

**Richard  
Bustillo**

**Speaks  
About  
Bruce  
Lee,  
Dan  
Inosanto  
and  
JKD  
in the  
Ultimate  
Fighting  
Championship**

**Interview by Paul J. Bax  
Photography by Rick Husted**

# JEET KUNE DO'S EARLY YEARS



**I**n 2006, thousands of martial artists cast their ballots during the online voting that would determine the recipients of the first Black Belt Industry Awards. In the Best Eclectic School category, Richard Bustillo and his International Martial Arts and Boxing Academy received the most votes. Presented below are his recollections of some of the experiences that put him on the path to the top of the industry.

—Editor

**Black Belt:** What was your martial arts experience before you took up jeet kune do?

**Richard Bustillo:** I practiced judo at 8, boxing at 12, *kajukenbo* at 14, boxing again at 19 and then jeet kune do at 24. I studied *escrima* and *kali*, *muay Thai*, catch-as-catch-can wrestling and *jujutsu* during and after learning Bruce Lee's JKD.

**BB:** Did Lee take offense when he learned that you were interested in other arts?

**Bustillo:** He would never take offense at any of his students who were interested in other martial arts. He practiced and preached being opened-minded to all arts. "Using no way as way" and "having no limitation as limitation" was his philosophy.

**BB:** How did your first meeting with Lee come about?

**Bustillo:** I first met Bruce at the 1964

International Karate Tournament in Long Beach, California. My initial impression was that he was average in appearance. But when he took off his shirt and performed his art, it was: "Wow! This is the real deal. He's awesome." He was very confident and self-assured.

**BB:** What impressed you most?

**Bustillo:** His physical power and explosive speed when he executed his JKD techniques, coupled with his presentation of his concepts, philosophy and martial arts training.

**BB:** After the tournament, do you recall your conversations with Dan Inosanto about Lee's demonstration?

**Bustillo:** I didn't know Dan Inosanto during the Internationals. I first met Dan in 1967 at the Jun Fan Gung Fu Institute orientation.

**BB:** Your training with Lee began in 1967, right?

**Bustillo:** Yes. I wanted to train with

Bruce after the Internationals, but I didn't know how to contact him except by writing a letter of my intentions.

**BB:** What made you want to learn from him?

**Bustillo:** Bruce's martial arts attitude, philosophy, concepts and training methods formed a well-rounded art that encompassed all the combative ranges. His personality and views on everyday life made me want to hang out with him. I wanted to learn as much as I could from him.

**BB:** Please describe Lee's Chinatown classes.

**Bustillo:** The average class size was about 12. It was always intense and combative. We warmed up and stretched out before working on strength training and JKD techniques. The second half of the class was sparring. Emphasis was put on being practical and functional in ap-

plication. Perfection, accuracy, speed and power—in that order—were the main focus when working on techniques.

**BB: How often did Lee teach?**

**Bustillo:** Bruce taught whenever his schedule permitted. He was constantly working on other projects and taught at the L.A. school periodically. It was Dan Inosanto who was there all the time. He played the major role as lead instructor.

**BB: Did you receive rank directly from Lee?**

**Bustillo:** I received a first rank certificate from Bruce in September 1967. It opened doors and opportunities I never expected I would be involved in for the rest of my life.

**BB: Is there a difference between the three arts that Lee gave rank in?**

**Bustillo:** I'm familiar with only one art, which is Bruce Lee's jeet kune do. Be that as it may, Bruce gave out three certificates in his lifetime. They were *Jun Fan gung fu*, *tao* of Chinese gung fu and jeet kune do. I received the first rank certificate of the Jun Fan Gung Fu Institute, membership No. 203, dated September 23, 1967.

**BB: Did you attend Lee's backyard training sessions?**

**Bustillo:** My first backyard session with Bruce was with Mito Uyehara, the original owner of *Black Belt*. I attended the backyard workouts several times. I wish I could have spent more time with Bruce. However, one needed only a couple of sessions with him to be enlightened with a whole new outlook on martial arts training.

**BB: Did you ever spar with Lee?**

**Bustillo:** I, and all the students, sparred with him at one time or another. My first sparring encounter with him was humiliating and frustrating. He was nonclassical and nontraditional in his sparring, and I was very traditional, stiff and nervous in the beginning.

**BB: With his sparring prowess, would Lee have done well in point karate?**

**Bustillo:** He would have been the ultimate in point karate. However, he didn't believe in tournaments. He believed that tournaments limit an individual's ability in martial arts combat. Tournament competitors fight with rules and regulations, and judges and referees. They do not have the total freedom of realistic combat.

**BB: Please describe the early days of the first school you opened with Inosanto.**

**Bustillo:** Dan and I opened the Filipino Kali Academy in 1974, a year after Bruce's death. It was to promote the martial arts of the Philippines and to share our Bruce Lee experiences. There were no other JKD instructors teaching Bruce's art except Taky Kimura in Seattle. Not until Dan taught in Los Angeles in 1974 did the rest of the top students at the Jun Fan Gung Fu Institute start training and teaching. It was Dan's leadership at the Filipino Kali Academy that popularized and made JKD what it is today.

**BB: Is it true that you had people from all over the world come to learn JKD?**

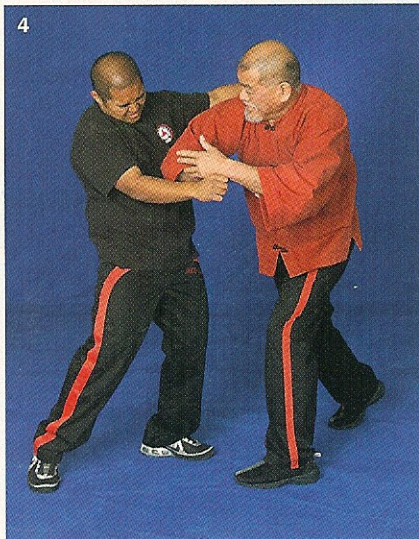
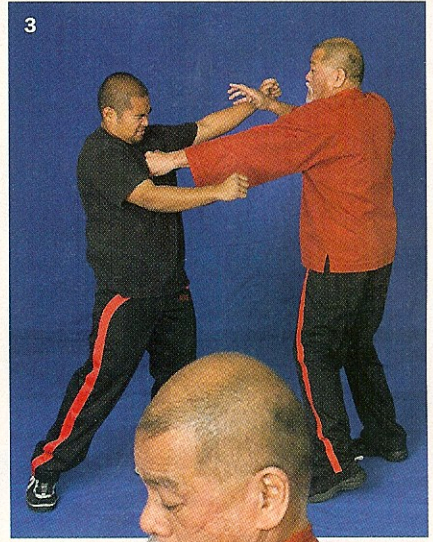
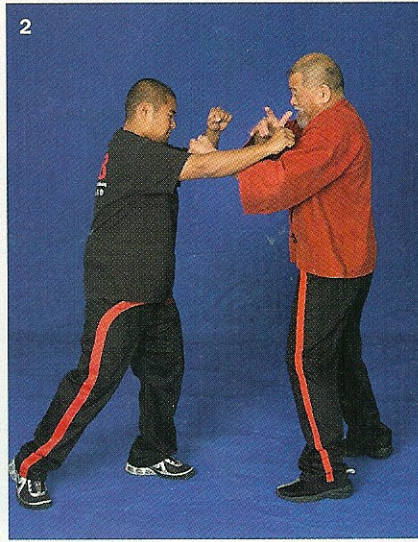
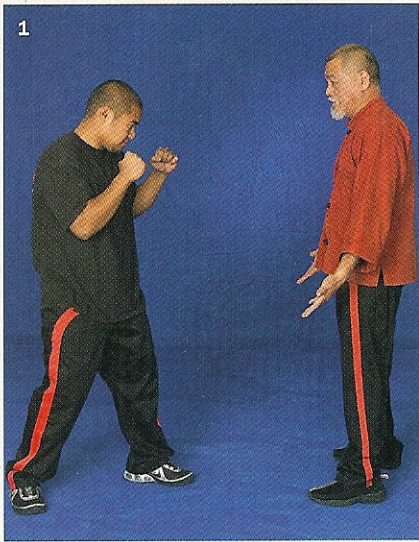
**Bustillo:** The media put us in the limelight of Bruce Lee's legacy. We had no idea that we were in the right place at the right time. All we wanted to do was practice and enjoy our martial arts hobby. We had a six-month waiting period before any new student could enroll at the Filipino Kali Academy. Other martial arts schools in our area were closing their doors because of our program and Dan Inosanto's leadership.

**BB: What led you and Inosanto to split?**

**Bustillo:** Dan and I, and another partner, Chuck Martinez, split up because our lifestyles and interests changed. We grew apart, but for the better. Our lives have improved above and beyond our expectations.



Jeet kune do will never go out of style, Richard Bustillo (right) says, because it constantly adapts and evolves.



**BB:** At first, to attend the JKD class, a student had to be voted in. Why did that change?

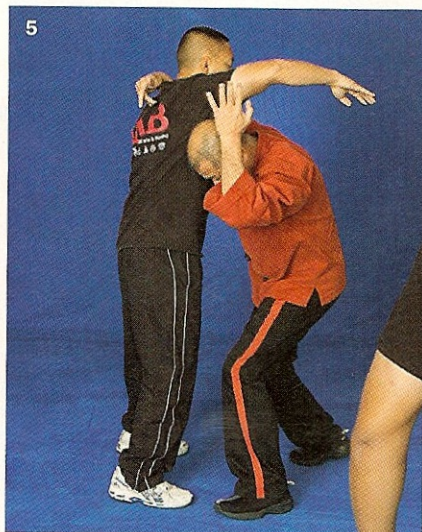
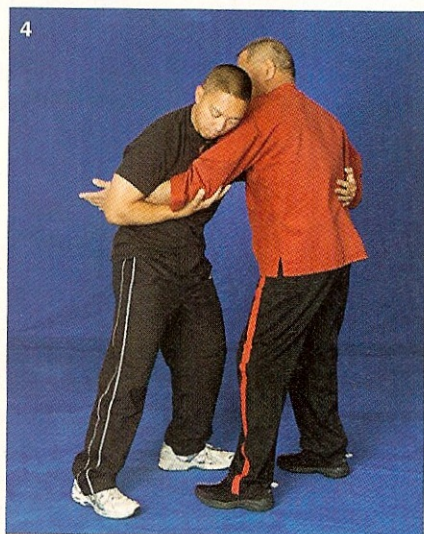
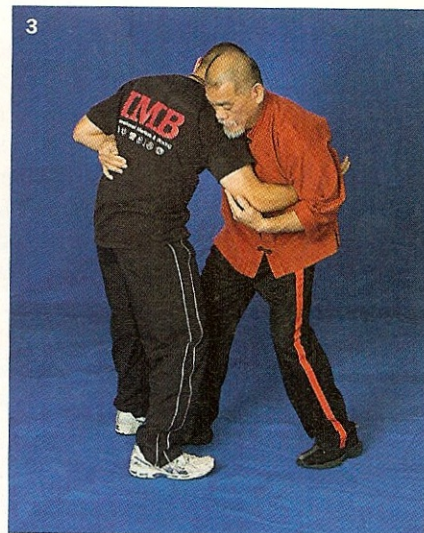
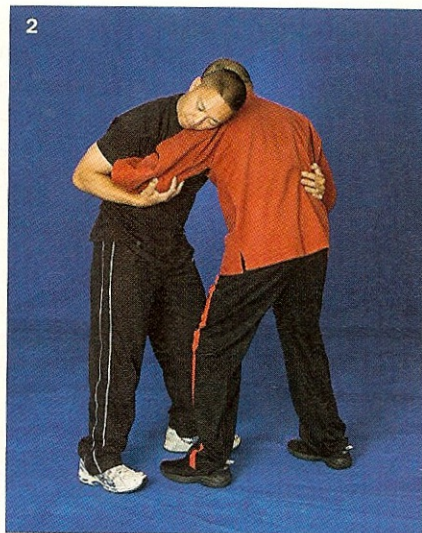
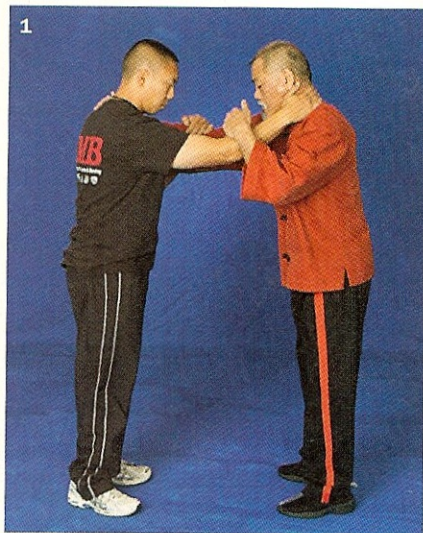
**Bustillo:** Our curriculum changed to three phases of classes. The first phase was the introductory class, and the second phase was the intermediate class. Senior second-phase students were candidates for the JKD class. They were still voted in by the third-phase members before being accepted into the JKD class.

**BB:** Do you still consider Inosanto a friend?

**Bustillo:** Of course. That's a dumb question. We may not be as close today as when we were partners, but I'll always consider Dan a friend and mentor even though it's been more than 20 years since our parting.



**EMPTY HANDS:** Richard Bustillo (right) is confronted by an aggressive man (1). When he punches, Bustillo uses his right hand to deflect the blow while his left fist finds a path to the opponent's right biceps (2). The jeet kune do instructor then snaps a one-inch punch with his left fist into the man's chest while simultaneously blocking a left punch (3). Bustillo twists his torso counter-clockwise to effect an elbow strike (4). He follows up with a clinch and knee thrust (5).



**BB:** Has JKD lost some of the mystique it had years ago?

**Bustillo:** JKD has not lost its mystique. The martial arts community has evolved to include other popular arts. The martial arts, like everything else, evolve. In JKD, we adapt and change with time.

**BB:** Why haven't we seen JKD practitioners fare well in the Ultimate Fighting Championship?

**Bustillo:** There are many JKD practitioners doing well in no-holds-barred competition. They just don't call what they do JKD. They use their own name.

**BB:** What's your take on no-holds-barred fighting?

**Bustillo:** I have mixed emotions about NHB competition. I love it because it tests an individual's skills. On the other hand, I don't like seeing permanent inju-

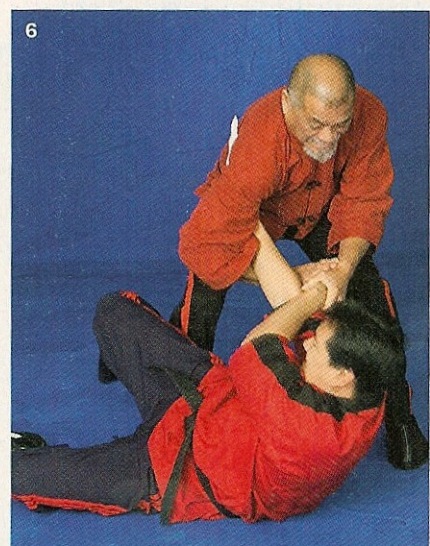
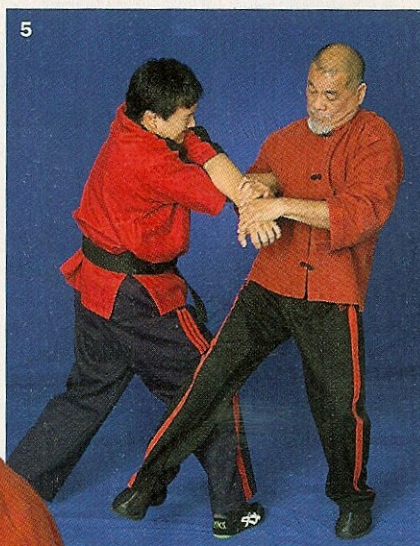
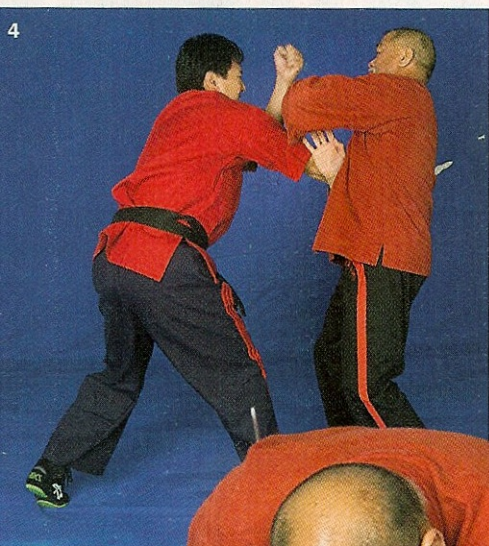
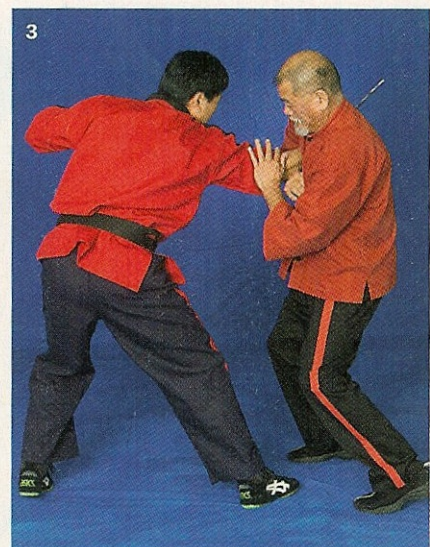
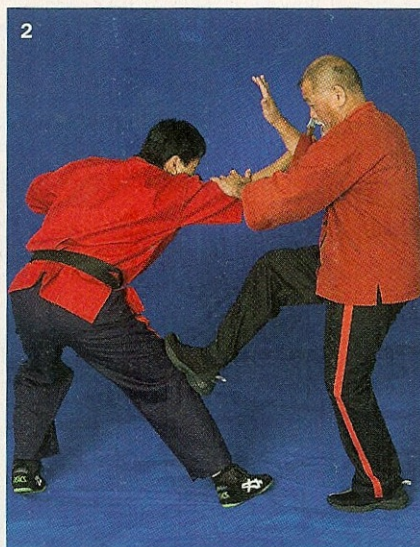
**STANDING GRAPPLING:** Jeet kune do expert Richard Bustillo (right) locks up with his opponent (1). The two pummel for control and positioning (2-3) until Bustillo senses an opening for an offensive move (4). As soon as the opponent steps forward with his right leg, Bustillo lifts the man's right arm and weaves under it (5). He then uses his right limb to encircle the opponent's arm and neck, after which he locks his right hand on his left biceps for the choke (6).

ries for the sake of entertainment.

**BB:** What trend in the martial arts is most noticeable to you?

**Bustillo:** Cross-training is now in. It involves the concepts of Bruce Lee's JKD, which includes being well-rounded in all the combative ranges.

**BB:** Early on, people confused kali



**with JKD. Why was that?**

**Bustillo:** Because of our curriculum at the Filipino Kali Academy. The empty-hand techniques of kali are very similar to Bruce's modified *wing chun* kung fu, which is JKD. Kali was also in the name of our school; that may have confused people.

**BB: So kali was never passed off as JKD?**

**Bustillo:** Kali was never passed off as JKD at the Filipino Kali Academy. Kali is a style, just as muay Thai, boxing, jujutsu and wrestling are styles. An individual's JKD could encompass all those styles at the original school. JKD is each person's way of fighting, similar to that person's signature.

**BB: Do you remember Lee's feelings on the Philippine martial arts?**

**Bustillo:** It was Dan Inosanto who taught Bruce the Philippine martial arts. And it

**KNIFE DEFENSE:** An armed attacker faces Richard Bustillo (1). When the man attempts a backhand strike with the edged weapon, Bustillo parries the arm to the outside and simultaneously kicks the knee (2). He controls the elbow and wraps his right arm around the assailant's weapon arm (3). The man tries to punch with his left hand, but Bustillo blocks it and pulls the limb over his right arm (4). He pivots counterclockwise and positions his right leg for a throw (5). After leveraging the man to the ground (6), Bustillo immobilizes him by placing his knee on his neck and locking his limb in an armbar while controlling the knife (7).