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## BRIEF HISTORY AND MAIN PRINCIPLES OF UKRAINIAN MARTIAL ARTS

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**КОРОТКА ІСТОРІЯ ТА ГОЛОВНІ ПРИНЦИПИ УКРАЇНСЬКИХ БОЙОВИХ МИСТЕЦТВ.**  
Ольга РОМАНЧУК, Оксана КОВАЛЬ, Ростислав КОВАЛЬ, Ольга МАТВІЯС. *Львівський державний університет фізичної культури*

**Анотація.** У статті коротко розглянуто історію утворення, становлення та функціонування українських бойових мистецтв. Володимир Пилат та Микола Величкович є ключовими фігурами у сфері сучасних українських бойових мистецтв. Микола Величкович вважається засновником рукопаш гопака. Перші змагання з цього виду спорту відбулися 1998 року. У цьому ж році було засновано перший спортивний клуб. У вересні 1999 р. у Львівському державному університеті фізичної культури створено нову спеціалізацію "рукопаш гопак". Українська федерація рукопаш гопака була офіційно заснована 21 листопада 2003 р. 2001 року представники національної команди Міжнародної федерації бойового гопака вперше взяли участь у світовому фестивалі бойових мистецтв у Південній Кореї. Бойовий гопак як давня українська традиція може принести славу нашій державі.

**Ключові слова:** бойове мистецтво, бойовий гопак, рукопаш гопак.

**Motivation.** Ukraine has produced many outstanding athletes such as footballer Andriy Shevchenko and professional heavy weight boxers Vitaliy and Volodymyr Klitchko. Ukrainian sportsmen do well in winter and summer Olympic Games. Within the international sports arena, Ukraine is well-known for its national martial arts – fighting (boyovyy) and rukopash hopak.

The key issues outlined in this study are the past and future of Ukrainian martial arts. In this paper special attention is given to the main principles of these sports. The influence of the national fighting culture on present-day sportsmen has also been highlighted.

This study is based on the detailed analysis of five books, published between 1994 and 2003. Although considerable research has been made in the field of Ukrainian martial arts history there still is no information on this subject in any other languages besides Ukrainian or Russian. The growing interest in this kind of sport facilitates its expansion and contributes to its discussion in other languages, especially in English. This article will contribute additional information to the overall research of Ukrainian martial arts.

**The aim of our study** is to analyse the status of fighting hopak and present this kind of sport in English in order to get the sport community acquainted with this Ukrainian martial art.

While studying the problem we applied such scientific approaches as **library research methods and historical survey**.

Practicing martial arts is both physically and spiritually beneficial. Through systematic practice a person's physical fitness is improved (strength, stamina, flexibility, movement coordination etc.), due to full-body exercise and mobilization of the entire muscular system.

Martial arts help to combat problems associated with contemporary society, specifically certain diseases and weakened immune system functioning as a result of a sedentary lifestyle. Some martial arts in various cultures can be performed in a dance-like setting for various reasons, such as when invoking ferocity in preparation for battle or for showing off skill in a more stylized manner. Martial arts incorporate music, especially strong percussive rhythms.

Fighting hopak and rukopash hopak are codified practices and traditions of combat. Both fighting styles have similar objectives, which are to physically defeat other people or to defend oneself or others from the threat of physical harm. They are considered to be both an art and a science.

The history of national martial arts is often seen as complex and is not very well documented. However, there are two outstanding and important personalities who have influenced the study and evolution of fighting culture in modern Ukraine. They are Volodymyr Pylat (born in 1955) and

Mykola Velychkovych (born in 1972). The book "Fighting hopak", written by Volodymyr Pylat in 1994, and "Rukopash hopak", written by Mykola Velychkovych in 2003, discuss in depth many concepts of national martial traditions. The authors present a fascinating array of new scientific evidence, largely accumulated over the past years, concerning the origins of Ukrainian fighting culture.

Ukrainians pass on knowledge from generation to generation. Fighting hopak is a system designed for harmonious development of a person. The cossack fight develops the ability to comprehend information quickly, and then to utilize this information in determining the appropriate tactical strategy. Although skilled cossacks were brave warriors, known as men with strong wills, they also possessed high intellectual and spiritual qualities. After being maimed in a fight, a cossack would become a kobza player (kobzar) and continue an active spiritual life. In their songs and ballads they retold their heroic deeds to other people. We have learned from the annals of history that ataman Sirko and hetman Mazepa knew several languages, while hetman Khmelnitskiy was fluent in ten or more. Cossacks wrote poems, pieces of music about might, spirit and glory of Ukrainian people.

Fighting hopak in Ukraine is considered to be an exotic fighting art. Traditional cossack dress causes admiration and curiosity, especially when being displayed at an exhibition performance. The majority of people are not aware of the fact that Ukrainian ancestors wore bright clothes and coloured boots in everyday life. These bright clothes reduced depression, improved mood and raised attention.

Volodymyr Pylat was born in Lviv. He began his career in sports rather early. When he was seven he joined the group of sports gymnastics, and soon after he moved to a free-style wrestling group. In 1968 Volodymyr began his professional career in karate kyokushin.

It took him nine years to advance from beginner to master level. In 1977 he received the first dan and black belt, and then set up his own personal school of karate. He worked as a trainer. For leisure he studied other fighting styles. It is worth to mention that in the Soviet Union those who practised fighting arts illegally, could be brought to justice. In the early eighties his school became the premier institution for fighting arts in Lviv as well as Ukraine. The sensei and his disciples won almost every fight by knockout. It was the only school in Lviv that practised full contact. They were the first to use armour for their hands, feet, breasts and back, and helmets to protect the nape and crown of the head. What at first seemed like the peak in his career, turned out later to be only the next step.

Volodymyr Pylat has always felt connected to the fighting heritage of Ukraine. His grandfather from his father's side, Michael Pylat, descended from nobility. During the XVI century his family inherited the ancestral coat of arms. The grandfather from his mother's side, Andriy Gidey, served as a bodyguard of the Emperor during the Austro-Hungarian empire [7].

Volodymyr analyzed both Ukrainian fighting and dancing traditions. He began to systematize any piece of information concerning these traditions he could find from Ukrainians scattered throughout the former Soviet Union. This accumulation of data refined some of the earlier views and concepts. Together with Myroslav Shukh, a specialist in Ukrainian folk dance, he created the Experimental School for the Study and Research of Ukrainian Fighting Culture in 1985 [1; p. 15].

Two years of research yielded positive results. In 1987 Volodymyr gave up karate and started to develop fighting hopak in an attempt to revive this martial art. It was often compared with Brazilian capoeira, but this is not an accurate comparison. The fighting art of Brazilian capoeira disappeared when dance was introduced, while every movement element in cossacks dancing could be applied in fighting (both with a weapon or without it). Therefore fighting hopak is more similar to traditional Chinese kung fu. In kung fu a disciple studies many interrelated movements the first few years, such as grips, blows and blocks, which are related to dance in some way. The hopak, a traditional Ukrainian dance, solved all problems concerning initial combat training. The hopak unites dance movements with martial arts.

In 1989 Volodymyr Pylat organised the first congress for cossacks. Enthusiasts from all over Ukraine arrived in Lviv. In 1990 he together with Evgene Prystupa, chancellor of Lviv State Univer-

sity of Physical Culture since 2007, Oles Noha and Maria Shun established a public organisation called Galyska Sich. Pylat, the master, organised exhibition performances, festivals and educational seminars in different cities. In 1991 he published a book "Traditions of Ukrainian national physical training" (co-author Evgene Prystupa) [7].

In December 1994 the first fighting hopak competition was held in Lviv at the Veterinary Institute, with participants coming from Lviv, Turka and Rogatyn. Roman Bala, Andriy Lobazevych (trainer – Mykola Velychkovych) and Taras Skyba (trainer – Leontiy Martynyuk) were the winners. The first competition for teenagers took place at Lviv State University of Physical Culture in May 1996. The competitors came from Lviv, Turka, Rogatyn, Poltava and Kovel [1; p.16].

Competition breeds better and more efficient practitioners, as well as gives a sense of good sportsmanship. The same year Volodymyr Pylat published his book "Fighting Hopak", sports clubs for fighting hopak were being established in different regions of Ukraine. The Main School of a Fighting Hopak was opened in 1997. The first festival of cossack martial arts took place in Zaporizhia during the summer of 1997.

There are seven ranks in fighting hopak – zhovtiak (novice), sokil (or falcon), yastrub (or hawk), dzhura, kozak (cossack), kharaternik and volchv (or magician). Duels or sparrings take place in an outlined circle to music. The right to tutor or teach is only given to those who occupy the last three honorary ranks. The volchv is the most advanced status. At this stage the martial art has transitioned from a purely physical activity to a spiritual and power level.

There are also different kinds of fighting techniques – candle, bear, crane, knee, and blows by fists and feet. The teaching of martial arts in Ukraine has historically followed cultural traditions concerning teacher-disciple interaction. Disciples are trained from within a strict hierarchy by their master. Disciples are forbidden to smoke or drink alcohol. The teacher sets the best example for the athletes to follow.

In 2001 representatives of a national team of the Fighting Hopak International Federation participated in the World Festival of Fighting Arts in South Korea for the first time. They took the third place. They were defeated by the Shaolin monks and the Brazilian School of Capoeira. The well-known monks from the monastery of Shaolin offered some of their secrets in exchange for information about the fighting hopak strategy. It was an exciting moment for both the participants and the spectators. Shaolin monks and Ukrainian athletes exchanged memorable gifts. The exchange of gifts was a sign of respect and honour between the two schools. The library of Shaolin was graced with a "Fighting Hopak" manual. There is a peculiar feature about this festival, only a person belonging to a certain ethnic group was eligible to represent the fighting art of his country. The arrival of Ukrainians in their national clothes created much excitement among the spectators during the festival.

In 2001 the Hopak Art Centre which was headed by Volodymyr Sherstjuk was established in Kiev. Its aim was to organize exhibition performances and demonstrations in Ukraine and abroad. Volodymyr Sherstjuk is the President of the Kiev Hopak Federation. He is a skilled organizer of exhibition performances, the prize-holder of the International Festival of Fighting Arts in South Korea, the winner of Ukrainian mixed style competitions and fighting hopak competitions. For a long period of time he has been a trainer of sports, fighting and folklore hopak studies. At numerous exhibition performances competitors fight with ancient Ukrainian weapon in order to demonstrate cossack firmness and talent. Sherstjuk managed to modernize an ancient fighting style and present it in the sparrings to music and songs which inspire Ukrainians [6].

Fighting hopak has gained world recognition. The International Federation of Fighting Hopak was established as the interest in this martial art began to increase rapidly. In 2005 fighting hopak athletes appeared on the Eurovision television show in Kiev. In July 2007 Volodymyr Pylat organised the First International Workshop of Fighting Art in Kalush. In 2008 he published a book of songs for those who study fighting hopak. Now he heads the International Federation of Combat Hopak. He wants hopak to be included as a sport in the Olympic Games.

Volodymyr Pylat is convinced that fighting hopak completely meets modern expectations – the main techniques and methods of teaching have been developed, skill levels and competition rules have been established and grants for disciples and teachers are awarded. The fighting hopak is an

ancient tradition that has survived numerous political frameworks and thus, is capable of bringing glory to the Ukrainian nation.

Another prominent personality in the history of Ukrainian martial arts is Mykola Velychkovych from Lviv State University of Physical Culture. He was a disciple of Volodymyr Pylat. Since they expressed varying opinions on the development of fighting hopak, Velychkovych founded rukopash hopak. Later on Valery Odayskiy and Valery Chobotar gave up fighting hopak and joined him in rukopash hopak. The first competitions of rukopash hopak took place in 1998. The first club was opened in 1998 in Kiev. In September 1999 a new sport specialization "rukopash hopak" was introduced at the University of Physical Culture in Lviv. The Federation of Ukrainian rukopash hopak was officially registered by the Department of Justice on November 21, 2003 [1; p.18]. In 2003 Mykola Velychkovych published a book titled "Ukrainian rukopash hopak" (co-author Leontiy Martynyuk, born in 1971).

Competitions of rukopash hopak take place on tatami and consist of three rounds with each round lasting three minutes (for boys – two rounds three minutes each, for girls – two rounds two minutes each). There are two types of rukopash hopak – one with hand-to-hand combat and the other with weapon. Mykola Velychkovych and Oleksandr Prytula (from Zaporizhia) clarified the rules for Ukrainian rukopash hopak in 1998. Competition programs consist of a fighting dance, technique and the rukopash (with a long and short stick and with bare hands). The uniform consists of wide trousers, a sleeveless shirt with buttons, and a belt [1; p.109]. A sportsman's feet are bare, except during the "fighting dance" (he is allowed to wear boots). Prayers and songs are very important for practitioners of national martial arts in Ukraine.

In 2002 the Female School of Fighting Art of "Asgarda" was opened. Asgarda takes into account woman's anatomy and physiology. Girls study wrestling, fighting techniques and tactics and self-defence. In 2003 Kateryna Tarnovska published a book titled "Asgarda" (co-author Volodymyr Pylat).

**Conclusions.** Some nations have lost their fighting culture. The current generation of Ukrainians should thank those ancestors who had kept cossack spirit alive, which makes popularizing the national fighting culture possible as well as generating respect from the international community. Ukrainians must strive to revive the nation spirit. Nowadays this is more important than ever for Ukrainian society. Martial arts are deeply imbedded in Ukrainian culture. Recently Ukrainian fighting traditions have witnessed an increased interest from the media. The life of a person who studies Ukrainian national fighting traditions is cheerful and interesting, he or she attempts to popularize Ukrainian culture by completely submerging themselves in original and unique national traditions.

Volodymyr Pylat and Mykola Velychkovych used national Ukrainian dances, folklore and personal experience while completing their research. The principal idea of this paper is that outstanding individuals determine Ukrainian sports history.

Today Lviv State University of Physical Culture is one of the most important centres of sport life in Ukraine. Chancellor Evgene Prystupa and his team work hard every day to ensure that the University is an exemplary academic institution of Ukrainian sports traditions as well as of science. Since 1999 a sport specialization "rukopash hopak" has been enjoying significant popularity.

National martial arts include wrestling, grappling and throws as well as certain boxing techniques. It can also be associated with Ukrainian religion and spirituality. Self-control, determination and concentration are necessary qualities of a martial arts student, who always reacts productively and without stress. Self-defence and strong self-control are the result of hard training.

Thus,

1. The review of inborn Ukrainian martial arts was made.
2. The historical survey in rukopash hopak and fighting hopak was provided.
3. The introduction of inborn Ukrainian martial arts was for the first time presented in English.
4. Our further study is pretended to be included into Wikipedia.
5. The glossary is planned to be compiled.

In addition we would like to stress that Ukrainian martial arts have great potential for the future. Further analysis of this sport in other languages would be of great importance for the world sporting community. Proper translation of fighting and rukopash hopak terminology is the next stage of the research.

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## КРАТКАЯ ИСТОРИЯ И ГЛАВНЫЕ ПРИНЦИПЫ УКРАИНСКИХ БОЕВЫХ ИСКУССТВ

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**Аннотация.** В статье рассматривается история создания, становления и функционирования украинских боевых искусств. Владимир Пилат и Николай Величкович являются ключевыми фигурами в области современных украинских боевых искусств. Николая Величковича считают основателем рукопаш гопака. Первые соревнования в этом виде спорта состоялись в 1998 году. В этом же году был основан первый спортивный клуб. В сентябре 1999 года во Львовском государственном университете физической культуры было создано новую специальность "рукопаш гопак". Украинская федерация рукопаш гопака была официально основана 21 ноября 2003 года. В 2001 году представители национальной команды Международной федерации боевого гопака впервые приняли участие в мировом фестивале Боевых Искусств в Южной Корее. Боевой гопак, являясь давней украинской традицией, может принести славу нашему государству.

**Ключевые слова:** боевое искусство, боевой гопак, рукопаш гопак.

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**Annotation.** The article is devoted to the brief analysis of origin, formation and functioning of Ukrainian martial arts. Volodymyr Pylat and Mykola Velychkovych are the key figures that are associated with the modern Ukrainian martial arts. Mykola Velychkovych is considered to be the founder of rukopash hopak. The first competitions of rukopash hopak took place in 1998. The first club was opened in 1998 in Kiev. In September 1999 a new sport specialization "rukopash hopak" was introduced at the University of Physical Culture in Lviv. The Federation of Ukrainian rukopash hopak was officially registered by the Department of Justice on November 21, 2003. In 2001 representatives of a national team of the Fighting Hopak International Federation participated in the World Festival of Fighting Arts in South Korea for the first time. The fighting hopak is an ancient tradition that has survived numerous political frameworks and thus, is capable of bringing glory to the Ukrainian nation.

**Key words:** martial art, fighting hopak, rukopash (hand-to-hand fighting) hopak.