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The Expandable Baton: Your Less-Than-Lethal Sidekick While On Duty

By John G. Peters, Jr.

Photos courtesy of Armament Systems & Procedures, Inc.

Remember the last time that you leaped from your patrol car to chase a violator and left your baton — straight or side-handle — on the front seat? Well, maybe you can recall the last time that you were eating lunch and suddenly a patron began to argue with the server about the cost of the lunch. As you stepped in to see if there was anything that you could do, you reached down for your baton only to have your memory refreshed that you never take it with you while eating lunch.

Speaking of "getting lunch," remember when you could have really used a baton to subdue a violator or to help defend yourself when you worked in the detective bureau, the military police, or the security firm? Memories of bruised ribs, possibly a broken nose, or a partner who was injured during the arrest process come to mind. If only you would have had a baton with you. But how can you carry a big, bulky baton with you and still maintain your soft-clothes image?

There are three possible answers to this question: (1) elect to carry a large, bulky baton (so what if it stick out of the bottom of your jacket); (2) elect to not carry a baton (if the violator looks like (s)he will fight, reschedule the arrest); or, (3) elect to carry an expandable baton. It is this last option upon which I focus.

Why should I carry an expandable baton? The best reason is to have a defensive impact tool with you should you need it. In a telephone interview, Edward Nowicki, a police training specialist for the Milwaukee (WI) Area Technical College told me that the number one tactical advantage of the expandable baton is "that it is with you all the time." Referring to the expandable side-handle

baton Nowicki said, "(It) is not cumbersome or in the way. You can run with it... do almost anything." In fact, Nowicki claims, "Anything that you can do with a traditional PR-24, you can do with the expandable one."

Regarding the expandable straight baton, Dr. Kevin Parsons agrees. During a telephone interview, Dr. Parsons said that "The principle attribute of the expandable baton is that it is easy to carry. (Expandable batons) are often available when longer batons are impractical or are left in the car." Parsons went on to cite that expandable batons can be carried on the officer's belt, and be used by groups of enforcement officers who were, many times, in the past not given an intermediate range impact tool.

For example, a detective can carry an expandable baton on his belt, completely hidden from view. Should he need a defensive impact tool, he can obtain it, and with a flick of the wrist,

open the baton. When the threat has ceased, or his use for the baton is gone, he simply collapses it and puts it back on his belt. **Figure 1** shows a straight expandable baton in both the closed and the open position.

Portability is another plus for the expandable baton. **Figure 2** shows how the various sized straight expandable batons look when placed into a leather holster. Nylon holsters are available for many expandable batons, too. For female investigators, the expandable batons can easily be placed into a purse or handbag.

Finally, versatility must be considered when studying the adoption or the use of expandable batons. Through proper training, the batons can be used for defensive striking techniques, for defensive restraint and control holds, and for other tactical applications.

Are expandable batons as effective in the controlling of violators



Figure 1



Figure 2

as traditional batons? A qualified yes. Equipment alone does not control; well-trained people who use the equipment can make the equipment effective for whatever purpose. Therefore, the officer who is holding the impact tool is the "real" answer to this question.

For example, if an untrained officer who is given a side-handle baton is compared to a well-trained officer who is given a straight baton, and both are then told to properly handle a simulated attack situation, to the casual observer the officer who is using the straight baton appears to be superior. However, the issue is really not the type of baton which was used, but the training, or the lack of training, which was provided to the officers. The same is true for expandable batons versus non-expandable batons.

Regardless of the impact tool that you decide to use, you must receive training. And the training must be job-related, and situationally based. Only after you have been thoroughly and properly trained in both types of batons can you really make an accurate comparison. However, as a person who conducts training in both expandable and traditional batons, I can say that both are effective impact tools. The real issues are, I believe, the image a traditional

baton conveys, vis-a-vis an expandable baton, and the practicality of carrying the baton in uniform and in soft clothes.

What about liability? You always have some degree of exposure when you use an impact tool. Training, product selection, policies and guidelines, and common sense can help to limit, and in some cases, seemingly erase liability. Let's take a look at each area.

First, you must have training in the use of the expandable baton. It is a different piece of equipment than the "old" baton that you did carry. And the training must be conducted by qualified trainers who can instill confidence in the students about the "new" baton, and teach them the pros and cons about his "new" piece of equipment.

Second, product selection is important. For example, how is the product made? Since modern expandable batons were designed for striking, they should be balanced, be durable, and be made by a reputable manufacturer. Using a balanced expandable baton is important. Such a baton should allow you to quickly extend the baton, strike with it, and then recover quickly for more strikes, should they be needed.

Durability is another element which you must consider when investigating

the expandable baton. Dr. Parsons is quick to point to a study completed by the Japanese Secret Service which concluded, "...that Expandable Batons have a greater chance of controlling subjects than other types of impact weapons. Such units generate increased fluid shock waves due to their **tubular design**. At the same time, Expandable Batons have less propensity for inflicting permanent tissue damage. This increased control potential with a reduced injury potential is one of the major strengths of the Expandable Baton concept."

The expandable baton the Japanese studied was made of steel, and is of a tubular design. According to Dr. Parsons, the use of a steel, tubular-designed expandable baton, "... generate increased fluid shock waves due to their tubular design. (Simultaneously), the use of Expandable Batons have less propensity of inflicting permanent tissue damage."

Conversely, Edward Nowicki dislikes the use of the steel expandable baton. "I don't like hitting people with steel. Striking them with (plastic) gives a softer perception of force." Nowicki is referring to his evaluation of the soon-to-be-marketed PR-24X expandable baton. Unlike

the straight expandable batons, at this time, there has been no published reports or studies on the effectiveness of the PR-24X expandable baton. Regarding an earlier version of an expandable side-handle baton, Nowicki said, "I never liked the PR-16E. I broke a couple of them, and didn't think they were designed well. It's trying to make a 44 magnum out of a .22."

Nowicki went on to say, "I do like the new standard-sized expandable side-handle baton. You can take it out in a low profile manner, or you can take it out dynamically. In fact, when you take it out dynamically, it sounds like you're jacking a round for an 870."

Regarding durability, make sure that the expandable baton that you select is made by a reputable manufacturer. Also, make sure that it has had the "test of time" behind it. Don't spend a lot of money on a "new" product only to discover that you are the "laboratory" for the manufacturer.

Third, make sure that after adopting the expandable baton that your agency issues written directives about its use, training, etc. And after they are written, make sure that your department or city legal person reviews the policies and procedures. Doing so should prevent a

claim of "negligent direction" from a plaintiff in a law suite.

Finally, common sense should enter the picture. If you need an impact tool which has versatility, which can be easily carried by officers, which can be easily concealed, and which is durable, then the expandable baton might be for you. However, an analogy can be drawn to firearms.

Today, many law enforcement agencies are making a transition from revolvers to the auto pistol. And for several of these agencies, the reason for making the switch is wrong. For example, one argument that is often heard for the auto pistol is firepower. Sure, the auto pistol does hold more bullets, but if you can't hit the violator with the first six, you may not hit him with the next six. Hence, identify solid reasons for adopting the expandable baton. Several have already been identified. One of these reasons may fit your agency.

How does an expandable baton work? Basically the expandable baton has a tip, a handle, and a barrel. The barrel of the baton collapses into its handle. The barrel, generally made of high-quality steel, is tubular in design, and is tapered so that its several sections collapse into one another, **Figure 3.** To

expand the baton, all the user must do is snap his/her wrist downward or to the side. This action should extend the barrel sections of the baton.

What are the disadvantages of adopting the expandable baton?

The main drawback is cost. Expandable batons are more expensive than the traditional baton. However, a straight expandable baton generally does not cost in excess of most side-handle batons.

Tied to cost is training. When you adopt the expandable baton, your officers need to be trained in its usage. This can generally be done through in-service or roll-call training.

Finally, you will, most likely, need to purchase a holster or carrying pouch for the expandable baton. Although not as costly as the expandable baton, it should be considered in your budget.

Who is currently using expandable batons? Several criminal justice agencies have adopted the straight expandable baton. (To date, the side-handle expandable baton has not been released.) According to Dr. Parsons, the following agencies have adopted the ASP expandable baton: The U.S. Capitol Police; the U.S. Coast Guard; the Wisconsin State Patrol; the Milwaukee

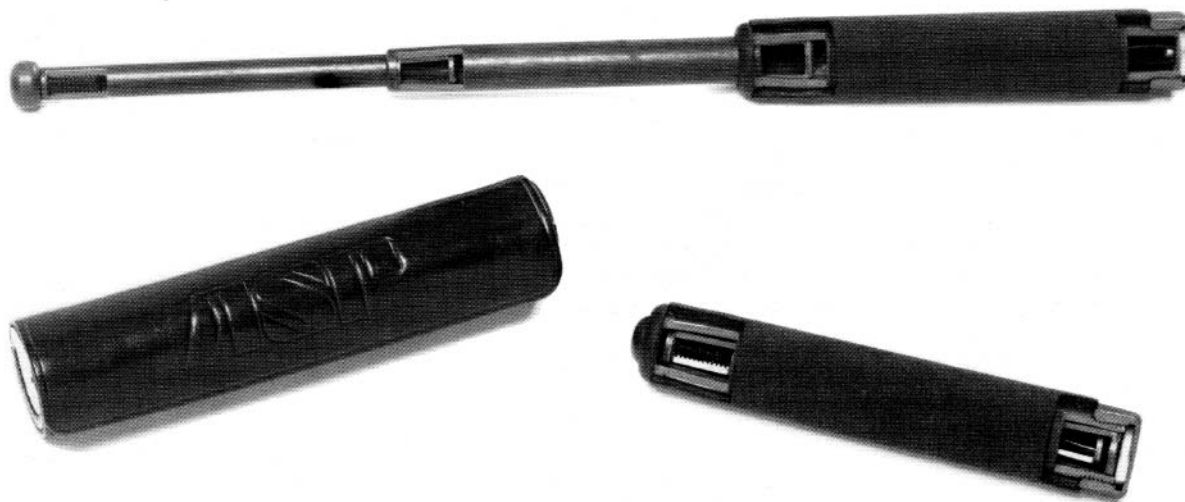


Figure 3

(WI) Police Department; the Tampa (FL) Police Department; the Illinois State Police; plus many other state, local, and federal agencies.

SUMMARY

The expandable baton is here to stay. While the baton is not a new idea (the Japanese have been using it for years), its presentation and use are new to the United States. And, like the first few years after the introduction of the side-handle baton, skeptics were often converted to evangelistic users. I believe that the expandable baton will be eventually adopted by many agencies. Even those agencies that are currently using traditional batons. And I think officers will eagerly want to adopt this new concept of baton.

Officers know a good idea when it comes along. And I believe that the expandable baton is a good idea. But, like all ideas, some take longer to get adopted than others. Unlike the side-handle baton which replaces another baton, the expandable baton can be a supplement to your agency's impact tool arsenal. In my opinion, it makes the perfect sidekick. It's on your belt, and goes with you, even when you don't think that

you will need an impact tool.

I think Dr. Parsons has summed up the advantages of the straight expandable baton very well. He cites:

- Adoption of the expandable baton provides more controlled shock with less physical potential.

- Adoption of the expandable baton provides a low profile for an improved public image.

- Adoption of the expandable baton provides a psychological deterrence when extended. This will often defuse confrontations prior to use of force.

- Adoption of the expandable baton provides a practical impact tool for investigators, undercover, administrative, and tactical personnel.

- Adoption of the expandable baton provides an effective impact tool which can be carried on the belt.

Depending on how you look at the expandable baton, the Japanese have given us another export. This one however, when used properly, can help save lives. But only if it is carried and used properly.

John G. Peters, Jr. is found and president of the internationally-recognized defensive tactics and impact tool

training firm, Defensive Tactics Institute, Inc. Based in Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA, he has just published his fifth book, "Tactical Handcuffing For Chain-and Hinged-Style Handcuffs." He has also served as an expert witness where use of force was the primary issue in both state and federal courts.

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