

Karate vs. Continuous Attacks

“One cannot use continuous attacks against true Karate. That is because the blocks of true Karate make it impossible for the opponent to launch a second attack.” –from a Collection of Saying by Motobu Choki (translated by Yuriko & Patrick McCarthy, from Legend of the Fist, Vol. 1)

Most traditional karate might think Choki MOTOBU, renown both for his size and for his fighting prowess, must have meant that in true karate, the blocks are so powerful that they end the fight by damaging the opponent’s attacking limb. Rocky Marciano used to be known for battering his opponent’s arms with powerful blows as they covered up to protect themselves. Arms bruised and weakened, they eventually let a blow in, and down they went. It sounds very much like Motobu was suggesting the mirror image of Marciano’s tactic—that a karate-ka batter his opponent’s initial attacking blow to discourage following up with another.

Certainly this is possible. Many years ago, one of my students reported that he had gotten into a argument with a “friend”, perhaps after indulging in libations, that ended up with the friend taking not simply one swing at him, but a series of swings, all of which my student blocked until his comrade was tired of making the aggressive effort. Admittedly, the attacker was not a big, bad biker dude from *Born Losers*, and my student was not trying hurt the attacker but trying to avoid launching his own strikes, thus also avoiding trouble with the authorities (and perhaps with me). The interchange *did* show the effectiveness of trained blocks; however, it did not demonstrate that a single karate block, or even several, could prevent additional attacks.

A different tactic is to avoid an antagonist’s initial attack and block in such a way that he has to contort himself in order to deliver a second blow. This is done frequently and expertly in Hanshi Bruce Juchnik’s Koshu-ryu Kempo. The fundamentals are explained in my Master Class DVD called [*Dealing With the Attacker’s Second Blow*](#).

A third tactic is to block an attack such that the attacker is immediately off-balanced. This action both allows the defender to follow-up, if appropriate, and also prevents the attacker from following up. In my DVD program called [*Off-balancing Blocks*](#), I explain how this is done.

So Master Motobu’s “the blocks of true Karate make it impossible for the opponent to launch a second attack” could have meant three things: (1) powerful, damaging blocks, (2) avoidance with blocks that check the attacker’s rotation so that he cannot follow-up, and (3) blocks that off-balance the attacker so that he cannot follow-up.

Because of Motobu’s size and reputation, we tend to think he means the first option, but we should remember that Motobu Sensei was also associated with two masters that were much smaller than he, but whom he respected as martial artists: Shito-ryu’s Kenwa MABUNI and Shindo Jinen-ryu’s Yasuhiro KONISHI, both of which were known for their technical excellence.

I suggest that it is not only Motobu's reputation as a tough brawler that biases our interpretation of what he meant, but also *our own* unspoken preferences. Many of us took up karate for self-defense precisely because we were *not* tough brawlers, and secretly wanted to be. A moment's reflection, however, suggests that if we were not physically or attitudinally like Master Motobu, it might be to our advantage to emulate the physically smaller (and attitudinally more reserved) Masters Mabuni and Konishi, at least in their technical excellence.

Develop all the power in your blocks that you desire, but also think about mastering the tactics of preventing "second rotation" and off-balancing on contact.