

The blocking techniques in Karate-do and their connection with the Kamaes.

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1. Introduction

The objective of this work is to do a theoretical and practical study of some of the “basic aspects” needed when it comes to the practicing and teaching of blocking techniques Karate-do and their connection with the Kamaes.

What I want to do is to shed some light on some of the things I consider highly important—that is, the importance of the blocks themselves and not just the idea of using them to help respond to a counterattack. On a theoretical level, I would like to point out the advantage of undertaking the teaching objectives in a gradual way. This is why the right selection of the contents to be taught is essential. And if they are adequately distributed throughout the “teaching-learning” process, we will reach the objectives that we are aiming for.

Another important aspect to keep in mind is the connection of the Kamaes to the blocking techniques and at the same time the relationship of the blocking techniques to the counterattacks that we want to do. The rule to be followed: first know the right form of the Kamae; second, when facing an attack do the blocking technique so that the movement is correct from the mentioned Kamae; third, once the block has been carried out, use the most appropriate counter attack. And when I say the most adequate, I am referring to the counter attacks in Hente (using the same arm that is used to defend). Therefore, to do the counterattacks in Hente, it is necessary to select a technique whose line of movement is aided from the position of the person who is defending.

I would also like say that some of the Japanese words used in this study are used by Sensei

Taiji Kase, of whom I have the honor of being a student and an unconditional follower for 16 years.

And finally, I want to take advantage to this simple introduction to render homage in memory of Sensei Gichin Funakoshi, who expressed the meaning and importance of the blocks in this noble art with his maxim <<Karate ni sente nashi-there is not a first attack in Karate>>.

2. Dictionary definitions

There are different definition for the words and verbs used. Here is a synthesis of these definitions.

-Parry: An action to stop or to detain. In fencing. A defensive movement,...

- Stopping: In fencing: the use of the sword to fend off the opponent's strike. This is extended to other sports.
- Defense: Weapon, instrument or something else with which someone defends himself when in danger.
- Defender: Aid, free self, protect, impede...
- Block: Impede a mechanism from functioning or the development of a process with an obstacle that stops it.

Synthesis of different definitions.

From the ideas defined before, we can say that a defensive action is one that is done with the objective of protecting the physical integrity of the person assaulted or injured by using the body, an instrument or some other thing and the aim is "to stop", take away, block, deflect, impede, obstruct an attack or an offensive action.

3. Personalized classification of the blocking techniques

The idea is not to list all the blocking techniques, but rather to create a possible classification or different ways of grouping the blocking techniques or Uke-Waza. By this, I am referring to the diverse aspects that help us to elaborate a way to teach the contents of Karate-do, therefore, to know:

3.1. By the action, the effect or form of making contact with the attacker:

Penetrating blocking techniques.

It is one of the most used and it consists of a strike or strong and rapid impact against an aggressor, with the aim of avoiding the attack or deflecting it away from the danger zone of the defender. For example, Otoshi Uki.

Striking blocks

This way of using the blocking techniques consist of a rapid strike that takes advantage of the speed of the movement, the impacting action, as well as the abrupt turns or movements of the defender upon the impact. For example Soto Ude Uke used this way.

Evading blocking techniques

These are blocks that are used with the aim of guiding or channeling the action of the aggressor sending the attacker far from his objective. They can be used together with Tai Sabaki or to evade the body. For example Jōdan Nagashi Uke.

“Enwrapping” blocks

They are similar to the ones before. These techniques usually combine circular movements that with a gentle contact (and at times with the help of Tai Sabaki) you avoid your adversary’s attack. These are usually done with the hands open. For example Tekubi Kake Uke.

Blocking techniques with grabs

As you can see from the name it implies grabbing the adversary (after blocking him) by the part which attacks and then control him, applying a dislocation or throwing the adversary. Generally they are blocking techniques done with the hand open. For example, Kakete.

Cutting Stops.

In this blocking technique the offensive action is used to strike various parts of the aggressor causing sharp pain and affecting him, weakening him. These kicks are very efficient against the shin bone or the ankle bone. For example, Gedan Shuto Barai against a Mae Geri.

Blocking techniques as an attack.

That would be any blocking technique literally used in the form of an attack. For example, Jōdan Age Uke against the neck of an attacker.

3.2. Depends with whom the technique is done.

Blocking technique with only one hand or arm.

Double blocks: with both hands and arms.

Blocking with any side of the forearm.

Blocking with the interior edge of the open hand.

Blocking with the palm or the back of the hand.

Blocking with the reinforcement of the hand opened or closed.

Blocking done with the elbow.

Blocking done with sole of the foot.

Blocking with the inside or outside part of the leg or knee.

Blocking with the internal or external edge of the foot.

Others

3.3. Depending on the angle of the movement described.

Upward blocks.

Downward blocks.

Blocks away from the center of the body.

Blocks towards the centerline of the body.

Blocks that describe a semicircle

Multiple combinations and variations of the same ones.

3.4. Depends on the follow up intention to be taken.

However, the final aim of all blocks and defensive actions is to avoid being hit. When preparing the exercises, you also have to keep in mind that the blocking techniques will be selected.

Depending on the action to be carried out after the block (strike, grab, dislocate or throw), it will be more convenient to select one technique or another.

Therefore, I will number some of these possibilities.

Blocking strongly with the aim of dissuading the adversary because of the pain caused. For example, a penetrating blocking technique.

Block gently, allowing the attack of slip away from the target. For example, sliding or enwrapping block. Blocking with the intention to immobilize, dislocate, throw or unbalance. For example, a kick with a grab, sliding or “enwrapping”.

Blocking and counter attacking simultaneously.

Attack anticipating when the opponent starts his attack.

Blocking with the intention of throwing the attacker off balance.

Evading to follow up by an offensive action.

Others

4. Variations and different forms of applying the blocking techniques

On an advanced level one of the characteristics or conditions that a Karate practitioner should have is that of knowing how to adapt himself depending on the circumstances and to “go beyond techniques” that are conventional. Technique in itself is nothing else but a mere instrument that should help us to evolve in all aspects, even though in this case I am only referring to the technical aspect. Therefore, if you use the following outline in an organized manner, “practice-reflection-practice”, you will begin to discover other possibilities in the blocking techniques. When you are performing those techniques, varying them will give you more possibilities.

Some of the examples of these variations are:

Extend, reduce or vary the spatial movements of the blocking techniques to adapt them to the level of the penetration of the attack. For example, Gedan Barai could be done various ways and this will depend on space used in which there is an interception.

Vary the contact area with the person who is defending. For example, Soto Ude Uke done with the second phalanx of the closed fist.

Aim the stopping techniques to parts of the opponent’s body that are vulnerable, such as the joints, weak points or painful, etc. For example Soto Ude Uke against the base of the opponent’s thumb.

Utilize the block as an attack. For example, Jôdan Age Uke against the elbow joint. Or when following the direction of a blocking action, first hit the area that is open and then stop if it is necessary. For example, take advantage of the movement of a Jôdan Soto Ude Uke, first strike to the head or to the opponent’s face and then block if necessary.

Use blocking technique as you attack. For example, Tsuki-Uke.

Use attacking techniques to block with. For example a Yoko Uraken Uchi utilized as a defense against a Jôdan Oi Tsuki.

5. Important aspects when doing the blocks

Optimum use of the biomechanics of the defensive actions or blocks: adequately utilizing the rotations of the bones in the joints and applying them at the right moment.

Being aware of the right moment or the “timing”, is also shown, in the correct use and right distance with the adversary or Maai.

It is when doing the blocking techniques, that the shoulders are perfectly well placed, if not, the blocking techniques will be weak, as will be the action that comes after that.

On a fundamental level, the extension of the blocking techniques should be wide, but as you practice and on the advanced levels, you will have to be as effective each time at increasingly shorter distances. That is why it is important to use the body adequately, done through the correct use of the hip with an attitude centered on the Hara.

If the blocking techniques are done incorrectly, and you do not get to throw your opponent off balance, he could respond rapidly and powerfully. But if you get to throw him off balance, even though the next attack comes, it will not be strong, he will do it weakly. Another important aspect that has to be kept in mind is that of taking advantage of the force generated by means of pressure or pushing the Hara against the floor. This is done by putting all of our weight from the hip to the floor through the legs applying strong pressure with the heels, sole and metastasis of the feet.

6. Counter attack

The best use will depend on the direction of the movement and the final situation of the defender. Here it is essential to practice and study the different Kamaes as well as how to adjust before an attack, because this prepares the use of certain blocking techniques. Another aspect that has to be kept in mind is the final situation of the block or the position in which the opponent ends up. If we select a counterattack or the next blocking technique keeping in mind the Kamae (or the starting point), it will be easier for us to respond and, subsequently, more effective. A clear example of this is the use of the classic Kamai of Hikite in the hip, which is specially indicated for the best performance of direct attacks-Tsuki. Even if this Kamae corresponds to the first stage in the evolution of a Karate-ka. This is why to progress on other levels it is necessary to do these techniques from different previous starting points or Kamaes, and adapt ourselves to the changing situations of the combat or to the exercise with a partner.

1. To sum up, this means the main idea of this section is, depending on the movement of the blocking technique, and most of all, on how the arms and hips are positioned, you will have to select the right counterattack, which could be Hente or en Seitei (counterattack with a different arm to the one used to defend yourself). This also includes the movement with one or both legs before, during or after the blocking technique or counterattack. In addition, going back in reference to the work in Hente, they reach their highest level of expression when done directly after a blocking technique, that is, without previous preparation. To be able to this, it is important to be as efficient with our techniques whether the distance is long, medium or short. (O-Waza: Long distance technique, Chu-Waza: Medium distance, Ko-Waza: Short distance technique).

7. Conclusion

We will use these last paragraphs to remind us of the most important aspects, that according to my understanding, summarizes the purpose of this study. First of all, it is important to point out the focus given to the different blocking or defensive techniques from different perspectives such as: their educational possibilities when teaching, the richness of the contents in the practice and

all of this without forgetting the philosophical and ethical vision. In a defense that is well done, the spirit of Karate-do is seen in its synthesis. On a technical level, I have explained some of the different blocking technique forms, their classification generate variations or adaptations, as well as important aspects when performing them.

Other important aspects of this work have been the study of the relation that exist between the best use of a counterattack, depending on the direction of the movement and the final position of the defender. This also includes the right blocking technique, depending on the follow up action that is to be used. And finally, the close connection of the predetermined Kamaes with the blocking techniques and the counterattacks performed with the same arm.