

The Missing *Kumite*

There is no safe way to simulate a sudden single attack in dojo training. As a result, traditional hard-style martial artists (from arts like karate, kempo, Tang Soo Do, TKD, etc.) are compelled to employ some version of one-step sparring so that students can safely develop both powerful attacks and powerful defenses.

Much of the training in kempo centers on pre-arranged attacks with an emphasis on creative combinations as defense. TKD concentrates on keeping a distance once the attack has been thrown, both for safety and so that the defender can fit in his/her kicking retaliations. Most Japanese fist-systems employ a short sliding scale of one-step drills, gradually increasing the complexity of the attack and the creativity of the defense.

Even with a sliding scale, however, dojo seldom use many types of relatively safe one-step drills unless their sensei have creative bents and see the gaps in traditional training.

Yakusoku Ippon Kumite are “promised”, “agreed upon,” or “pre-arranged” one-step engagements. In a sense, all engagements in the dojo must use some “yakusoku” element. While we execute our counters, we must agree not to take advantage of the defender’s poorly timed or poorly executed response nor the attacker’s frozen posture. Also, at least for beginners, many of the attack-defense scenarios are pre-arranged by the curriculum or by Sensei. In other words, rather than responding to a simulated attack in creative way, the defender responds in pre-arranged “kata-like” way.

The next slide upwards in traditional Japanese one-step “sparring” is *Jiyu Ippon Kumite* or free one-step engagements. The “free” can be deceptive here since in many schools the attacker is required to announce the level of the attack (high, medium, or low) before he/she executes. Low kicks or sweeps are usually not allowed.

After this, students jump into free sparring or *Jiyu Kumite*.

Between yakusoku (pre-arranged) and jiyu ippon kumite (free one-step engagements), instructors often put a transitional requirement in their system, whether or not it is considered “traditional”. My Shotokan instructor, for example, required three-level one-step sparring, but against lunge punch only. It is at this in-between level that instructors should, in my opinion, create kumite drills that address as many aspects of a sudden-attack interchange as possible. Unfortunately, most instructors often repeat without question what they have learned, better instructors borrow drills they have seen in other schools, and excellent instructors create drills on the fly depending on what their students need.

Basic pre-arranged sparring, despite the fact that it employs a formal attack that would never be seen on the street, may initially address the student’s need to react with correct distance

and timing and to respond quickly with blows that would actually work. Free one-step sparring might address the student's need to handle different angles of attack. But everything else the student needs for attack-engagements is up to the middle ground, the modified one-step sparring created *ad hoc* by the instructor. That huge creative middle addresses training needs by asking questions like: (1) can the attacker throw a second blow?

(2) can the defender deal with a second blow if it is thrown?

(3) can the defender deal with attacks besides lunge punches?

(4) can the defender respond from an un-ready stance, facing at an angle, for instance?

(5) can the defender respond well if he flinches, is off-balance, or is hit?

Without these missing kumite drills, not only is there no safe way to simulate a sudden single attack in the dojo, there is also no way to train against any sudden attack outside the dojo.