

To AJKA-International  
AJKA-I of PA  
Instructor Trainee's Report #37

Subject: **Kumite**

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In the early days, karate was used solely for fighting actual enemies (armed or unarmed) sometimes to the death. Karate was perfected into a dangerous weapon. It was not until Gichen Funakoshi, and later Nakayama, that the concept of focusing the techniques just short of contact with the opponent was developed – making kumite possible.

*Kata* and *kumite* are complementary training methods. In *kata*, one learns basic techniques; in *kumite*, one applies them with a sparring partner under a stressful condition.<sup>1</sup> The principles of *kihon* (see prior papers) still apply to *kumite*. Besides giving the student practice in hand techniques, foot techniques and body shifting, sparring also trains the *karate-ka* in distancing (keeping the proper distance between oneself and one's opponent necessary for the execution of the technique) timing and responding. One must remember that, while *kumite* is a useful application of the fundamentals learned through *kata* it is not a substitute for *kata*.

The Sensei prepares the *karate-ka*s for confrontation with others by first teaching them how to block simple attacks. The opponent warns of the type of attack by announcing the target area and the technique thus giving the *karate-ka* time to prepare a countermove. These single attacks are aimed at one of the three major levels – the head and neck level (jo-dan) body level (chu-dan) or groin level (ge-dan).

After the attack has been blocked and deflected the *karate-ka* follows up with a counter move. As the *karate-ka* becomes more proficient with their techniques and control the counter moves become more advance and increase. The counter-attack should be executed with good form strength and speed. It should be treated not as a counter but as an attack on the person that was attacking you.

The gyaku-zuki (reverse punch) is Shotokan karate. Mastery of the gyaku-zuki as a countering technique is the primary goal of every karate-ka as this technique can be used as the foundation for a variety of movements. If you are able to achieve balance, timing focus, correct hip action (rotation/vibration) good breathing and correct distancing while doing the gyaku-zuki then any other techniques can be added.

The maxim of Kumite training is “from the simple to the complex.”<sup>2</sup> What this means is that you should learn the simple forms of kumite first (Gohon-Kumite and Sanbon- kumite) in order to internalize the way of keeping your distance when attacking and defending as well as counter-attacking before attempting Jiyu Kumite. In order to get the most out of kumite training you must master the basic positions and techniques.

*Karate-ka* should learn five types of kumite or sparring at specific phases of their instruction. The types of *kumite* and when they should be introduced are:

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<sup>1</sup>Nishiyama, Hidetaka: Karate – The Art of “Empty-Hand” Fighting, Tuttle Publishing 1960, pg. 168

<sup>2</sup>Grupp, Joachim Shotokan Karate, Kihon-Kumite-Kata Meyer & Meyer Sport (UK) Ltd. 2000 pg .80

### **Basic Kumite:**

*Go-hon kumite* – five step sparring should be taught to beginners

*Sanbon kumite* – three step sparring, should be taught to beginners

Basic *kumite*, consisting of five or three-step sparring, permits the *karate-ka* to cultivate basic blocking and attacking through prearranged techniques using simple techniques. It is a useful introduction to sparring for beginning students. These two types of *kumite* allows the beginner to get the feeling for timing, distance speed and control, as well as developing a feeling for the right attack and defense.

The basic point of either 5 or 3 step sparring is to learning how to move backwards and forwards while attacking or blocking. The difference between *Gohon* and *Sanbon kumite* lies in the number of techniques demanded as well as in the starting positions of the attacker and defender.

In addition, in basic sparring you need to keep mindful of posture and the execution of the technique as learned in *kihon*. It is also important not to race through the techniques. Each attack and defense must be completely executed before the next one is started

**Ippon Kumite** – basic one step sparring, taught to beginners and intermediate

*Ippon kumite* is similar to *Gohon* or *Sanbon* except now every attack is blocked and a counterattack is delivered. It also basic, prearranged techniques, but reduces the attacks (and defensive moves) down to one and adds emphasis on body movements and proper distancing from the opponent (*zanchin*). This time instead of simply moving forward and backwards the *karate-ka* attempts to utilize angles (45, 90, 180) to put themselves in the proper position to attack from strength.

### **Jiyu Kumite:**

*Jiyu-ippou kumite* – semi free one attack sparring, taught to intermediate and advance students

*Jiyu-kumite* – free style sparring, should be taught to advance students

*Jiyu ippou kumite* often serves as a bridge between *ippou* and *jiyu kumite*. A combination of one-step and free sparring. In this semi-free form of sparring, both sides must use basic, prearranged techniques, but may act according to their own rhythm and timing. Both attacker and defender assume relaxed ready positions and move about looking for an opening and create the proper distance before attacking. The Defender is encouraged to use his/her reflexes to produce specific fighting actions.

*Jiyu kumite* – the name says it all ... freestyle sparring. Utilizing the prior fixed forms of *kumite* and while maintaining the points learned in *kihon* the fighter's imagination is now utilized. The *karate-ka* may freely engage their physical and mental powers, but must strictly control their attacks. The *karateka* must be well-trained and disciplined enough to make a powerful blow that stops just before it

reaches its target. The techniques are not prearranged; for these reasons, it is recommended that only advanced students may practice jiyu kumite.

The fighter's temperament, individual capability, creativity, flexibility and physical condition are all factors that play a role in jiyu – kumite. In kumite there are two basic strategies being utilized. The first is to create or find an opening in an opponent's defense and attack (*sen no sen*). The other strategy is to block the opponent's attack and counter (*go no sen*)

In order to actively create an opening the karate-ka may put an opponent off guard psychologically by pretending to relax or by using a kiai. Also by attacking or feinting an attack in one direction thereby creating an opening elsewhere, weakening the defenses by attacking repeatedly, or throwing them off balance by attacking the leg.<sup>3</sup>

A passive way of creating an opening may consist of enticing the opponent to attack by showing an apparent opening and then taking advantage of the opening thus created in his defenses. This is also accomplished by psychological means or by the careful use of techniques. (ex. Lowering your guard from the face to attack midsection leading the opponent to make an attack to the face which exposes his midsection for an attack.)<sup>4</sup>

#### Important Points Regarding Basic Sparring

- ⑩ Before commencing the attacker should always announce what area he/she will be attacking
- ⑩ An upright balanced posture should be kept though out the blocking and countering
- ⑩ The hips must be engaged.
- ⑩ The muscles of the body should contract and tense as a unit at the point of executing the attack or block. The muscles are then immediately relaxed ready for the next movement.
- ⑩ To maintain good balance the hips should be kept as low as possible. The reason is that the body's center of gravity is located in your abdomen (hara) area - seika tanden. It is located at least two finger widths down from the bellybutton for a male (55%) and three fingers for a female (56%).
- ⑩ By directing the hips towards or away from an opponent maximum impact or distancing can be achieved.
- ⑩ When *Go-hon kumite* or *Sanbon kumite* are practiced in the dojo it is necessary for a strike or kick to be pulled just short of the opponents so that it does not touch the target. Because every movement is executed with full strength and could cause injury to a training partner immense self-control must be exercised.
- ⑩ In karate we start with a bow and end with a bow<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Nishiyama, Hidetaka: Karate – The Art of “Empty-Hand” Fighting, Tuttle Publishing 1960, pg. 185

<sup>4</sup>Id. pg 186

<sup>5</sup>Funakoshi, Gichin – Shoto Niju Kun