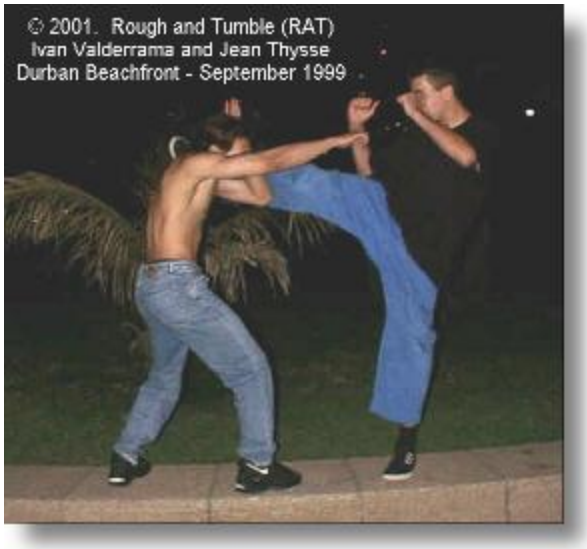
RAT – A South African Martial Art

RAT is the acronym for Rough and Tumble. RAT developed as a system of unarmed and armed combat for the South African Special Forces. RAT is now taught only in a civilian capacity. It is not so much a system as it is an approach to combat training where all aspects and ranges of combat are considered. This means that the RAT practitioner needs to learn how to do striking techniques (kicks, punches, elbows, knees, head butts etc,), standing and ground grappling (throws, locks, holds, chokes and strangles), and use and defence of weapons.

A new member can either join as a junior (between the ages of 4 – 12), or as a senior (from the age of 12 and upwards). Junior and senior groups have a different syllabus and there is continuity and overlap between the two. Each rank or grade level consists of a fitness programme, which gets progressively more difficult with each rank, a fitness test, a sparring test, as well a test of techniques. The beginner levels are quite structured introducing the practitioner to the basic concepts of all the ranges of combat and as practitioners progress the syllabus becomes more unstructured and ill-defined simulating more real kinds of situations. At the higher levels practitioners have the opportunity to specialize in their area of interest. This means that after gaining a thorough understanding and skill level in striking, grappling and weapons, practitioners can choose their own path of learning.



RAT is geared towards being highly practical in nature and training is geared towards developing highly competent and knowledgeable practitioners. Training classes typically consist of lots of callisthenics exercises, skipping, impact pad work, and lots of sparring, grappling and self-defence drills. The physical and mental training is taken quite seriously and there is a special course devoted entirely towards developing persistence and determination. This does not mean that the class is so serious that people do not have fun while training. In fact, the learning and teaching approach is quite different to many other martial arts classes where the instructor has the final say over all matters. Despite the classes being quite demanding, they are done in a relaxed manner where all participants are considered equal in the learning process. Classes are run in such a way that participants have fun rather than fear.

Many people who do not know much about RAT assume that RAT is simply a mixture of different martial arts, but this is really an uninformed view. RAT has its own philosophical and technical framework. The basic principle is that one should be considering all the ‘universal’ possibilities of combat, meaning that various aspects of other martial arts can fit into the framework of RAT.

RATs believe that all martial arts have something valuable to offer. In order to improve and discover the underlying principles of various martial arts there is no better way than actual hands on experience. For this reason many RAT practitioners also hold high grades in other martial arts and combat types as well as having competed in different kinds of competitions using the rules of the host of the competitions. Some of the competitions include RAT, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, Sport Jiu-Jitsu, Kuoshu (Kung Fu), Karate, Tae Kwon Do, No-Rules, and Pankration. Of course the ideal for us is to use the RAT rules, but sometimes it is a valuable learning exercise to push oneself outside of your comfort zone. This means that sometimes it is okay to lose, as long as we really do try and be the best we can be.

RAT was founded by Steven Yates and was developed together with the late Wayne Roscherr. For more information about RAT go to http://www.ratonline.com