

The History of Sambo

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Annotation: Getting involved in a sport provides opportunities for individuals to see the results of their efforts. If you practice hard at your sport and see success, it builds self-esteem. If you defeat a challenging opponent, you're bound to feel that you've accomplished something worthwhile. Mastering a skill, such as a consistent serve in tennis, also boosts self-confidence

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Sambo (Russian: самбо, pronounced ['sambə]) is a Soviet martial art, an internationally-practised combat sport,^{[2][3]} and a recognized style of amateur wrestling included by UWW in the World Wrestling Championships along with Greco-Roman wrestling and freestyle wrestling.

It originated in the Russian SFSR in the Soviet Union. The word *sambo* is an acronym of the romanization *samozashchita bez oruzhiya* (Russian: самозащита без оружия), which literally translates to 'self-defence without weapons'. The correct, official English spelling, approved by USA Wrestling and the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee, is SOMBO.^[1]

Sambo is relatively modern since its development began in the early 1920s by the Soviet NKVD and Red Army to improve hand-to-hand combat abilities of the servicemen. It was intended to be a merger of the most effective techniques of other martial arts.

The pioneers of sambo were Viktor Spiridonov and Vasili Oshchepkov. Oshchepkov spent several years living in Japan and training in Judo under its founder Kano Jigoro. Oshchepkov died in prison as a result of the Great Purge after being accused of being a Japanese spy.

Spiridonov and Oshchepkov independently developed two different styles, which eventually cross-pollinated and became what is known as sambo. Compared to Oshchepkov's system, called "free wrestling" in Russia (known in the West as catch-as-catch-can wrestling or simply catch wrestling), Spiridonov's style was softer and less brutal. It was also less strength-dependent, which in large part was due to injuries Spiridonov sustained during World War I.

Anatoly Kharlampiev, a student of Vasili Oshchepkov, is also considered a founder of sambo. In 1938, it was recognized as an official sport by the USSR All-Union Sports Committee. There are multiple competitive sport variations of sambo (though sambo techniques and principles can be applied to many other combat sports). Below are the main formats that are recognized by FIAS.

- **Sport sambo** or **Sambo wrestling** (Russian: Борьба Самбо, romanized: *Bor'ba Sambo*, lit. 'Sambo Wrestling') is stylistically similar to old-time judo, and in a lot of ways influenced by it, but with some differences in rules, protocol, and uniform. Sambo allows various types of leg locks like old Judo before the ban of the Ashi Garami techniques, while not allowing chokeholds. It also focuses on throwing, groundwork, and submissions, with very few restrictions on gripping and holds.^[11] Sambo is an international style of amateur wrestling recognized by the FILA (now UWW) Congress in 1966.
- **Combat sambo** (Russian: Боевое Самбо, romanized: *Boyevoye Sambo*). Utilized and developed for the military, combat sambo resembles modern mixed martial arts, including forms of striking and grappling. Combat sambo allows regular punches, kicks, elbows, and knees, as well as soccer kicks, headbutts and groin strikes, in addition to throws, holds, chokes and locks, except for a standing or flying wristbar.^[12] The chief distinction from Brazilian jiu-jitsu (BJJ), apart from striking techniques, is that combat sambo rules and regulations do not permit a one-sided resort to ground fighting without throws or other combative

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maneuvers (i.e., by simply sitting down and continuing from the ground without touching his opponent that BJJ allows). In terms of aliveness, combat sambo surpasses ARB by design, though both were designed for combat situations only. Competitors wear jackets as in sport sambo, but also hand protection and sometimes shin protection and headgear. The first FIAS World Combat Sambo Championships were held in 2001. The World Combat Sambo Federation, based in Russia, also sanctions international combat sambo events.

Sambo's early development stemmed from the independent efforts of Vasili Oshchepkov and Viktor Spiridonov to integrate the techniques of Catch wrestling, Judo, Jujutsu, and other foreign martial arts into native Turkic wrestling styles, Armenian kokh, Romanian trîntă, Mongolian khapsagay and Georgian chidaoba (ru:Чидაობა, ka:ქართველი ჭიდაობა). Oshchepkov taught judo to elite Red Army forces at the Central Red Army House. Vasili Oshchepkov was one of the first foreigners to learn Judo in Japan and had earned his Nidan (second-degree black belt, out of then five) from judo's founder, Kano Jigoro. Spiridonov's background involved indigenous martial arts from various Soviet regions as well as an interest in Japanese jujutsu (though he never formally trained it). His reliance on movement over strength was in part because during World War I, he received a bayonet wound which would leave his left arm lame. Both Oshchepkov and Spiridonov independently hoped that Soviet military hand-to-hand combat techniques could be improved with an infusion of the techniques distilled from other foreign martial arts. Contrary to common lore, Oshchepkov and Spiridonov did not cooperate on the development of their hand-to-hand systems. Rather, their independent notions of hand-to-hand combat merged through cross-training between students and formulating efforts by their students and military staff. While Oshchepkov and Spiridonov did have occasion to collaborate, their efforts were not completely united.

Each technique was carefully dissected and considered for its merits, and if found acceptable in unarmed combat, refined to reach sambo's ultimate goal: to stop an armed or unarmed adversary in the least time possible. Thus, many techniques from jujutsu, judo, and other martial systems joined with the indigenous fighting styles to form the sambo repertoire. When the techniques were perfected, they were woven into sambo applications for personal self-defense, police, crowd control, border guards, secret police, dignitary protection, psychiatric hospital staff, military, and commandos

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