



SABONG FEDERATION

A Sparring Club For Filipino Martial Artists

San Francisco / Bay Area Chapter

Introduction

Executive Summary

Sabong Federation is a round table of top Filipino martial arts coaches in the San Francisco Bay Area consisting of practitioners of various lineages and regional styles. The mission of the club is to provide an arena for elevating our martial arts understanding and foment mutual trust and learning from each school. The federation was set up to establish a code of conduct and rules of engagement between practitioners conducive toward the development of an Olympic inclusion. Our aim is to establish a safe space for sparring and lay the groundwork for an international collaboration in the sport arena. We intend to do this with weekly workshops, monthly meetups, and an annual tournament event that will further the recognition and understanding of Filipino Martial Arts.

Purpose and Meaning

Sabong is the name for cockfighting in the Philippines. Cockfighting itself has a history that dates back 6,000 years as a spectator sport in ancient India, China, Persia, and other places they conquered. In the Philippines, sabong was already flourishing in the 16th century, as recorded by Antonio Pigafetta, the Italian diarist aboard Ferdinand Magellan's 1521 expedition.

“Cockfighting, locally termed *sabong*, remains a popular pastime in the Philippines, where both illegal and legal cockfights occur. Legal cockfights are held in cockpits every week, whilst illegal ones, called *tupada* or *tigbakay*, are held in secluded cockpits where authorities cannot raid them. In both types, knives or *gaffs* are used. There are two kinds of knives used in Philippine cockfighting: single-edged blades (used in derbies) and double-edged blades; lengths of knives also vary. All knives are attached on the left leg of the bird, but depending on agreement between owners, blades can be attached on

the right or even on both legs. *Sabong* and illegal *tupada*, are judged by a referee called *sentensyador* or *koyme*, whose verdict is final and not subject to any appeal. Bets are usually taken by the *kristo*, so named because of his outstretched hands when calling out wagers from the audience from memory.” - [Wikipedia](#)

We are invoking this name for the sparring club because it symbolizes the feist and fury of our warrior identity as harnessed by a pre-colonial tradition and cultural pastime. The cockpit symbolizes the arena for duelists to express their martial art to the highest degree. Because Filipino Martial Arts are heavy on blades and hidden weapons, and because the sparring activities will involve training replicas of Philippine-inspired swords, *sabong* makes for a great name for this club.

The role of the *Sentensyador* or *Koyme* also symbolizes the discipline, order, justice, fairness, and responsibility that will be instilled in all participants, whether they are duelists, coaches, umpires, or judges. There is a code of conduct that all participants are expected to adhere to when stepping into the cockpit. As for the *kristo*, it symbolizes the squawk of live action to exalt the athlete and ultimately benefit them with a venue for sport and monetary support for their Olympic goals.

Sparring is now fast becoming a popular practice among Filipino martial artists all over the world. However, our own San Francisco Bay Area community does not have a unified league or organization to bring everyone together. This club was founded on the premise of bringing the top FMA school representatives to the round table to ratify the rules of engagement between duelists and ensure encounters rooted in respect and mutual learning. Although sparring encounters are as simple as a handshake and two sticks, the rules of engagement lead to a code of conduct that will apply to each school and individual joining the club. *See Appendix*

Positive Mentorship

As many Filipinos can attest, *Sabong* also invokes many negative archetypes about our culture that also need healing. Violence is the most contentious activity associated with cockfights. This club will be an outlet that we can use to curtail toxic behavior amongst our male youth and provide them with a positive and powerful image of a warrior with moral law, fraternal camaraderie, maternal instincts, and eternal siblinghood. By giving young and old martial artists a safe place to express their art and sharpen their skills, duelists can engage in activities that form bonds rather than hostile encounters—raising children who use martial arts to stop violence within and amongst our community. This club intends to provide a safe space for martial artists to evolve into great athletes and ambassadors for our greater cultural identity.

Another negative stereotype associated with *sabong* is gambling. *Sabong* is a “gladiator” arena where spectators wager on which cock will survive. The “*Kristo*” is the person who uses their impeccable memory to count every bid and offer and ascertain the prize at the end of the cockfight. In this club, we aim to encourage commerce to benefit athletes, vendors, local businesses, and sponsors alike. Instead of gambling, the club will prioritize all business transactions to benefit the athlete first and foremost. Ultimately, we intend to align our efforts for the benefit of the SoMa community, as we endeavor to involve local vendors and apportion a percentage of proceeds toward the upliftment of local businesses to be determined.

Gender Inclusion

Another aspect of the martial arts sparring community that needs addressing is the absence of women in the sport or a league of their own. This club intends to be free of demographic restrictions by creating and encouraging coed duels based on mutual agreements without restriction to size, shape, gender identity, or age. So long as any duelist is able to pass tryouts by demonstrating their skill levels in predetermination exams, regardless of gender, age, or demographic, they can participate in games, bouts, and tournaments. In this way, we can encourage an even deeper part of our cultural tradition of women warriors exalted for their knowledge of higher martial disciplines, including healing and mercy.

Community Impact

Filipino Martial Arts is a gateway to athletic excellence and moral fortitude that will enhance the lives of our people through positive mentorship, discipline toward success, empowerment as a guardian for our youth, and stewardship for our elders. These things can only be achieved through an intense, yet controlled, sparring practice and athletic development.

We will provide a space suited for noble dueling, with the intent to demonstrate skill rather than simulate an actual brute encounter. Read the Code of Conduct and Rules of Engagement section of the proposal. In this manner, we will be able to tap into a deep level of our cultural psyche and harness it for the betterment of our community.

We will provide a venue for athletic excellence and a foundation for Olympian triumph.

Culmination of Events

The sparring club will be a weekly workshop on safety, style, and stamina training in preparation for a monthly meet sponsored by Bunal Brands, called a "sparbecue," where duelists can spar openly with others while enjoying a friendly barbecue atmosphere. The monthly barbecue will culminate in a community-endorsed public tournament for a media-covered event celebrating Filipino martial arts. This tournament may include martial arts dance performances and adaptations of Philippine-based children's games such as "patintero" and "sabong sa kaka" (spider fights) into light sparring activities that foment teamwork and bonding as part of its activities to include all levels. The tournament will also feature elimination rounds between schools and non-denominational athletes, culminating in prize bouts as the main event.

The weekly workshops can run for two to three hours on Sundays and will focus on safety, technique, and developing stamina. A monthly barbecue sponsored by Bunal Brand will be hosted on August weekends. Sabong Federation tournaments will be annual and will use the Sabong Federation Rules of Engagement as laid out in the Appendix.

Deliverables will be online tutorials for on-demand download, weekly workshop review videos, a monthly archive of sparring sessions, and social media ads using footage from sessions and interviews with athletes. A documentary on the development and culmination outcome has been proposed but will be determined by resources after the first annual tournament event.

Safety and Insurance

Club membership and event attendance are required to sign a waiver admonishing responsibility outside of voluntary will. This absolves the club of any liability should an accident occur. Each club participant should understand that the potential for harm is imminent in any bout confrontation. However, martial arts insurance can also be priced into membership fees.

We also will require first-response training for all umpires and have volunteer first-aid interns on hand during monthly events. There will be a minimum of two dedicated first responders in addition to the umpires at tournament events.

Budget Allocations

This is a proposed budget allocation for a \$6000 grant:

\$1600 will be invested in safety equipment and training weapons needed for full-contact sparring. I will collect and source from vendors, sports donations, and thrift stores supplies to meet the proper safety precautions for all levels with the expectation of renting them out to club members and event participants.

\$1400 will be allocated for camera equipment to record bouts and be used as body cams for umpires. I will handle producing and directing any and all media for content development in partnership with Greg Manalo.

\$1200 will be spent on social media ads using funnel marketing and viral campaigns leading up to the main event. I will lead the brand campaign and media production in partnership with Balay Kreative board members to align goals.

\$1000 will be used for auxiliary costs associated with content creation. I will work in partnership with Greg Manalo to offset production costs.

\$800 will go toward seed merchandise for sale. I will design the products (shirts, hoodies, patches, mugs, phone covers, etc) and source production for profit share on all designs.

Sustainability

The reliability of monetary factors impacts the success of the club, workshops, and tournament. In order to kickstart the project, we need grant aid to cover expenses for safety equipment, media capture technology, social media advertising, and auxiliary costs associated with social media production and safety equipment testing. The budget received will affect the scope and speed of equipment acquisition, so the more we receive, the better our chances of success. Nevertheless, a \$6000 budget will be expensed solely as seed money for ensuring the safety of the athletes and the success of the program in general.

To make the workshop sustainable, the following revenue generation model is proposed:

- Monthly membership subscription of \$100 per athlete with access to 5 workshops at \$20 each, a sparring session and two workshops, or two sparring sessions at \$50 each.
- Sparbecue pay-to-play base fee of \$25 for members–early registration to cover space (\$5), equipment supplier (\$5), umpire (\$5), promoter (\$5), club (\$5); non-members–late registration of \$30 (add +\$1 each); Day of event will be \$30 plus food ticket (+\$20).
- Vendors will be given the option to either pay a flat fee for space and keep all profits or set up for free and share profits through a ticket system whereby attendants will buy tickets from Sabong to redeem at vendor booths. *To be determined after further research on tax implications*
- Tournament culmination will be a bay area / statewide fanfare with spectator ticketing of \$20 per head and pay-to-play athletes of \$75 for members and early registration; \$100 for non-members and late registration for bouts with prizes. No drop-ins allowed.
- Sale of merchandise at a 300% markup with 50% of profits to regenerate batches and 50% toward auxiliary cost offsets.
- Sponsors are welcome and will be sought to support the club, space, event, or athlete through donations, prizes, and media exposure.

APPENDIX

1. Code of Conduct

1.1. Duelists

- 1.1.1. Duelists stand at the core of this confederation regardless of demographic
 - 1.1.1.1. The rights and safety of the duelist is of the utmost importance
- 1.1.2. Duelists are expected to adhere to the rules set forth in this rule book
 - 1.1.2.1. It is the duelist's responsibility to know what the rules are prior to entering the pit
 - 1.1.2.2. Duelists have the right to a copy of the rules and clarification for modifications on each bout, if any
- 1.1.3. Duelists are expected to have integrity and admit a point strike against them that was not called by umpires
- 1.1.4. Duelists are not allowed to inflict uncontrolled or unnecessary attacks on opponents
 - 1.1.4.1. Striking unprotected targets without consent
 - 1.1.4.2. Revenge attacks initiated after a point has been called
 - 1.1.4.3. Multiple attack sequences in a point system bout
 - 1.1.4.4. Targeting vital areas listed for automatic disqualification
- 1.1.5. Duelists are responsible for providing their own protective gear and must meet the standards set by judges prior to the bout

1.2. Coaches

- 1.2.1. Coaches are obliged to provide due diligence of the rules to the duelist
- 1.2.2. Coaches have a fiduciary duty to act on behalf of the duelist throughout a bout
- 1.2.3. Coaches are responsible for the actions of the duelist inside the pit

1.3. Umpires

- 1.3.1. The role of umpires are to ensure the enforcement of rules in a match
- 1.3.2. Umpires in the pit must ensure safety of the duelists
 - 1.3.2.1. Call the point out loud
 - 1.3.2.2. Interrupt exchange
 - 1.3.2.3. Subdue berserkers safely

1.4. Judges

- 1.4.1. Judges have the last say
- 1.4.2. Judges are only required to provide a judgment if
 - 1.4.2.1. Umpires can not resolve a challenge by a duelist
 - 1.4.2.2. Cameras are short of a decisive visual

2. Rules Of Engagement

2.1. Sparring

- 2.1.1. Sabong is a sparring club rooted in trust and fortified with fraternal respect
- 2.1.2. The mission is to establish camaraderie between individuals and schools to form an open and unified practice of martial arts excellence and mutual learning
- 2.1.3. Sparring between duelists begin with a handshake and establishing comfort levels with simple rules
 - 2.1.3.1. Sticks or padded sticks
 - 2.1.3.2. Hand and eye protection
 - 2.1.3.3. Open rounds
- 2.1.4. Duelists are encouraged to utilize the Tournament rules in any combination or adjustments for their bout with mutual understanding

2.2. Games

- 2.2.1. Sparring games can take on multiple forms with alternative missions
- 2.2.2. There are two main categories
 - 2.2.2.1. Children
 - 2.2.2.1.1. Spider Fight
 - 2.2.2.1.2. Patintero
 - 2.2.2.2. Extreme *Requires extended rule sets
 - 2.2.2.2.1. Multiple attackers
 - 2.2.2.2.2. Team battles
 - 2.2.2.2.3. Shields and Projectiles
 - 2.2.2.2.4. Urban simulations
- 2.2.3. Games must incorporate weapons and contact sport to be valid
- 2.2.4. Extended rule sets for extreme games must be ratified by judges prior to engagement

3. Tournament

- 3.1.1. These rules are set for the purpose of elite encounters and noble dueling in a tournament ring of paid events
 - 3.1.1.1. Duelists may negotiate and agree on any changes or customizations to these rules so long as it is agreed upon by both duelists, they abide by the Code of Conduct, and it is approved by judges.
- 3.1.2. This tournament is based on the rules found in Italian Fencing Event Rules of 1910 By Chris Holzman. This ruleset was the official ruleset of the Italian Fencing Federation. The SERFO ruleset is adapted from it to allow us to show a demonstration of skill rather than a simulation of a serious encounter.
- 3.1.3. The rules are applicable to any weapon or combinations of weapons
 - 3.1.3.1. Stick
 - 3.1.3.2. Dagger
 - 3.1.3.3. Stick and dagger
 - 3.1.3.4. Double sticks or daggers

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- 3.1.3.5. Sword
 - 3.1.3.6. Sword and dagger
 - 3.1.3.7. Double sword or dagger
 - 3.1.3.8. Long sword
 - 3.1.3.9. Lances
 - 3.1.3.10. Poles / Spears
 - 3.1.3.11. +Shields
 - 3.1.3.12. +Projectiles

3.2. Rounds

3.2.1. Round: 90 seconds

3.2.1.1. Point system

- 3.2.1.1.1. The clock shall stop on each point
- 3.2.1.1.2. Each opponent must riposte after each point
- 3.2.1.1.3. Each point counts as a pass
- 3.2.1.1.4. 5 passes end the round
- 3.2.1.1.5. 4 consecutive pass victories end the round
- 3.2.1.1.6. 3 rounds end the bout
- 3.2.1.1.7. 2 consecutive round victories end the bout
- 3.2.1.1.8. 1 disqualifying move ends the bout

3.2.1.2. Damage system

- 3.2.1.2.1. The clock continues to run until max points are reached
- 3.2.1.2.2. The clock stops at penalty move
- 3.2.1.2.3. The round ends at disqualification

3.3. Targets

3.3.1. Targets must have protection to be valid

- 3.3.1.1. Hands (fingertips to wrist),
- 3.3.1.2. Arms (wrist to shoulder)
- 3.3.1.3. Head (crown to neck)
- 3.3.1.4. Torso (shoulder to waist)
- 3.3.1.5. Legs (waist to ankle)

3.3.2. Targets with automatic disqualification

- 3.3.2.1. Occipital (back of head and neck)
- 3.3.2.2. Spine (spinal column)
- 3.3.2.3. Armpit (inner bicep to upper ribs)
- 3.3.2.4. Groin (inner thighs to bladder)
- 3.3.2.5. Feet (ankles to toes)

3.4. Attacks

3.4.1. Weapon to target contact

- 3.4.1.1. Weapon must be in hand
 - 3.4.1.1.1. Thrown weapons are penalized (disqualification)
 - 3.4.1.1.2. Accidental afterblows from a disarm are valid
- 3.4.1.2. Weapon must hit target with sufficient force or slice

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- 3.4.1.2.1. Point (top 3")
 - 3.4.1.2.2. Edge
 - 3.4.1.2.3. Double edge
 - 3.4.2. Invalid Attacks
 - 3.4.2.1. Punching
 - 3.4.2.2. Pushing
 - 3.4.2.3. Charging
 - 3.4.2.4. Footsweeps
 - 3.4.2.5. Grappling
 - 3.4.3. Revenge (Attacks initiated after point)
 - 3.4.3.1.1. 1st penalty - Warning
 - 3.4.3.1.2. 2nd penalty - Disqualification
 - 3.5. Point Value
 - 3.5.1. Point Meter
 - 3.5.1.1. 1 point no matter the target
 - 3.5.2. Damage Meter - First person to reach 20 wins - * Different points can be assigned to targets as determined by duelists
 - 3.5.2.1. Hand - 1 point
 - 3.5.2.2. Limbs - 2 points
 - 3.5.2.3. Head - 3 points
 - 3.5.2.4. Torso - 4 points
 - 3.6. Victory
 - 3.6.1. Highest score at end of bout
 - 3.6.2. Disqualification of opponent
 - 3.7. Doubles
 - 3.7.1. Two criteria "Incontro" and "True Double" Incontro
 - 3.7.1.1. This is an at-fault double, in which one of the fencers has made a mistake that caused the double touch. When the incontro occurs, the umpire will review the sequence and assign "fault" to one of the fencers based on the below rules. The point will go to the fencer who was not at fault.
 - 3.7.1.1.1. A fencer with five "at fault" doubles against them within a single pool bout will be disqualified from the elimination rounds.
 - 3.7.1.1.2. The attacking fencer is considered to be at fault:
 - 3.7.1.1.2.1. When, with the opponent holding the blade in line (with the point toward the face, chest, or flank and the arm naturally extended), the attacker did not deflect the point with an action on the blade,
 - 3.7.1.1.2.2. When seeking the opponent's blade, the attacker did not find it (make contact), and the opponent eluded the blade while counterattacking.
 - 3.7.1.1.2.3. When, in a counter-time action, the attacker strikes the opponent without having avoided the counterattack.

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- 3.7.1.1.2.4. When, in a compound action with feints, the defender found the attacker's blade during the feint, acquiring the right to riposte.
 - 3.7.1.1.2.5. When the attacker replaces or renews his attack against the opponent's parry and immediate riposte.
 - 3.7.1.1.3. The fencer who is on defense will instead be considered as touched:
 - 3.7.1.1.3.1. When the defender delays the riposte, the opponent has the option to remise.
 - 3.7.1.1.3.2. When the defender counterattacks without protecting themselves from the final [action].
 - 3.7.1.2. True double Incontro
 - 3.7.1.2.1. This is a double touch that was a true simultaneous attack, where each fencer conceived and executed an attack at the same tempo. Neither can truly be said to be at fault for such a double touch. There is no penalty for a True Double, though it is much rarer than the Incontro.

3.8. Umpires

- 3.8.1. One main umpire is required in the pit
- 3.8.2. Second umpire or "mirror" stage across main umpire at all times
- 3.8.3. Third umpire or "shadow" stage behind and to the right of main umpire at all times
 - 3.8.3.1. Umpires will raise a colored flag if a point strike is seen and heard with certainty.
 - 3.8.3.2. Two flags are required to call a point.
 - 3.8.3.3. Doubles and strikes without sufficient force are nulled and signaled with flags crossed

Examples

The following YouTube videos are examples of what varying intensity levels will look like. Click on the links to open the videos:

Light knife sparring

[▶ Kalis Ilustrisimo : Knife sparring with mang Romeo Macapagal](#)

Controlled duel with single saber and hand target

[▶ KALIS ILUSTRISIMO : Sword hand/body sparring with mang Romeo Macapagal](#)

Single stick escrima sparring duel

[▶ Full Contact Stick Fight with Slow Motion, Play by Play and Action Zooming | F...](#)

Double stick escrima sparring duel with leg targets

[▶ Double Escrima Sticks Sparring](#)

Tournament style bout with mixed weapons and full body targets with armor

[▶ Mixed Weapon Lucky Dip Exhibition Sparring](#)

Tournament demo performance with multiple athletes and mixed weapons

[▶ 15 vs 15 Melee Sparring - Mixed Weapon Carnage](#)

An important reminder regarding sparring intensity

[▶ Sparring Intensities - Understanding HEMA](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am a seasoned veteran of cultural activism and indigenous arts education in the Filipino American community since 1991. I am regarded as the pioneer of the Baybayin revival in the early 90s, when I created a TED Talk-style presentation of the ancient pre-hispanic scripts of the Philippines, which I took nationwide after providing weekly workshops in local universities, high schools, conferences, and cultural events. I presented at prestigious universities across the United States, such as Harvard, Stanford, the American University, and UC Berkeley, just to name a few. My written work was published in Maganda Magazine Issue No. 8 in 1993, which became a viral article in the collegiate circuit and served as a blueprint for teaching the baybayin both here in the USA and in the Philippines.

I've also been a leading advocate for community growth and safety in South of Market for many years, having been a resident since the 1990s and a street patroller during the anti-Asian hate crime spike in San Francisco. I participated as a founding board member for Balay to help establish its foundation to help artists grow their careers and normalize martial arts discipline within the SoMa community.

My professional career is centered on the convergence between education, entertainment, and technology. As a media producer, I am known for my achievements in independent filmmaking, having recently released a full-length rotoscope animation that garnered accolades throughout its festival journey. The movie is about to be released on Amazon and Apple TV in the coming months. I also spent several years as an instructional designer for tech companies such as LinkedIn and Facebook, where I used my data science and UX design skills along with my education background to develop learning experiences that are customized to the learner. My ability to do this well allowed me to train the trainer and focus on the development of each individual as a means of progressing the entire audience using video and assessments. Curriculum design is an inherent part of my work and will serve the workshops masterfully.

As a martial artist, I have a checkered past that proved to be the game changer between the different FMA schools in the SF Bay Area. Because I studied many styles and did not stick to one school, I developed a brotherly relationship with many practitioners who are now masters and was able to stay away from the politics of toxic masculinity that plague the FMA community. As such, I am able to play the role of referee and mediator between schools, selecting only those that align with the intentions of unity and mutual respect.

Now that I've progressed to be a formidable ronin (a masterless warrior), I became involved in the growing practice of sparring in FMA circles. Sparring with safety gear and actual live sticks flying at combat speed with contact precision has completely sharpened my martial arts game. I see so many people practicing escrima improperly, often taking on habits that don't actually work in real situations, that I believe a space for safe learning is needed in order to normalize it as a traditional

exercise, just as it had been prior to and during colonial rule. Many FMA masters agree and applaud what I am doing and endeavoring to achieve.

I have been studying martial arts first as a street fighting enthusiast. It wasn't until I was introduced to escrima that I turned my wildness into a controlled and morally adjusted discipline. I thank FMA for that, and that's why I believe it's important for our youth, both young men and women, and especially non-binaries, to have this discipline for themselves and become better human beings, to reach their full potential, to be saviors and guardians of our community, to be ambassadors of high regard, and, ultimately, to be heroes to the next generation.

As for the tournament, my experience in conference organizing during my college years and media-covered entertainment fundraiser events for the Haiyan typhoon and Japan's tsunami disasters prove that I can pull together a complex event with a successful turnout and community impact. Right after the typhoon disaster in the Philippines, I quickly gathered all my entertainment contacts and boots-on-the-ground connections in the harder-to-reach places in the islands. I was able to pull together a highly attended entertainment fundraiser with multiple acts, including Native Elements, and radio personalities to host, such as Freska Griarte. We had martial arts demos, cultural folk dances, comedy by Kevin Camia, and so on. It was a successful event, and I personally matched the money raised at the door to send boxes of toiletries and other necessities to areas where the Philippine government failed to deliver help by coordinating with private organizations to send helicopter trips to those areas. The same was done when the tsunami in Japan hit. I organized a punk show at a local venue with Japanese punk bands, and we raised several thousand dollars to send via the Japan Red Cross. I did everything in kind and acted as the event director, executive producer, and stage manager for these events. I am not just someone on stage or at a microphone, but someone who strives to do what it takes to help others and save lives.