

Karate techniques consist basically of hand techniques and foot techniques. Hand techniques are divided into defensive or offensive moves. Defensive moves, known as Uke-Waza or blocking techniques include a variety of methods by which the hand or forearm is utilized to block, sweep, deflect, or hook an opponent's attacking weapon.

Some styles emphasize circular movements in their blocks, while others place emphasis on linear blocking movements. In general circular blocks are soft, while linear blocks are hard. The softer blocks tend to deflect an attack, while the harder blocks meet the attacking limb, often with enough force to render the limb useless. Most styles of karate include both hard and soft blocks, but tend to emphasize one or the other.

Offensive or attacking hand techniques are divided into punching techniques (Zuki-waza) and striking techniques (Uchi-waza).

Punching techniques are delivered in a straight line, usually from the hip to the target. The forefist (seiken) is most often employed as the striking point, but punching techniques can also be done with the palm heel (teisho), fingers (nukite) or fore knuckles (hiraken).

Striking techniques usually follow a circular path to the target, and are performed with a snapping motion of the elbow. There are many striking techniques in karate, and they employ all parts of the hand and arm including the back of the fist (riken), bottom of the fist (tettsui), back of the hand (haishu), side edge of hand (shuto), ridge part of hand (haito) and elbow (empi).

Foot techniques are divided into kicking techniques (keri-waza) and leg blocking techniques.

Kicking techniques are usually divided into snap kicks and thrust kicks. Snap kicks are performed by kicking and then immediately retracting the foot. These kicks make use of the snapping motion of the knee, and enable one to execute a series of kicks in quick succession. Thrust kicks are delivered in a straight line to the target, with the kicking leg locked out for a second, adding more power to the kicks. Kicks can be further subdivided into straight and circular kicks.

Straight kicks are delivered in a straight line to the front, side, back or downward. Circular kicks are delivered usually with a snapping motion of the knee and the swinging of the hips. These kicks travel in a circular path before hitting their target. Some styles of karate further divide their kicks into spinning kicks-in which the kick is delivered with a full or half-spin before hitting the target; wheel kicks-in which the kick is executed by swinging the whole leg at the opponent with little knee action.

Stomping kicks-in which the kicks are delivered from close in by lifting the knee high and then driving the heel into an opponent's knee, shin, ankle or instep. These kicks can also be used to kick a downed opponent. Jumping or Flying kicks while in mid air and can be done in any direction in a straight line or circularly. Some styles of karate even have spinning-jumping kicks in which the kicks are delivered while in mid air with a full spin of the body.

Leg Blocking techniques utilize the feet or leg to stop an opponent's kicking or punching attack. These blocks are usually used by jamming or sweeping to the side an opponent's attacking limb. They are valuable especially to low attacks to the legs or groin where the hands have difficulty reaching. Foot techniques utilize all parts of the leg, including the ball of the foot (koshi), side edge of the foot (sokuto), heel (kakato), instep (haisoku), sole (teisoku), toes (tsumasaki) and the knee (hittsui).

Other important elements of karate include stances, posture and body shifting. Since there are a multitude of moves in karate there are different stances for each situation. Stance must be flexible; it must be changed with direction and type of movement.

The stability of a stance depends to a great extent on the area included within its base. And, as the center of gravity is lowered, stability increases. Therefore, stances in which the hips are relatively low tend to be more stable than those in which the hips are high. A particular stance loses stability as the center of gravity is raised, but conversely, aids mobility. No one stance is suitable for all occasions. Generally, when moving from one stance to another, the hips remain at the same level and the feet slide lightly across the floor.

Some styles of karate, like Shotokan, advocate low, deep stances while others, like Shukokai,

prefer higher more mobile stances. Some are in between the two. The stances found in a style reflect the emphasis which the style places on such things as speed, power and hip movement.

In competition many of the traditionally deep stances are abandoned in favor of high mobile ones, since in sport karate speed is more important than power.

In most traditional styles the three main types of stances used are:

**NATURAL STANCES**-in which the muscles of the leg are relaxed (e.g. informal attention stance, open leg stance).

**OUTSIDE TENSION STANCES**-in which tension is put on the legs by forcing the knees outward (e.g. forward stance, back stance, horse stance).

**INSIDE TENSION STANCES**-in which tension is placed on the leg by forcing the knees inward (e.g. cat stance, hourglass stance).

Postures used in Karate include front facing-in which an opponent is faced straight on, with hips locked forward; and shoulders parallel to the target and half front facing-in which the opponent is faced forward but the shoulders and hips are turned away at a 45 degree angle. This is the most widely used position when moving and getting ready for attacking, as well as when defending against an attack. Side facing-in which the opponent is to the side. The shoulders are perpendicular to the target. This position has become widely used lately by karate competitors of non-traditional styles. Body shifting consists of moving from one position to another. In karate this can be done in a number of ways: by stepping, hopping, sliding, shuffling, jumping or turning.

Another important aspect of karate is hip rotation. Destructive force in karate is generated by turning the body and especially by rotating the hips to deliver a karate punch a smooth, swift, and level turn of the hips is essential to effectiveness.

In karate: the trunk works as the drive shaft giving the body greater motion which creates a larger and faster movement and more power.

Abdominal muscles play a major role in turning the hips and thigh muscles contribute. Power generated by rotating the hips is conveyed to the backbone then to the muscles of the chest and shoulders and finally arm and fist.

Breathing is also an essential part of karate training. Inhaling is deep and full, through the nose and into the stomach. Exhaling is through the mouth and gradually down toward the stomach. Karate breathing is designed not only to refresh the respiratory system and to conserve bodily energy but most importantly to strengthen the lower abdominal areas so that maximum internal strength can be used when delivering a blow.

When first beginning karate, a new student learns basic stances, punches, kicks and blocks. He works on improving his balance and muscle control and learns how to increase speed and power in his techniques. Breathing-when to inhale and when to exhale as a technique is delivered-is vital and students must begin to learn its proper application early in training.

Once basics have been mastered, multiple techniques are learned as well as the more difficult blocks, punches, strikes and kicks. At this stage students begin to work with a partner to perfect not just technique but distancing, timing, speed, power, and eye-body co-ordination. Known as Kumite, or sparring, this type of training puts all the moves of Karate into practical application.

There are two types of kumite: pre-arranged (Yakusoku-Kumite) or free (JiyuKumite).

In pre-arranged sparring, often called Kihon Kumite (basic sparring), the mode of attack and defense is always determined in advance. There are a number of pre-arranged sparring methods.

Ippon Kumite or one point sparring consists of participants facing each other from a fixed distance and taking turns in attacking and defending against pre-determined attacks. Usually one participant assumes a fighting position while the defender remains in a natural stance.

As the attacker steps forward and delivers his attack the defender steps either backward, forward, or to the side and blocks the move and then immediately counter attacks.

Gohon Kumite or five step sparring consists of one participant attacking five times in a row with the same technique while his partner moving back blocks the attacks and after the last attack he counters with a forceful counter attack.

Sanbon Kumite or three step sparring, consists of one participant attacking, with three pre-arranged techniques of any type and the defender retreats and blocks the attacks-at the end of the three attacks he delivers a forceful counter attack of his own.

Jiyu-ippou-kumite, semi-free one-step sparring, is the midway point between basic and free style sparring. Here both partners move around freely and one person attacks with a pre-arranged target. The defender blocks and counters the attack. A more advanced variation occurs in this category, when both the attacker and defender are pre-determined, but the method of attack and choice of weapon remain undisclosed. Yiyu-Kumite or free style sparring is the most advanced form of karate! training. Here both partners move around freely and exchange blows, blocks and counter attacks at random until one of them gets in a focused attack at his opponent's vital point. Here all aspects of karate come into play: punching, kicking, blocking, shifting, distancing, timing, and strategy. Jiyu-Kumite differs from competitive karate in that it is still a method of training whereby students should work with each other in perfecting their skills in a realistic situation. When attacks are thrown they are pulled just short of contact-so injury is avoided.

There are many different methods of free sparring, among them slow sparring in which all attacks are done slowly or done quickly with no power, kick sparring in which only the feet are used, or hand sparring in which only hands are used to attack and counter.

Another important training method in karate is KATA, formal exercises. In kata a number of pre-arranged defensive and offensive moves are performed in a fixed order of succession against several imaginary opponents. Kata include all the various hand and foot techniques used in karate, and incorporate rapid changes of technique, speed, balance, posture, position, breathing and muscle tension.

All kata begins with a defensive technique, followed by an attacking movement. Katas are of varying lengths, but all of them terminate in their initial positions.

All styles of karate! have kata but some emphasize its practice more than others. Although kata differs from style to style in most of the traditional karate styles, the katas have a lot of similarity because they originate from Okinawan karate masters. Although recently the practice of kata has been on the decline, its practice is still important, especially in the Japanese and Okinawan systems.

While sport karate is a product of the 20th century its roots can be traced to ancient India, China, and Okinawa. India, which developed yoga and its diaphragmatic breathing methods, has exerted influence on numerous combative techniques throughout the Orient.

Many martial scholars consider India the birthplace of all martial arts. During the 5th and 6th centuries B.C. Indian combat techniques similar to modern karate were transmitted to China by Zen Buddhist monks.

It is thought that at the end of the 5th century A.D. a Buddhist priest named Bodhidharma traveled to China from India to instruct at the Shaolin monastery. There he taught the monks a combination of yoga and Indian fist-fighting that became the kung-fu system of Shao-lln. As the art proliferated throughout China, variation and local style appeared.

The fighting techniques of China were subsequently carried to the off shore islands, most notably Okinawa, by waves of immigrants, refugees, and priests. Weaponless combat, called te (hand), had already existed on Okinawa; with the ban against carrying arms issued by the Japanese occupation in 1470, these empty-hand techniques thrived.

Later, with the aid of Chinese kung-fu masters who fled from China, te developed into a crude form of karate.

At first the new art was translated to mean T'ang hand, or China hand, to indicate its Chinese origin. It was not until the 20th century, when Gichin Funakoshi, an Okinawan karate instructor-introduced Okinawa-te to Japan, that it acquired the name karate. Yasutsune Itosu of Okinawa, an exponent of shuri-te (shoral-rtfu), is generally acknowledged as the first to teach karate as a sport. Itosu made this innovation in 1905 for middle-school students when occupying Japanese authorized karate for inclusion in the physical education curriculum. But it is the Japanese who are cited as the pioneers in the use of karate-do as an amateur sport, and the Americans to use of karate as a professional form of competition.

In the years following Funakoshi's arrival in Japan, other styles of karate-do were developed. Many Okinawan masters brought their styles to Japan, among them Kenwa Mabun, who introduced Shorin-ryu in 1930, and Chopn Mqagl, who combined hard Okinawan karate with soft Chinese forms and called it gop-ryu (hard-soft way). Other styles arising in Japan include wado-ryu, shukukal, and kyokushinkal. Rivalry among these groups was so intense that each style practiced its art in secret.

Following World War II, owing to the presence of many western servicemen in Japan and Okinawa, karate gradually acquired devotees in America and Europe. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, karate was well established, and by the 1970s, the art was practiced extensively throughout the world.