

Neutralize and Destroy

Hapkido's Kick-Killing Techniques

by Les Connard

Americans love to kick. Hundreds of Korean martial arts instructors discovered this as soon as they moved to the United States and began teaching students the intricacies of their kicking-oriented fighting styles. But to be truly well-rounded in the combat arts, kick-happy practitioners need to know how easily some martial arts can dispense with even a fast, perfectly timed foot technique. In the following article, *Karate/Kung Fu Illustrated* presents a detailed discussion of the methods hapkido uses to counter the kicking techniques of any martial art.

—Ed.

Hapkido's efficient kick-killing techniques allow you to intercept an opponent's kick and easily throw him to the ground. But successful employment of these techniques requires you to take into account the phases of the throw and the principles of hapkido. This article discusses everything you need to know to use these powerful defensive skills against kickers in the ring or on the street.

Setting Up The Kicker

To more easily catch your opponent's kick, lure him into throwing the kick you want. Your position relative to his position is very impor-



tant. Try to start outside kicking range so that, unless your opponent likes to jump-kick, he cannot easily attack you. You then have a moment to decide which kick you want him to use and which throwing strategy you will respond with.

For example, if you want your opponent to throw a roundhouse kick, do not stand directly in front of him because he will probably try a front kick or rear-leg side kick—which you may have trouble evading. Instead, stand

just off to his side and guard your front, leaving open only your stomach and face on one side. Then, when he moves, you can be nearly certain he will throw a roundhouse to that unprotected side. This is the first of his three options and the best for you.

His second option is to lunge and punch instead of kick. If he



武 Les Connard (left) squares off against Marc Buckler (1). As Buckler throws a high roundhouse kick, Connard traps the leg from underneath and grabs the nearest shoulder (2). Connard then turns his body while pulling his opponent's shoulder and lifting his leg (3). After his opponent hits the mat (4), Connard kicks to the head (5).

does, you can move in and hit him first with your lead hand, or just wait, block and counterattack. Then, if he lifts his leg to move or throw a follow-up front kick, you are close enough to grab his leg and throw him.

Your opponent's third option is to throw a different kick, but you still have defensive options if you are in the right position. Your defense always flows more smoothly, however, when you can sense which kick is coming. To accomplish this, always look at your opponent's eyes to get a sense of where and when he will attack. Once you grab a part of his body, you no longer have to look at his eyes because you can feel where everything else is.

If you want to throw, avoid blocking any kick below the knee because if your opponent can push his trapped foot below the level of his knee, you will lose control of the leg. (If you must block below the knee, opt for a hapkido twist instead of a throw.) Blocking above the knee, on the other hand, leaves nothing for him to stand on. At such a close distance, it does not matter if he is bigger than you; you can still hit with your hip and lift him until there is no resistance. He may try to hit your face in the short time he stands with his leg trapped, but when his hand comes up, you can just grab his sleeve at the biceps area and block his forearm with your forearm. This enables you to protect yourself and lower your partner safely to the mat during practice.

Moving In On the Kicker

Human nature makes you move backward when your opponent kicks. If you want to move in, you have to train yourself. Remember that, if your opponent strikes with a short weapon, such as a knee or elbow, moving in is more difficult. But because he is more likely to

use a kick in competition and self-defense, moving in becomes somewhat easier.

The leg is so long and powerful that getting hit with any part of it hurts. But your opponent cannot hurt you with his kick if you move in past the knee. As soon as you move in, you can block his kick

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above the knee—then you can easily trap his leg. Next, you should plant your forward foot. From this position, you continue his motion by pulling his leg around his body in a circle. His supporting foot cannot move to regain balance, so he gets swept to the mat.

The three principles of hapkido can help you determine when and how to move in on a kicker. The circle principle is important because you create power with a circle. Each time you step and throw, you pull your opponent around you in a circle. That circle can go up, around or in any direction. The best throwers plan on using a circle before they even position themselves to intercept the kick.

The *ki* (internal energy) principle involves the fusion of your opponent's power with your own. You control his power and take it in a circle, then add a little of your power. If you find that you need too much strength, you are probably doing the throw incorrectly or using improper timing: You may be too far away, you may have caught his leg too late, or he may have planted his weight just before you caught his leg.

The water principle teaches

that, if a wave hits you and you are steadfast, it will go around you, over you or under you. If you are movable, it will push you. Water fills a container of any shape without leaving any spaces. It is diligent enough to create the Grand Canyon, yet versatile enough to fill the smallest crevice.

Using the water principle, you meet an attacker by encompassing him and replacing him. You move into any opening you can find—high, low, grabbing a leg, grabbing an arm, etc.

It does not matter which throwing technique you use as long as you use the three principles to catch your opponent's momentum as it comes up past his hip. As you drive his power backward past his hip, he has to go down because you are moving his center of gravity away from the line extending upward from his supporting heel. As soon as you break his balance, you can throw with just a push.

Throwing On Specific Kicks

No matter where you stand relative to your opponent, you have four basic throwing options: forward-leg sweep, rear-leg sweep, thigh-to-thigh sweep, and back-of-the-knee-to-back-of-the-knee hook. Although hapkido teaches certain throws specifically for certain situations and some throws work better for certain kicks, all four can work against any kick.

When your opponent's leg starts to move, it signals the perfect time to throw. If he finishes his kick and you are still not in position, you may be able to muscle him into the throw, but you cannot do it as easily because you do not have his momentum to help you.

Hook your opponent's supporting leg with either of your legs so he cannot hop to regain his balance; then you can grab his kicking leg underneath or over the top. You can move to the inside or out-

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side of your opponent's body, and the inside or outside of the leg. His stance determines whether you move to the inside or outside of his body: If your right foot and his left foot are forward, you will end up on the inside of his rear-leg kick.

When he tries to kick, his hip pivots around his supporting leg and leaves a gap the width of his hip radius. Your lead foot should be under this radius. Once you get into that position, grab over the top of his leg to prevent him from kicking you in the face when he falls. By cross-stepping behind your lead foot, you pull his leg around your body and sweep with your lead foot.

From the outside of his body, it works similarly. Start with your left foot forward. Step to the outside of his supporting foot, then simultaneously block his leg on top with your left forearm and hook under his knee with your right elbow. Your left hand then grabs his wrist to avoid getting hit during the throw. All you have to do is reverse your opponent's momentum. If he tries to put his foot down, you might lose control of the leg. To avoid this, hook your elbow under his knee. If your arm is under his leg, you should do a reverse throw because when you move, it starts to lift and create power. You then sweep his supporting leg when his hip pivots past it. When you hook the supporting leg, always place the back of your knee against the back of your opponent's knee.

When you use the front of his leg, place the back of your thigh against the front of his thigh. If you fail to do this, you probably cannot throw him because you are not close enough to his center of balance. If he throws a roundhouse and you hook with your heel, you will not be in position to break his balance or use his power against him. But when you are

武 Les Connard (left) and Marc Buckler square off (1). As Buckler throws a rear-leg side kick, Connard moves forward and traps the leg (2). He turns his body and moves closer to his opponent (3), then sweeps his supporting leg (4). Connard finishes with a groin stomp and foot lock (5).



close enough to put your thigh against his thigh, he cannot take his power back because you and he have become one. Then, if you

decide to continue the shift of power, you are lower than he is, and his power is higher than you are. He goes with you because he

has no choice.

Sometimes you continue to move his power in the direction it was moving. Other times, you should move it in the opposite direction and do a reverse throw. Choose according to your position. If you are on the inside of your opponent and his leg comes toward you, it is easier to just continue the circle around your body.

Because a reverse throw always employs your rear leg, you can

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generate your own power. You actually create the circle around your hip, then come up and under his hip. As you do that, your body rises. You start with your feet apart and hips low, but as you come up on one leg, you create an upward power that takes him off his feet. It becomes almost a bumping action with your hip under his. The secret involves positioning your lead foot and hip under his hip. Then, place your center of balance where his is.

Polishing Your Throws

Hapkido teaches you to use your opponent's momentum to throw him. For safety during training, exercise great restraint while throwing, but in a real self-defense situation, you can use that momentum to slam him to the ground. For example, if you hook-sweep him, he can land on his head and neck, possibly causing a

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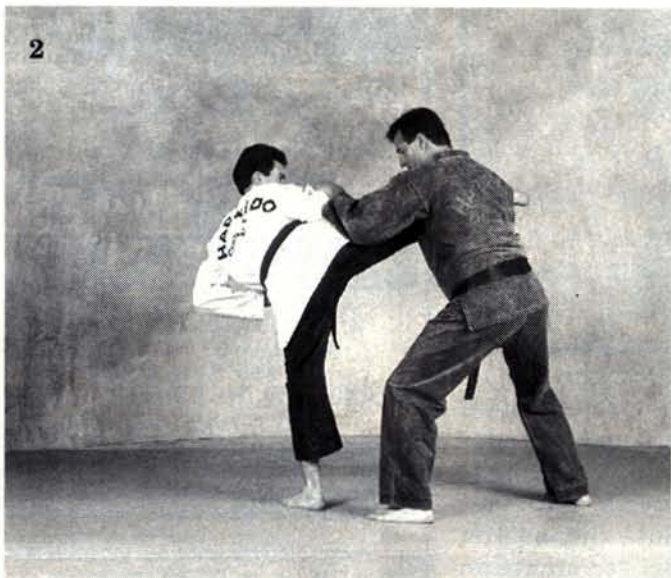
concussion. Likewise, instead of letting your opponent go after a reverse throw, you can jerk his face straight to the ground.

Efficiently using your opponent's momentum involves grabbing his kicking leg and continuing his momentum in a circle while his leg is still extending. This causes him to come up onto his toes instead of staying flat-footed. Unless he can do a split, his supporting leg cannot stay in its position. Move your hip slightly past his when you reverse his power. Then, he cannot stay there because he has only one leg on the ground to push with and that leg is pushing off the toes.

So when your opponent comes off the ground, he immediately goes straight down. It works well when somebody hits you with a spin kick or a back kick—as long as you move in past the supporting leg, you do not have to worry about the kick. You just absorb it and lift the kicking leg. If a smaller person tries to absorb the force of a larger opponent's spin kick, it is still no problem as long as he moves in and does not get hit with the lower leg.

A beginner should always block his opponent's kicking leg as it comes in. When learning to throw, always block with the front hand. If you keep your hands up, a forearm block will usually work well. Sometimes you can use a punch block, in which you punch under the leg and block with the top of the forearm. This actually drives the leg upward, creating more momentum.

Do not try to inflict pain with an ordinary block because your opponent's body will tighten and his energy flow will stop. In hapkido, always block soft and hit hard. In throwing, you do not even have to block; as his leg comes up,



武 Hapkido instructor Les Connard (right) squares off against Marc Buckler (1). As Buckler executes a high spin kick, Connard moves in, traps the leg from underneath and grabs his opponent's nearest arm (2). Connard then steps forward with his rear leg and positions his front leg behind his opponent's supporting leg (3).

4



5



6



武 Connard lifts his opponent's kicking leg as he sweeps his supporting leg (4). (Note how Connard holds his opponent's arm for safety during training.) Once his opponent is down, Connard keeps control of his leg and arm (5), then drops his knee into his opponent's groin to finish the encounter (6).

you just help him up. If it comes around, get into a position where it will not hit you and you can continue the kick's momentum. But the only way to get to that level is to learn to block and do the throw correctly.

If your opponent spin-kicks more quickly, eventually you can execute a faster version of the spinning throw in which his kick does not even touch you. Start with your left foot forward. As soon as you see him start to spin with his right leg, step with your left foot to the outside of his supporting leg and step with your right foot past your left. Simultaneously come in with a straight right arm under his thigh while he is still kicking—that is when you drop him. But remember that, to succeed with this advanced technique, you have to learn the basics of how to enter using the methods explained above. You must train enough to be able to move in at exactly the right time.

If you have trouble throwing someone bigger than you in a self-defense situation, strike his groin with your palm as you move your body upward. Or thrust your knee into his groin as you throw him. That will put his energy up in the air so that, when you sweep the leg, he will be slammed down headfirst.

When practicing the hook to the back of the knee, always try to hold your opponent's arm so he will fall sideways onto the mat, rather than flat on his back. Then he probably will not slam his head. When sweeping the front of the thigh, your partner will always roll over the same shoulder as the leg he kicks with. Also, remember never to practice a throw on an unprepared or untrained opponent, or in a small padded area, where your opponent's ankle or hand may miss

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the mat and hit the hard floor.


Kick-Killing Drills

Three drills can help you improve your throwing skills. First is the punch takedown. Stand with your right foot forward and have your opponent deliver a front, side or roundhouse kick with his right rear leg. When his kick starts, place your lead foot near his lead foot, strike his diaphragm with a right punch, and block or grab his kicking leg with your left arm. If you push with your right hand as he kicks, he will fall to the mat because you move his center of gravity beyond his supporting leg.

When you have mastered this drill, you should have sufficient timing to catch a kick in motion. Continue your training with the catching-the-leg-on-top sweep. Assume the starting position of the first drill, and as your oppo-

nent begins to kick into your waiting left arm, grab his leg on top with your left hand and grab his right biceps with your right hand. Press your forearm against his so he cannot punch. With your left leg, cross-step behind your right to begin a circular motion as you pull his leg around his body. This motion alone can take him down, but to be sure, use your right leg to do a back-of-the-knee-to-back-of-the-knee sweep to his supporting leg.

Third is the Y-block with underneath hook. This drill works well with any stance or kick. Begin by using it against a front kick. From a hands-up position, bring your rear arm forward so the inside of the elbows meet. Your rear arm should point straight down, and your lead arm should bend up in a basic blocking position. Together, your arms should be shaped like a "Y." Move your lead foot forward

when your partner begins to kick. Use your top arm to block on top of his thigh. Your rear arm will now easily slide under his leg before he completes his kick, leaving you in a good position for a reverse throw. Practice until you can do it comfortably, then try it on different kicks. 

About the author: Les Connard is a freelance writer who owns and operates a hapkido school in Monrovia, California. He began training in taekwondo 18 years ago but switched to hapkido after a tournament competitor caught his kick and threw him to the mat.

武 *Les Connard (right) faces Jeff Morris to demonstrate the punch-takedown drill (1). As Morris throws a front kick, Connard advances, catches the leg and hits him with a right punch (2). As Connard continues to move forward, he destroys his opponent's balance (3). Once on the ground, Connard can finish with a kick or leg lock (4).*

