].

TALES OF A TIREUR

BEING A SAVATE TEACHER IN CONTEMPORARY BRITAIN

SOUTHWOOD & DELAMONT

DOI

10.18573/mas.51

KEYWORDS

Savate, *assaut*, coaching, ethnography, life history, habitus.

CITATION

Southwood, J.V. and Delamont, S. 'Tales of Tireur: Being a Savate Teacher in Contemporary Britain', *Martial Arts Studies* 5, 72-83.

ABSTRACT

A *tireur* is a male practitioner of savate, a martial art relatively unknown in the UK but popular in France, Belgium and much of central Europe. Savate, which is also known as French kickboxing or *boxe française*, is very much a minority sport in contemporary Britain and Northern Ireland, and its enthusiasts have received little research attention from social scientists. This article is a collaborative case study of one tireur: James Southwood. It draws on ethnographic research on the classes taught by Southwood, a British teacher who is an international medallist. The interrelationships between this teacher's pedagogy, his enthusiasm for savate, and his biography are explored, drawing on his life history and the events in his classes. The small world of savate in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in which teachers find it hard to make a living, and the success of this teacher as an international competitor, are contrasted herein. The article also introduces Bourdieu's concept of habitus in a way parallel to the work of Wacquant on boxing.

INTRODUCTION

It is a cold winter evening in Earlshaze, a central London borough. In a brightly lit, noisy and busy commercial gym near a major railway station the 'post work' crowd is dispersing, and increasingly the machines are now idle and the laundry bin is full of discarded towels ready for the industrial washing machines. In the dance studio twelve men and four women are in pairs, practising a kick and the ways to block or evade it. The teacher, James Southwood, in a black singlet and tights, watches them, walking around the room, observing each pair and coaching them. In one corner stands an ethnographer, Sara Delamont, making notes.

This extract from field notes written originally at a *savate* (French kickboxing) class takes us to the heart of the case study reported in this article. James Southwood and Sara Delamont are the co-authors. It explores how Southwood's career as a *tireur* (fighter) and as a teacher in savate has developed since 2004. He has a dual identity as a world champion and a recognised teacher. The latter is more central to this article, which explores his teaching philosophy and strategies. Southwood has been active in savate since he was an undergraduate at Templecombe University (a pseudonym) nearly twenty years ago. He is the most successful *tireur* Great Britain has ever produced, having been the gold medallist in his weight category at the World Championships held in Rome in 2014. British women and men had 'only' won silver medals before. Southwood has been active in savate since 1999, and Sara Delamont has been studying him since 2009.

This article has six sections. Three sections are contextual (*vis-à-vis* savate, research methods, and Southwood's career) and three present findings on recruitment and retention (two of the practicalities of running successful classes), Southwood's philosophy of teaching savate, and the pedagogy of Southwood's classes. Southwood is the central figure in the article, with some other teachers briefly appearing, their names and locals being protected by pseudonyms. This is not an article about savate students in the UK. Few data have been collected on students, therefore the students in the classes and events observed are discussed only insofar as James Southwood reflected on their recruitment, retention and motivation to learn savate in conversations with Delamont. This project differs from Delamont's earlier work on capoeira conducted with a sociologist who is a capoeira student (Neil Stephens), which focused equally on teachers and learners [Delamont, Stephens and Campos: 2017].

SAVATE

Savate, also called French kickboxing or *boxe française*, seems to be relatively unknown in the United Kingdom and the rest of the Anglophone world, either as a martial art or as a topic for scholarly attention. Reed and Muggeridge [1985] authored what remains the only British book on the art. Tegner [1960, 1983] provided the American equivalent and the only other English-language book. Both are slim paperbacks which introduce the basic moves for learners but do not include the history of the art in any detail. Nor is savate treated at length in picture books or encyclopaedias on martial arts. There is a small entry on savate in Crudelli's [2008] coffee table book on martial arts, and a short piece about savate in France by Loudcher [2010] in Green and Svinth's [2010] encyclopaedia of martial arts. Savate featured in Josette Normandeau's [2006] TV series called *The Deadly Arts*, as one of six disciplines that the heroine learnt, but has not been promoted in advertisements, cartoons, cult films, or computer games (as compared to kung fu and muay thai, for two obvious examples). There is no savate equivalent of *The Karate Kid* or *Kung Fu Panda*. It has not only suffered scholarly neglect but also remains invisible in the popular newspapers even when there is British success. The UK won four medals at the 2016 World Championships, a feat that received no mainstream press coverage in Britain. A search of internet sources and cable TV stations will produce some footage of savate, but an inquirer would need to know savate existed and to look with some diligence. Kit, especially the boots, has to be ordered from France or through a club.

Savate is essentially a form of kickboxing. There are two contemporary varieties taught in Britain, *assaut* and *combat*, and both have international competitions. Many *tireurs* do both styles. Southwood specialises in the former, so it is the main focus of this article, which does not discuss the differentiation or origin of the two contemporary styles. In *assaut*, the aim is to land the kicks and punches with skill and finesse – *but as touches rather than blows intended to injure* – on target areas of the opponent's body to score points. *Assaut* is elegant, technical and skilful, and the fighters should not hurt each other. *Combat* is, like kickboxing, designed to deliver blows that land with power and hurt. Southwood has neither trained in *combat* nor competed in *combat* tournaments. He reflects: 'At several points in my career, I have asked myself seriously if I want to try *Combat*, if only to say I have done it'. But he has not. Southwood continues:

I know [*combat*] would not suit me well because I am injury-averse and not happy taking punishment in *Assaut*, which pretty much disqualifies me from trying full-contact. I also note that all the full-contact fighters I know have medical issues related to their sport, and I do not want to follow them into that.

His position is: 'I was not willing to take the risk of damage that combat entails, and if I could not accept the downside, I should not do it'.

There is also a variety of savate (*La Canne*) that centres on fencing moves done with canes rather than swords. *La Canne* is taught in the long-established savate club in Templecombe, and James has some experience of it but does not practice or teach it.

I perhaps train *La Canne* one or two days a year and have done so since about the year 2000, so I enjoy some of the movements that *Canne* teaches and the cleaner approach to scoring points should make it preferable to me, as a stylist, over *Boxe*. Somehow it just does not excite me as much though.

This article focuses only on *assaut*, as James learnt, competes in, and teaches it. Delamont has not done any fieldwork on combat or *canne* classes, gradings or competitions.

In Great Britain and Northern Ireland, there is as of this writing savate in Scotland and Northern Ireland but not in Wales. In England, it is concentrated in the South and South East, with long-established clubs in Templecombe and Selchester that have existed for over 30 and 20 years respectively. Other clubs and classes are transitory, dependent on a teacher deciding to start and maintain them.

Southwood has been teaching in London since 2004 and currently most of his classes take place in the London district we call Earlschaze. There are combat classes elsewhere in London started much more recently (in 2013). Allingford has had classes since 2007. One leading UK figure has taught in two small towns (Fernhurst and Ludmouth) because his job took him there. Clubs in a northern city, a London suburb and a Midlands city have closed down during Delamont's fieldwork, while two clubs in Scotland and on the South Coast of England are recent foundations (2014 and 2017) and, given the fluidity of the club landscape, may or may not survive.

Savate's history is disputed and mythologised, which is typical of many martial arts [Bowman 2017]. Loudcher [2010] offers a brief account mostly focused on its development in France since 1944, emphasising the governing bodies. Most practitioners in Britain tell newcomers that it began in Marseilles or Paris and that its modern form dates from the period after the French Revolution when it was illegal to carry a sword, in response to which men used canes and kicks to defend themselves from street attacks by thugs.

Those who tell the story that savate grew up in Marseilles stress an African influence (from North African sailors) and a maritime influence (from men fighting aboard ships, holding onto the rigging and using kicks). Both origin stories stress that in its early days boxing was not part of savate; in the nineteenth century, however, French men saw British boxing as a useful supplement to the kicks, and so modern savate was created.

There is no mythology or evidence that savate was ever used in warfare and it should be classified strictly as a duelling art rather than a martial art. Loudcher [2010], a French historian of savate, writes that contemporary savate developed during the nineteenth century and was demonstrated at the 1924 Paris Olympics. He says that, during World War II, the German occupation of France nearly destroyed savate and that it subsequently had to be recreated from the 1950s onwards. Loudcher is confident that since the 1970s it has grown in France so that in 2010 there were 37,000 licensed *tireurs* in France, twenty per cent women, and thirty per cent children.

When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, savate began to spread in some countries that had been behind the iron curtain, such as the nations of the former Yugoslavia, Hungary and Bulgaria. There are British, European and World Championships, and, now that Paris has been awarded the 2024 Olympic Games, savate may well feature as a demonstration sport.

Men and women train and spar together in classes but competitions are sex-segregated and fighters compete in weight categories parallel to those used in boxing. Progress in the sport is marked by the award of the right to wear different colours of gloves (*gants*). The lowest glove colour is blue, the highest silver. Promotions to the next level are assessed by appropriately qualified teachers on the basis of candidates satisfactorily performing a specified set of attacks, defences, escapes and counter-attacks. Assessment for higher level gloves involves performing longer and more intricate sequences of moves which have to be memorised and demonstrated to judges. Assessment for the blue, green, red and yellow gloves is conducted in the UK, but the white and silver gloves can only be awarded in France.

RESEARCH METHODS

The article uses two main sources of data: Ethnographic observation and interviews with Southwood. Delamont has been observing savate classes taught by Southwood and attending events involving other teachers and students in British and European savate since 2009. Regular events are grading days (when students are tested and may be promoted to a higher grade of glove), training days for officials (when enthusiasts learn how to judge and referee fights), and competitions (when competitions take place). Competitions in the UK often feature 'teams' from clubs in other European countries such as Ireland, France and Hungary. The observation is done in the ethnographic tradition expounded by Hammersley and Atkinson [2007], involving field notes recorded by hand *in situ*, afterwards written up into a more formal and expanded narrative, and subsequently coded for analysis. To supplement the observational data, Southwood has reflected on his career and discussed it at length with Delamont in email correspondence and face-to-face formal and informal interviews. No systematic data have been collected on students.

The ethnographic data collection has been done by Delamont, but this article has been co-authored because it has been co-constructed, giving its main focus a voice. Southwood has a degree in philosophy and reads about coaching, martial arts, and sports science regularly. After Delamont had been observing him for five years (2009-2013), Southwood asked for a list of more sociological and anthropological research on martial arts that he could read, including Delamont's publications on capoeira [e.g., Rosario, Stephens and Delamont 2010]. The advantages and disadvantages of two-handed research, with a practitioner and an observer, for the investigation of physical activities such as dance and martial arts, are explored in Stephens and Delamont [2006].

In the next section, an account of a typical class seen by Delamont is presented to give the reader unfamiliar with the activities and terminology in savate a basic idea of what occurs in routine encounters. This specific evening began with interaction between the two authors of the article in the gym reception area before the students arrived.

A TYPICAL CLASS

BLUE RIBBON GYM, EARLSHAZE 23 APRIL 2015

Sara Delamont had got to the gym at 6.35 p.m., an hour before class, and James Southwood arrived at 6.50 p.m. Since they had last spoken, Southwood had been reading Wacquant [2004] on Delamont's recommendation, his first academic sociology monograph on a martial art, chosen as a possible model for their joint publications. Delamont wrote:

James arrived and we hugged each other. He had already said in an email he was enjoying *Body and Soul*: tonight he elaborated on that, saying he was 'captivated' by the pen portrait of Dee Dee – a model of the role of a martial arts coach he likes.

We caught up on news: he has enrolled with a boxing coach to improve his boxing, and the Allingford club has a new organiser, teacher and coach, as Ursula Graeme has got a new, very demanding, job and is moving house. The new man is Dutch, called Conrad von Trouten, and is a heavyweight (over 85k): so he is not in the same weight category as James or Alex Grierson of the Selchester club. Being Dutch, Conrad is not a competitor for their international fighting selection. The European combat event is imminent and James is going to be the trainer and corner man for Adelaide and Agnata, two women I know, who are competing. He explains that there can be knockouts in combat, although these are uncommon in fights between women in the lower weight categories (under 55k and under 59k) where the two British women compete. There is to be a squad training event for the combat and assaut UK team people only (i.e., 'closed'), and later an open 'train with the team' event when people can pay to attend the same training as the best in Britain. Conrad has a friend who is a personal trainer and fitness instructor who is going to come and do a session with the squad: James is keen to see if there are some new ideas that this trainer will bring to the squad.

By 7.15 p.m., students both new and regular are arriving. Women hug each other and hug the men. Men either hug or shake hands with other men. The students 'check in' with Southwood and pay if they need to for the single class or for the month, get changed, and catch up with each other. Southwood keeps the attendance and payment records on his phone. He goes to change himself at 7.20 p.m., asking Delamont to 'keep an eye on my stuff' while he is in the changing room. When greeting the students, Southwood urges them to put photographs of savate on their Facebook pages and to tweet about the classes. At 7.32,

the Zumba class that precedes savate ends and those customers leave the aerobics studio so that the savate people can go in and get set up.

James puts his stuff in the alcove, and the students put theirs in one corner. He puts some music on the CD player, and calls the class to order. They form lines facing him – there are 14 students, four women and ten men.

That is a common sex ratio in these classes, in which women are usually in the minority. A regular male student, who is training to be a savate teacher and is one of the advanced learners, Lawrence Todhurst, is not here, but Delamont knows he has a new job which sometimes involves evening shifts.

James begins by greeting the class and then says there is a 'big competition' on July 4th, and the visiting teams will include '14 Hungarians', a Paris club who are sending 'three top people', some Belgians and another French club who are sending 'novices'. James urges those present to think about fighting that day by saying 'If you sign up now, I can get you a fight – a novice fight – at the right weight'.

James asked if anyone was interested in attending an all-night event at a pub to watch the Mayweather v Pacquiao fight for which he has already bought his (£20) ticket. This was a social event, he stressed, a chance for friends to enjoy an evening out together.

Then the class starts. First James instructs them to do individual shadow boxing, without gloves, facing a mirror (there are mirrors on all four walls), to 'get your arms moving' and 'get your feet moving'. Then at short intervals the class are required to drop and do 10 press ups, stand and stretch their arms, and box alone facing a mirror doing three quick punches: 1 right, 1 left, 1 right. These are the first four elements of the warm up. Each element is either 10 of something (e.g., the press ups) or lasts one minute (the shadow boxing facing the mirror). James uses a timer which 'bleeps' and is louder than the background music.

The class move on to the next warming-up exercise. They drop to the floor and do ten squat thrusts, then stand up and stretch leg and ankle muscles, then solo shadow box facing a mirror again, this time 'jab, cross, uppercut'. During that minute James walks round watching each student carefully and coaching some of them.

There are six more of these exercises alternating generic warm-up, stretching and fitness moves with core savate elements including the *fouetté* (a kick used a lot in savate). Three more men arrive during

those stretches, including a regular, Michael Staveling, who greets Sara. Because the ethnographic visits are not very frequent, only long-standing, committed students know Sara well enough to exchange greetings. Those who have been training for a year or so hug Sara or shake hands; more recent class members nod or smile. Visitors to the classes are not uncommon. Of the thirteen men and four women training that evening, all the students were in their twenties or older and the majority were Caucasian but for two S.E. Asian women and two African-Caribbean men. Five people were French, one American and the rest British. The largest class at this gym Sara has ever seen had 24 people training; the smallest had six. Caucasian men are usually in the majority.

It is now 7.45 p.m. James says 'Get a drink and gloves, get a partner'. He does not say 'put in a gum shield' but everyone who has one does so. The regulars have their own gloves, some newer people get a pair from James's kit bag which is kept in a large wall cupboard in the room. James sets up his camera, looking for good shots he can post on YouTube.

James calls Michael to be his demonstration partner. They demonstrate doing a left-hand jab and how to guard your face so your partner's jab does not hit you in the face but on your gloved hands. Pairs train that for 1.5 minutes taking it in turns to jab.

Then James and Michael demonstrate the next sequence. One person now does two jabs, a fouetté (kick) and a third jab, while the other defends himself. The students do 1.5 minutes with one person attacking, and a second 1.5 minutes with the other combatant attacking.

Protecting the face with the gloved hands has two functions. One is simply protective: A savate assault punch on the gloved hands does not hurt. The other is that in competitive bouts with judging a point is not awarded for landing a punch or a kick on the opponent's gloved hands. When the bleeper goes for the end of the three minutes, the sequence is re-demonstrated, and the pairs do a further three minutes. James walks round saying positive things such as 'That's the speed I want' immediately and offers advice later. 'Use the angles, don't just stand there, don't just block'. The class went on with nine more such sequences, each one progressively more complicated, until 8.35. Then there was a water break, the room was sub-divided into four smaller spaces using the aerobic steps as dividers, and the second hour is for sparring. James coaches people in that hour but does not teach the whole class.

The basic structure of the first hour described here – announcements, stretching and warming-up, demonstrations, and paired practice – is typical of James’s routine lessons for non-beginners, although the detailed content varies. If there are beginners, the instructional part of the first hour is done with a divided class, and there are effectively two parallel classes in the same small studio. James demonstrates something basic for the novices, leaves them to practice it, goes to the more experienced, teaches something more elaborate and leaves them in turn to practice while he goes back to the newcomers. The basic pedagogic pattern is the same, however: Demonstrations of and drills for specific punches and kicks.

On April 23rd, there were no beginners in this class; the emphasis was on short sequences of punches and kicks that all the students present could be expected to know well enough to practice. A core part of savate classes, as in capoeira [see Stephens and Delamont 2006, 2014], is practicing short sequences in pairs. It is normal for the teacher to demonstrate the sequence with a student. First, the teacher will do the ‘harder’ part of the sequence, for example the two kicks, while the student blocks or escapes them; then, the roles are reversed and the student gets to do the two kicks; finally, the students pair up and practice while the teacher walks around carefully observing the pairs and coaching them. Beginners are helped simply to achieve the sequence while more advanced people get coaching on the finer details, such as how to make the kick harder to block, or to be more stylish, or how it can be used to score points in a competitive fight. If anyone is endangering themselves or their partner, the teacher will quickly go to that pair. Pairs are changed regularly and routinely, so that all students present will have the opportunity to train with as many people in class as possible.

A regular attendee who is alert and quick on the uptake is a good demonstration student, especially if they have learnt the names of the moves. The teacher can say ‘do a *chassé bas* with your left leg’ and ideally, with a student demonstrator who does that competently, the escape or counterattack can be showcased. Becoming a student who is chosen to demonstrate with the teacher is a sign of competence. James had the experience of being such a ‘trustie’ early in his career, to which we now turn. The case study of James begins with his biography as a tireur.

JAMES’S CAREER

The brief summary of James’s career in savate – his social trajectory – focuses on how he did the necessary work to pick up the craft and how invested in savate he became. James went to university in Templecombe keen to find classes in a martial art. He learnt that there was a Templecombe kickboxing club, and discovered that savate was taught, so he took some introductory lessons. He got ‘positive feedback’ from the teachers ‘a few months in’, partly because he ‘was more conscientious’ than some of his fellow students. That is, he focused hard on what was taught, practiced a good deal in his own time, and built a ‘solid technical base’. He felt able to see he was making progress when he ‘was chosen for demonstrations’ in the class by the teachers in his second year of training. James was picked out by Marjorie and Len, his first teachers, to demonstrate not only for his ‘solid technical base’ but also, he points out, because he was a similar height and build to both Len and Marjorie.

James’s initial enthusiasm and regular training enabled him to get his first, blue, gloves in 2000, within a year of beginning savate, and then the green and the red gloves in 2001. Many students do not progress that fast. James also learnt the rules of the sport, and had been trained as a judge and a referee in time to go to his first world championship, travelling as an official rather than as a competitor, in 2004.

Simultaneously, he took the training necessary to become a savate instructor, and became an *initiateur* in 2003. Once he had gained that status, James got insurance and began to teach his own classes, initially in an English seaside town and then in London from 2004. In the years after he graduated from Templecombe, he returned for savate gradings and competitions and took some classes in London with a man who later returned to France; for the most part, though, he recalls that he ‘taught himself’. James’s trajectory and social location were, after graduation, designed to change his bodily and intellectual dispositions, because by 2005 he was heavily invested in savate.

When he moved to London, James taught his own classes and trained in Selchester (a cathedral city in the London commuter belt) and Templecombe on alternate Wednesday evenings. His teaching career prospered and he became a *moniteur* in 2006 and a *professeur* in 2014. By 2008, he had gained the white and then the yellow gloves. When he was assessed as worthy of the silver gloves in 2017, he became only the third British tireur ever to achieve them.

Alongside his progression to professeur, James began to fight regularly at the international level, but, as the major championships only have one competitor of each sex per nation in each weight category, getting

selected is not easy. In the 2012 World Championships, he recalls, 'I was in a weight category that did not suit me'. In 2014, he was able to get selected for the British team in a weight category that suited him better – i.e., one in which he could make the weight limit without weakening himself by fiercely dieting down or by limiting his mobility and agility by bulking up. He won the competition, the first British man ever to earn a World Championship gold medal in savate.

His self-confidence as a fighter was much higher by 2014 due to other competitions in which he had done well. As he recalls, 'I realised – maybe for the first time – that I could win consistently at [the] international level'. There is a contrast James makes explicit in his reflections, comparing the speed with which he progressed so he was confident as an athlete and a teacher in savate and the ten years it took before he felt he was 'good in competitions as well'. Alongside the teaching and the fighting, James has also become a member of the group who run GB Savate and select the teams for the international championships. This is a time-consuming part of his life, but we have not explored it further in this article.

This summary of James's career illustrates the four properties of a pugilistic habitus [Wacquant 2004, 2011, 2013]. He has acquired the pugilistic habitus of a tireur, the set of acquired, not innate, dispositions. He changed his embodiment, learning things that are beneath the level of discourse and consciousness. That is, he had acquired skills and knowledge that are tacit, not explicit. By his own account, he is heavily invested in savate. James's involvement with savate is self-critical and reflexive, and that has led him to welcome Sara as an observer of his teaching, and to choose to write with her about that shared experience. Sara has been watching savate classes, competitions and grading events since 2009, but has never learnt it. The article now focuses on James's work teaching savate in Great Britain in three sub-sections: Recruitment and retention, philosophy, and pedagogic processes in class.

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND OTHER PRACTICAL MATTERS

All self-employed teachers of dance, exercise and martial arts have to recruit students and retain a sufficient proportion of those they recruit in order to keep the activity alive. Hiring a space (gym, dojo, studio), travelling to and from teaching, buying equipment such as gloves to lend to novices, and equipping oneself with the correct shoes and clothing all cost money. Student fees have to cover those, before the teacher can eat or pay their own rent. James is the only savate teacher in the UK who tries to be full-time. In 2017, he was teaching three nights a week. All others have jobs, but James prefers to live cheaply and to devote time to preparing himself to compete regularly. In the years Sara has been studying him, he has alternated combining paid employment and savate with full-time savate.

Any savate instructor has to find a suitable venue. Savate needs a high-quality floor, but not the padded mats of a dojo. The space should be warm enough in winter and cool enough in summer for energetic exercise to be possible. The Blue Ribbon gym in Earlschaze, which is near a major commuter station in central London, has many features that make it attractive to students. The showers, changing spaces and lavatories are decent and clean, which may help to retain students. The gym is near a train station, an underground Tube station, on bus routes and has somewhere secure for bicycles, but not a car park. The environment feels safe after dark, and has a foyer where people can wait before the lesson. James has access to a wall cupboard in the Earlschaze gym where a large kit bag with boxing gloves in it can be left safely. The hall is a good size for the class, neither so small and crowded as to be dangerous and impede training nor so cavernous that the students feel 'lost'. An over-crowded room can deter students, while a sparsely-attended class looks like an 'un-cool' place to be.

Both recruitment and retention play out rather differently in the various savate clubs. The Selchester club has a core of long-term members, including two men, Francis and Guy Kincross, who have done savate for over thirty years. Francis Kincross is the only other British man alive to have earned the silver gloves. The authors Reed and Muggeridge [1985] were central to the Selchester club for many years. Two other clubs in university cities, Allingford and Templecombe, have a rotating membership of students as well as some core members.

Most of the clubs other than James's are in small cities, so once a person has made friends and got keen on savate they can come to class and train relatively easily. London is more problematic, and many potential students of savate live and work/study far from Earlschaze.

In London, savate can be 'squeezed out' by other interests, or a rent rise, or a move that makes the journey to class very prolonged, expensive and unpleasant. James has 'lost' advanced students to divorce, marriage, a move out of London, career moves outside the UK altogether and in one case to MMA. James has one advantage in recruitment. London is a global city, his are the only assault classes and, for French people, whether they are looking to make friends with other French people or to get fit, coming to James's class is a convenient choice. He therefore recruits more students who already know savate and have a positive view of it than the other clubs do. However, these people are often transitory; their long-term life will not be spent in inner London.

Getting publicity is hard, time-consuming and expensive. When he began teaching, James found he would get more enquiries whenever television programmes about martial arts included anything on savate [such as Normandeau 2006]. In 2017, TV is not used that way by potential students, and such series are 'found' on YouTube, if at all. He featured in a national newspaper article in 2005, and one of the current students was interviewed in a different newspaper in 2017, but such exposure does not produce enquiries. Generally, new people come through word of mouth or having found the website.

James has a beginner package of five lessons, but it is hard to get novices to commit to the more serious, long-term training. Among the retention strategies James deploys are encouraging students to go for grading and to enter competitions. These are discussed in the next section.

PHILOSOPHY OF TEACHING

James is clear that 'the purpose of training is to learn skills, gain self-esteem, keep fit, make friends and have fun'. This is what he makes explicit in his classes and his individual exchanges with potential students. What he says is not unique to savate. Teachers of other martial arts such as kung fu [Jennings et al. 2010] have very similar goals for their students. James is keen that his students learn to do savate assault because they will get fit but not suffer injuries or long-term health problems unless they have a (very unusual) accident.

Because savate is intended to be stylish, and to be a mental competition as well as a physical one, the biggest or strongest person is not necessarily the best. So, James's philosophy is to get people to train regularly and develop themselves as tireurs who know their own strengths and can deploy them with guile. The five other long-standing savate teachers in the UK have all explained to Sara that they share that

general approach to teaching their students. That is, as Wacquant's [2004, 2013] analysis suggests, pugilistic learning is based primarily on changing embodiment by intensive drill and practice as opposed to verbal instruction.

Students vary in their primary dispositions, in how adept at picking up a craft and how invested they are in savate. Motivating students to make a serious investment is one area where James's philosophy of teaching is rather different from his original teachers, in particular Marjorie and Len. Marjorie and Len regularly tell Sara that they disagree with James's enthusiasm for competition, and warn her not to think his approach is the dominant one in the UK. James does believe that competitions and gradings are motivating and therefore students who participate in those activities will progress in savate. So, all his goals (skills, fitness, self-esteem, fun and friendships) are reinforced by fights. Entering competitions reinforces those values, as James explains: 'I think competition does all that and more, if introduced properly and followed well. The spirit of competition is a great thing to inspire a student'.

In James's regular classes, there are announcements of future competitions and of the results from recent meetings. Students are exhorted to attend competitions in the UK and overseas as friends and supporters if not as tireurs themselves. Additionally, as James teaches he stresses that points can be scored by landing kicks and punches and, equally, that if escapes and blocks are done well the opponent will not score. In a typical class, such comments are publicly included in every paired sequence and are frequent in the quiet coaching remarks made to each pair as he walks round. James will say, 'If you move your feet here, he'll miss with his jab and you won't lose a point' or 'If you can do that chassé faster you can probably score with it! Don't pause!'.

Thus, James's teaching is suffused with the idea that everyone is training to compete and to score well, or at least to know how to compete and score even if they do not choose to do so. In short, for James, potential competitions (well-refereed and with appropriate opponents) are motivating and will enthuse students to train more seriously. Serious training will make savate more enjoyable and rewarding.

The same virtuous circle can be set in motion by a student focusing on getting a grading. James believes the hierarchy of gradings – the gloves – is also inspiring, or can be:

Gradings help by pointing out which technical accomplishments need to be mastered first from an ocean of possibilities. This offers reassurance to a student who otherwise can feel lost with so much to learn.

[Grading] also offers another marker of achievement, which adds to confidence, which itself will contribute to a better experience and better development.

The technical demands of Blue are such that most students are capable of it after a comparatively brief preparation so it depends more on their confidence. There is little point in putting them forward when they are still suffering from 'stage fright'.

These aspects of James's philosophy of teaching are obvious in his classes, although in this project we have not systematically asked students how far they 'hear' the messages. We suspect novices may be so focused on learning basic moves that they 'learn' little from the explanations offered. In the next section, the focus is on how transparent James's goals are to Sara.

PEDAGOGICAL PROCESSES IN CLASS

In his regular classes, James's philosophy and experience are manifest for Sara and advanced students. While working through the phases of his classes, different aspects of enculturation into savate are emphasised. For many students, the class 'begins' before 7.30p.m., in the foyer area of the gym where there are sofas and tables and chairs. James is usually present by 7.00 p.m. and talks to students about past events, future plans and anything else they raise. They pay him, and if they are novices or new to his class, he gets them to complete a health questionnaire. There is also an opportunity for students to catch up with or get to know each other. James often talks about savate events past and future, especially if his students have done well. When he has fought himself, advanced students will want to know about his bouts in some detail, including commentary on the judging. During Sara's fieldwork, one recurrent theme of such conversations has been referees who did not enforce the rules of assaut and allowed physical contact more suitable for combat or MMA. Assessments are made of the standards of training, coaching, fitness and knowledge of the rules among officials and tireurs from other countries.

When the small studio is free, the class move into it and deposit their belongings. James has control over an alcove where the music centre is; the students put their bags, coats, etc., in a corner. The class begins promptly, with some announcements and exhortations from James, which display his goals. He wants the existence and attractions of savate publicised, because word of mouth, including on social media, is the best way to recruit new students (and audiences for competitions). If

everyone present tells their friends about savate, it will grow. Good pictures may be shared more widely. James also regularly relays good news about success in competitions, which all present are enjoined to be pleased about, even if they do not 'know' the fighters. There is encouragement to attend future events, if not to fight simply to travel and cheer on friends. James's claim that savate gives people new friends is manifest.

Once the class begins, the first phase is central to James's aim that people will get fit, and is also designed to prevent injury. People need to get thoroughly warmed-up and to stretch all their muscles. Even if people do not stay in savate, they will have learnt how to stretch in preparation for exercise. The gym is cold in winter and so James starts classes between October and April with an extensive warm up (running, jumping, moving feet and hands rapidly). In summer, the gym can be hot, and stretching and warming-up the mind are all that is necessary. The warm-up and stretching blend into the savate moves, initially done alone, with both boxing and kicks. In the early savate phase, James emphasises being up on the toes and moving the feet continuously, as well as shadow boxing watching oneself in the wall mirrors. At this stage, boxing gloves are not worn; James wants students to get warm and 'loose', to get into the habit of being always moving and working the arms and legs together. Here, James is still leading things that would improve the fitness and alertness of anyone in the room.

The fifth phase becomes much more focused on savate-specific instruction and practice. Beginning at around 8.00 p.m., students are instructed to put on their gloves, put in gum shields, and if they have any jewellery not yet removed, or covered with plaster, that is done. A key marker of the seriousness of the rest of the evening, this phase also depends on mixing with other students, as sequences are practised in pairs. Because the pairings are regularly changed, most students will meet, in close physical work, everyone else in the room.

Savate is a dyadic activity, so this is the most important part of learning savate skills, because people train with partners of very different sizes and shapes. A 5'3" woman has to learn where to move to escape or block kicks from a woman her size, a 6'5" man, and all shapes and sizes in between. As savate is a martial art, being able to do moves alone in a drill is a building block, but only paired practice enables the student to become a tireur. Savate has to be done with other people who attack you and force you to escape from or stop your attacker. Solitary practice will improve technical skill, flexibility, and fitness, but it cannot improve the mental and interactive aspects of the sport. In our final section, we reflect briefly on the pugilistic habitus of savate.

DISCUSSION SAVATE'S PUGILISTIC HABITUS IN FRANCE AND BRITAIN

This article has presented some data from the eight-year research project to show how James engages in pedagogical work to adapt the French pugilistic habitus of savate for his students. In his classes, there are people whose trajectories and social locations vary widely, and no one he teaches has his own single-minded determination and dedication to savate. No student he has taught has progressed as fast as he did, or been as successful, perhaps because no one has been as invested in savate as he was, and is.

This discussion draws on the theories of Bourdieu [1977, 1978, 1990a, 1990b], especially the concept of habitus as developed by Wacquant [2004] to explore the 'pugilistic' habitus of boxing. Southwood has himself acquired the habitus of savate, and simultaneously spent a decade opening up that habitus to his own students. Wacquant [2011] sets out four properties of Bourdieu's original characterisation of habitus that made it directly relevant for his study of Chicago boxers and how they were taught and enculturated:

- 1) **The cognitive and socially constructed aspects of habitus are changeable, adaptable and can be transmitted by pedagogical work.**
- 2) **The concept of habitus rests on that fundamental premise that sets of dispositions (bodily and intellectual) can and do vary by trajectory and social location. Because people's primary dispositions vary, they will vary in how adept they are at picking up a craft as well as in how invested they are in it.**
- 3) **Habitus is based on the premise that practical mastery is tacit – i.e., it operates beneath the level of discourse and consciousness. It follows that pugilistic learning has to be based on changing embodiment, for, without that, mental learning is of little help in acquiring it.**
- 4) **The previous three points underpin the fundamental idea that any bodily habitus is acquired. In other words, bodily habitus is a set of acquired, not innate, dispositions.**

Southwood's career in savate, as both a fighter and a teacher, exemplifies these four principles. Wacquant [2013:194] proposes three research strategies for investigating any pugilistic habitus, which are (a) synchronic and inductive (the approach Bourdieu [1989] uses in *The State Nobility*), (b) diachronic and deductive (mapping the social trajectories of agents), and (c) experiential, which is what Wacquant himself did in the Chicago gym. The second idea, which is the one we

follow here, is mapping the social trajectory of agents. James is such an agent, and the sociological purpose of this article is using Southwood's social trajectory to investigate the pugilistic habitus of savate in France and contemporary Britain.

The pugilistic habitus of savate is predominantly French. France funds savate teachers from government money, and there are subsidised training facilities. In the 2017 European Championships, France won the gold medal in every weight category, both men's and women's. The core documents of the sport are published in French, and that is the language of competition and grading. James has acquired that habitus, and feels 'at home' in it. In this case study of a leading British tireur, we have focused on how James has gained his status in savate as a fighter and teacher. We explore here how James, as an enculturated tireur (that is, someone who is fully immersed in its French-dominated pugilistic habitus), works with his colleagues and students to 'translate' that habitus for people in the UK.

Savate in the UK does not have its own culture. Rather, it operates in a relationship with the dominant, French, habitus. There are two areas where the habitus is apparent: Routine classes in the UK and international competitions. In everyday training, the pugilistic habitus is all about fitness (based on serious, regular training, flexibility, developing both sides of the body to kick with both legs, punch with both hands, and move clockwise and counter-clockwise, and style). Knowing the rules, so that fouls (kicks and punches to the 'wrong', 'illegal' areas of the body) are avoided, is also crucial. Keeping an even temper so that points are scored, but illegally strong blows are not delivered, is another valued asset. The good savate tireur needs a brain to compete cleverly and also needs to cultivate self-confidence.

Regular classes, as James teaches them, are designed to lead his students towards these goals, with gradings for gloves, learning to judge and referee, and appropriate fights with well-matched opponents to act as motivators and reinforce the teaching. If his students emulate him, then they will pay attention to their diet, drink moderately, and eschew drugs and tobacco. Their rewards for entering into this way of life are to find friends from many walks of life and to improve their mental and physical self-confidence, so they can be 'at home' in their own bodies.

Overlaid on both regular classes and competition (so it is fundamental for all students, even novices and their teachers) is a pride in savate's internationalism. A student who travels with the British team to Bulgaria can meet a Canadian or a Finn who shares an interest in savate, become friends on social media, and agree to go to the same summer course in France, rejoicing in the pugilistic habitus they share, which transcends national identity.

Savate has been around in England for over thirty years, and James has become a leading figure in the shadow of pioneers, some of whom still teach and some of whom still compete. For James's generation, the modified pugilistic habitus that they co-create, perpetuate and develop has the following aspects. First, there is the challenge to French domination in the ring and in the organisation of British savate. The established French and French colonial domination of savate mean its language is French and the rules of progression and of competition are written in French and determined by French-dominated committees. James's generation have, *de facto*, challenged that domination by producing documents in English to organise the sport in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Those who represent the UK in competition inevitably define their success and failure partially as contrastive to the French rather than any other nationality.

In every competition, the French fighter at each weight is likely to be the favourite, because they have had to achieve selection by eliminating very good French tireurs in the French qualification events. The French fighters are envied because the tests for the highest gloves take place in France; there are big, well-funded clubs with specialist facilities; there are outdoor summer training camps and expert coaches; and all the kit is readily available from specialist suppliers. On the other hand, if a French competitor does not win the gold medal, it is known that they face severe criticism, which is not a burden for British fighters. For British competitors, anyone who defeats the French competitor is popular, if only because the route to a medal is thought to be more open. From this perspective, the French tireurs are unlike the British, who have none of the infrastructure or panache of the French. Beating the French is a success for the underdog.

However, there is another available perspective from which the British tireurs feel close to the French and the core of savate. This other perspective becomes apparent when British tireurs compete overseas. There is a strong resentment shown towards officials who appear not to know (or choose not to enforce) the rules of assaut, resulting in people getting hurt and transgressors going unpenalized. Allied to that is a contrastive rhetoric that the difference between assaut and combat is not being observed by some Eastern European teams nor policed by officials. The shared culture in the UK is therefore that *we* know the rules and we send properly enculturated fighters and officials into competitions. That is, British savate understands and upholds assaut as it should be done, and as it is done by the French.

James's career as a teacher, a competitor, and an organiser is therefore positioned between full membership of the French pugilistic habitus and his important role in GB Savate.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have explored the habitus of savate in the UK. We have used data from and about an experienced and successful savate teacher and competitor, James Southwood, collected by an ethnographer who is an anthropologist and a sociologist, Sara Delamont, to focus on a minority sport which deserves more attention from social scientists.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Mrs R. Bartle-Jones and Charlotte Bartlett for word processing the article and to the anonymous referees of the article. Paul Bowman, George Jennings and Neil Stephens have offered helpful comment.

REFERENCES

- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1989. *The State Nobility*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1978. 'Sport and Social Class', *Social Science Information* 17.6, 819-40.
doi.org/10.1177/053901847801700603
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990a. *In Other Words*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990b. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bowman, Paul. 2017. *Mythologies of Martial Arts*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International.
- Crudelli, Chris. 2008. *The Way of the Warrior*. London: Dorling – Kindersly.
- Green, Thomas A. and Joseph R. Svinth (eds.). 2010. *Martial Arts of the World*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.
- Hammersley, Martyn and Paul Atkinson. 2007. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. Third edition. London: Routledge.
- Loudcher, Jean-François. 2010. 'Savate, Chausson and French Boxing'. In Green and Svinth, 256-261.
- Reed, Philip and Richard Muggeridge. 1985. *Savate: Martial Art of France*. Boulder, Co: Paladin Press.
- Stephens, Neil and Sara Delamont. 2006. 'Balancing the Berimbau'. *Qualitative Inquiry* 12.2, 316-339.
doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284370
- Stephens, Neil and Sara Delamont. 2014. 'I Can See It in the Nightclub'. *Sociological Review* 62.1, 149-66.
doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12062
- Tegner, Bruce. 1960. *Savate*. Ventura, CA: Thor Publishing Co.
- Tegner, Bruce. 1983. *Savate*. Third edition. Ventura, CA: Thor Publishing Co.
- Wacquant, Loïc. 2004. *Body and Soul*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Wacquant, Loïc. 2011. 'Habitus as Topic and Tool'. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 8.1, 81-92.
doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2010.544176
- Wacquant, Loïc. 2013. 'Homines in Extremis: What Fighting Scholars Teach Us About Habitus'. *Fighting Scholars: Habitus and Ethnographies of Martial Arts and Combat Sports*. Edited by Raúl Sánchez García and Dale C. Spencer. London: Anthem, 194-200.

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

Martial Arts Studies is an open access journal, which means that all content is available without charge to the user or his/her institution. You are allowed to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of the articles in this journal without asking prior permission from either the publisher or the author.

The journal is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Original copyright remains with the contributing author and a citation should be made when the article is quoted, used or referred to in another work.



Cardiff University Press
Gwasg Prifysgol Caerdydd

Martial Arts Studies is an imprint of Cardiff University Press, an innovative open-access publisher of academic research, where 'open-access' means free for both readers and writers.
cardiffuniversitypress.org

Journal DOI
10.18573/ISSN.2057-5696

Issue DOI
10.18573/mas.i5

Accepted for publication 24 January 2018

Martial Arts Studies
Journal design by Hugh Griffiths

MARTIALARTSSTUDIES.ORG

TWITTER.COM/MASTUDIES

MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES

EDITORS

Paul Bowman
Benjamin N. Judkins

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

Kyle Barrowman
Qays Stetkevych

To discuss publication or to submit
a paper please contact:
martial.arts.studies@gmail.com

EDITORIAL ADVISORY PANEL

Oleg Benesch *University of York*
Stephen Chan *SOAS*
Greg Downey *Macquarie University*
D.S. Farrer *University of Guam*
Adam Frank *University of Central Arkansas*
Thomas A. Green *Texas A&M University*
T. J. Hinrichs *Cornell University*
Leon Hunt *Brunel University London*
Felipe P. Jocano Jr *University of the Philippines*
Gina Marchetti *Hong Kong University*
Meaghan Morris *The University of Sydney*
Daniel Mroz *University of Ottawa*
Meir Shahar *Tel Aviv University*
Dale Spencer *Carleton University*
Douglas Wile *Alverno College*
Phillip Zarrilli *Exeter University, Emeritus*

