



# GKR KARATE JOURNEY

## KUMITE TIPS

### 1) Develop Your Jiten Ushiro Geri (Spinning Back Kick)

The Spinning Back Kick (jiten = spin, ushiro = back, geri = kick) is a very powerful kick and one that a student of lower grade may not be able to control or conduct safely. It's important that before you start using it as part of your kumite arsenal that you feel comfortable with the technique and your control of the technique.

#### Key Technical And Strategic Aspects For Jiten Ushiro Geri (The Spinning Back Kick)

- a) Implement the full body weight and momentum into the kick. The Spinning Back Kick, whilst slower than other kicks, is far more powerful because of the tremendous amount of force that can be generated through, 1) momentum created by edging forward and turning the body, and 2) thrusting the weight forward. When executing this kick, many students fail to implement these two important advantages because their weight (thus energy) falls away from the target. This occurs when the student leans too far forwards during the kicking process or by failing to move their weight forward with the kick.
  - » To combat this, keep the upper body predominantly upright (a slight lean forward is important for power) and during the kick, ensure your weight is moving towards the target.
- b) It's not so much a spin, rather a 180 degree turn. Many students treat the Spinning Back Kick (due to its name) as a spinning kick. When performing a Spinning Hook Kick (jiten ura mawashi geri) the spinning of the body is important for power. When performing a Spinning Back Kick by contrast, if the body is still spinning during the kick, the energy is not sent directly into the target.
  - » They key is to quickly turn 180 degrees (turning your back to the opponent). Once the kick commences its journey, all energy should be travelling in a straight line to the target.
  - » Have your front foot slide forward slightly (creating momentum) and allow it to cross the path of your back foot. Then turn on your axis 180 degrees and kick in a straight line through to the target. For the advanced student, the front foot should not have to step across at all.
- c) Ensure it's a true back kick. Many students, because of their excess spinning, end up executing a Spinning Side Kick (jiten yoko geri). This weakens the kick, slows it

## Brown Belt (3<sup>rd</sup> Kyu)



- d) down and exposes the groin.
- d) Spot your target first. Whilst stepping the front foot across, keep your head facing directly at your opponent. The moment you begin your 180 degree turn, have the head rotate 360 degrees (so that it spots the target quickly). In simple terms you should not lose sight of the target for more than a split second.
- e) Get your distance right. Many students end up too close to the target prior to kicking. This means the kick is unable to generate any momentum and leaves the back exposed for an anticipated attack. You must measure your distance correctly so, after sliding the front foot forward and across, you are just one leg's distance away from the opponent.
- f) Disguise your intentions. Do not make clear your intentions to attempt a Spinning Back Kick. This will result in an opponent backing away to safety or moving in and attacking your back. Students telegraph their intentions by:
  - i) Starting in a side on stance. Every single technique in your arsenal should begin from your standard fighting stance. Every kick, punch, strike, sweep, attack, counter, pick-off etc, must be workable from your

regular stance. If you change stance to suit techniques (eg, raise in stance for kicks, or narrow your stance for Spinning Back Kicks) then your opponent will be clear to your intentions.

- ii) Stepping the front foot across in too obvious a fashion. If you step across too slowly, step across too far, or step directly across rather than edge forward, your opponent will be quick to see your intentions. All aspects of the step should be subtle, and as you become more proficient, should be minimised to no step at all.
- iii) Failing to distract your opponent. As previously stated, while the Spinning Back Kick is extremely powerful, it is also slower than most other kicks - this gives an opponent longer reaction time. Disguising your Spinning Back Kick will help to minimise this reaction time. While there are many ways to do this, one simple method is to throw out a lunge punch as your front foot slides forward and across. This will capture your opponent's attention and mean your step will be largely unnoticed.

## 2. Develop Your Ushiro Mawashi Geri (Hook Kick)

Unlike the Spinning Back Kick and foot sweeps, the Hook Kick is an advanced technique that most karate-ka would refrain from using in self-defence. But this does not make its practise a waste.

» Hook Kicks, whilst predominantly used for fun in kumite, develop many useful skills that a karate-ka may not develop were they never to engage in their practise. Some of these include:

- Increased leg strength
- Increased leg speed
- Increased flexibility
- Improved footwork and foot speed
- Improved coordination

### Key Technical And Strategic Aspects For The Ushiro Mawashi Geri (Hook Kick)

- a) The best way to learn a Hook Kick is to execute a Side Kick slightly to one side of a target (eg, 6-inches to the side). Just as the leg is about to reach its full extension, hook the foot back towards the target keeping the knee where it is. Never allow your leg to straighten during the kick.
- b) As you get better with practise, while the foot is hook back, thrust your hips in the opposite direction of the hooking foot.
- c) While it's generally used as a head level technique, practise kicking low to develop:
  - i) The coordination in your legs.
  - ii) The coordination to lean the body back slightly simultaneously with the kick (this creates a lever to help the kick with both power and height).
  - iii) The coordination to push your hips in the opposite direction to the foot. In essence, while the foot swings back, the hips push forward slightly.

d) The Hook Kick is generally used as an attacking technique but it can be used successfully as a defensive technique for the advanced karate-ka. This is because it can be delivered from very close range (flexibility and leg strength are required). To be used defensively, the key is to wait for an opponent to attack. Once they do launch their attack, lean back (causing their technique to fall short) and simultaneously execute the kick. The kick will travel up the side of the opponent and strike from outside their peripheral vision.

e) The most common footwork used to execute the Hook Kick are those used for other kicks. These include:

- i) Similar to the Stepping Side Kick: From fighting stance, bring the back foot up directly behind the front foot, and then allow the front foot to kick. Try not to have any time where the feet are together so the front foot should start the kick whilst the back foot is still moving up.
- ii) Similar to many kicks off the front foot: Raise the front foot off the ground and simultaneously hop the back foot forward to close the distance. As you are moving forwards, execute the kick. While this is weaker, it does not telegraph your intentions.
- iii) Similar to a Round Kick off the back leg: Bring your back leg around towards your opponent as though you are executing a round kick. As the knee points to the front, instead of extending the leg with your round kick, allow the knee to keep travelling past the centre line. Once the knee passes the centre line, start extending the leg to make a Hook Kick. In short, the kick appears as though it will hit the opponent's body on one side yet ultimately hits their head on the opposite side.

f) Disguise your kicks. For a Hook Kick to be successful it must travel around 6 times further than a punch. This gives your opponent a much longer reaction time. Your goal should be to minimise this reaction time by distracting them. This can be done by:

- i) Pretending to throw a body kick such as a body level Front or Round Kick, then surprising them with a head kick.
- ii) Launching a body level Reverse Punch or Lunge Punch (lowering their guard and allowing you to get close) and then executing the Hook Kick as you retract your striking arm.

## 3. The Dojo Is Your Science Laboratory

Do you find yourself using the same 3 or 4 techniques in kumite? Do you find yourself attacking with the same 1 or 2 combinations? Do you find yourself using the same defensive strategy every time?

» There are no trophies for winning in the dojo. And being the best in your dojo doesn't translate to being the most prepared for self-defence.

» Don't see the dojo as a place where you have to win. See it as your science laboratory where you experiment

with things to develop new formulas (new techniques and strategies).

» Having reached Brown belt you are permitted to start using new techniques. While this is not saying you should do nothing but these, you can certainly start.

» Start experimenting with new combinations. It doesn't matter if they don't work the first ten times. If the strategy behind them is sound, then it's a matter of developing the footwork, coordination, hand speed etc so they eventually become successful. Any technique will work for you if you work for it.

» Don't worry if opponents who you normally dominate start to get the better of you. Don't tie your ego up with your sparring results. Karate is about learning to control your ego so accepting the fact that lower grades are dominating you while you are developing new skills is a way to test how well you can control your ego.

» Be prepared to take one step backwards in order to take two steps forwards.

#### 4. Stay Focused On What Works For Self-Defence

This point is, in some ways, designed to keep you in check from the point 3 'See the Dojo As Your Science Laboratory'. It's important that you don't go too far and only experiment with new techniques. You still need to stick to what works best for self-defence.

» While is a great idea to try new things and develop some flair, it's important that you don't forget what works in self-defence.

» Running an opponent across the dojo with 20 punches looks great in kumite but is unlikely to happen in self-defence against a large aggressive opponent. Likewise, throwing nothing but head level kicks in kumite is impressive but it's not a tactic you might use on the street.

» Everything does have a time and place and kumite is supposed to be exciting and challenging. So by all means challenge yourself with advanced techniques but these cannot become the backbone to your kumite. Just because you can run everyone around in your dojo does not mean you should.

» In self-defence, the principles we have discussed since day one of the kumite journey are what work best in self-defence and should make up at a major part of your kumite. A few examples are:

- i) **Attack with kime.** The more techniques you put together the less kime each technique will have.
- ii) **Weight distribution.** Your whole body should be involved in each strike. And immediately after striking the whole body should move out again.
- iii) **Attack with footwork and use stances.** Never run, it has less reach, less power and leaves you open to being tackled to the ground.
- iv) **Quality counter attacks.** Remember your attacker will likely throw the first strike in self-defence.
- v) **Zanshin.** Chasing an opponent across the dojo with 20 punches shows little zanshin. The longer you stand toe-to-toe with them the more opportunity they have to land a lucky punch. Single and double

attacks followed by immediate zanshin are far more effective in self-defence.

#### 5. Continue To Develop Your Senjutsu (Combat Strategy)

Do you spar with the same strategies and techniques against every opponent you face? Being able to adapt to your opponent is pivotal for not only becoming a great kumite exponent but also for self-defence.

» We introduced this concept to your at Red belt, but it will be something you spend your entire karate life working on.

» Pre-brown belt we spend most of our time on ourselves. For example, "What technique should I do?" and "How should I do it?" As our techniques become more and more instinctive we can start to think less about ourselves.

» This is when we can start to spend more time thinking about our opponent. We can start to assess them on the fly, constantly looking for:

##### a) What are their strengths and how can I best take these away from them?

When you take an opponent's strengths away they lose confidence. The result of this is that you also gain confidence. Confidence is like a see-saw. There is only so much to go around, therefore when one person's confidence drops (like one end of a see-saw) the other's immediately rises (like the other end of a see saw).

» For example, if an opponent has a great right hand Reverse Punch, constantly circling in a direction away from their right hand will reduce its effectiveness and ultimately frustrate them and minimise their confidence.

##### b) What are their weaknesses and how can I exploit these?

Too many karate-ka focus on their opponent's strengths. Everyone has weaknesses, look for these and apply techniques and strategies that will best help you exploit them.

» For example, an opponent has fast attacks (too fast for you even attempt to pick off, and too fast for you to try and block then counter). They also have great defence. It seems they are too good for you on both fronts. But if you look closely, perhaps they have poor zanshin. Because their attacks are so good they are used to opponents running for the hills (or scoring on them). And because of this, they momentarily drop their hands after they finish attacking. Therefore your strategy might be to wait for them to attack. Then edge back bit by bit making them fall short by a few inches. And the moment they finish attacking is the moment you start yours.

##### c) What style of fighter are they and what senjutsu (combat strategy) will work best against it?

Are they a kicker? An attacker? A counter-striker? Do they mostly attack with single techniques, or combinations? It's important you develop a strategy to apply against different styles of fighting. Not only so you can become a great kumite exponent but because

in self-defence you need to have acquired the habit of thinking strategically.

Perhaps you will be attacked by two people. Or attacked in a confined space (like a kitchen), attacked by a person trying to wrestle with you, attacked by someone trying to hit you etc.

» The more you practise strategising the more it will serve you. You will get to a point where within a few seconds you can establish their strengths, their weaknesses and their style of fighting and come up with a strategy of your own to combat these.

## 6. Be Mindful Of The Groin

The groin is an illegal area to attack in kumite for one very good reason; you could severely injure your sparring partner. With that in mind, it tells you that it is a very valuable attacking area for real life combat.

» While you all know this, it goes beyond just knowledge if you want to make it work. One potential downside to dojo sparring in terms of real life self-defence is that we develop combat instincts around the rules of kumite.

### So How Do We Avoid This?

The key is, whilst sparring, is to always be mindful of the paths you 'could' take.

**Example One:** Next time you are sparring, take note of your opponent's stance. Would you be able to execute a groin kick to finish the bout instantly if you chose? Of course you don't act on this, but the thought is a good habit to have in the face of confrontation.

**Example Two:** Upon being attacked, while you may be blocking, before countering with a straight stomach punch, it enters your mind that you could actually back fist the groin should you choose. Once again, of course you do not, and if the thought ever transpired into action, then you would have to cull back. However, having these thoughts helps you identify moments in a person's attack where their groin is open and vulnerable, and where you would be able to strike it, whilst still defending yourself from the oncoming attacks.

## 7. Unlock The Power Of Visualisation

Reaching Brown belt means in many ways you are at a cross roads. You want to go from being good at the basic kumite techniques, strategies and principles (including footwork) and become great at them; setting yourself apart as an advanced karate-ka. Likewise you will be excited by developing advanced techniques.

» With great expectations of their journey, some Brown belts feel discouraged when neither their current arsenal fails to develop quickly enough, let alone developing new arsenal.

» One way to break this is to start to practise the art of visualisation.

» We all know how to visualise. It's like conscious day dreaming... conscious, detailed, daydreaming!

The problem is many don't utilise it because they don't understand how powerful it really is. There is no denying it, visualisation works. Countless studies have proven that visualisation improves sporting performance and almost every professional athlete on the planet is coached in the benefits of visualisation.

» Years ago, a large group of people who had never played basketball before were brought in for a study. They were all given a basket ball, given some coaching and allowed to practise shooting baskets for a few hours. Then they all underwent a test where their shooting percentage was recorded.

» Later they were broken into three groups, sent back to their accommodation quarters and told they would be retested the following day. However:

- i) The first group were each given a basketball and told, at some point between now and tomorrow's test to come back and practise for at least one hour.
- ii) The second group were not given a basketball. They were told to relax and forget about basketball.
- iii) The third group were not given a basketball either. However they were told to, at some point between now and tomorrow's test to spend at least an hour visualising themselves successfully shooting basket after basket.

The following day all three groups returned and completed another test where their success rate was recorded. The results found:

- i) The first group who had spent at least an hour practising had made significant improvements in their success rate.
- ii) The second group, who had not even thought about basketball, marked no improvement.
- iii) The third group, who were only allowed to visualise shooting baskets, had also made improvements - almost to their level of the first group.

The study concluded that the brain finds it difficult to distinguish between actual practise and visualised practise. This means that the body can learn a skill and develop muscular coordination purely by mental effort (visualisation).

» This means that you can develop your skills when you are at the traffic lights, on a bus, at home listening to music... any time!

## 8. Confuse The Lion

Have you ever seen a lion tamer? A lion tamer steps into a cage with an unfriendly lion carrying only a whip and a chair. The more important of the two is the chair. Many people often ponder as to why a chair? It makes far more sense to use a long pole with a tazer on the end but as it turns out, this would hardly help you from an angry lion.

» Now the reason the chair is so powerful is that a chair has four legs (or prongs). When a lion tamer gets in the cage to meet an unsettled lion he or she will move around

the cage holding the chair out in front of them, constantly moving it in front of the lion. Having four targets (four legs or prongs) moving around in its field of vision, the lion finds it very difficult to focus on its target. Now when we say 'focus' we do not mean the lion cannot see properly or its vision is blurred, it purely means it is unable to set its sights on a specific area to attack and as such, it will usually do nothing.

### **So How Does This Relate To Kumite?**

A competitor who regularly counter-strikes or picks off (anticipates) during kumite functions similarly to the lion. They like to sit in their poised stance and focus in on their target. When they are able to focus in on a target and have mentally committed to this technique they grow in confidence because it no longer matters what you attack with; the moment you move forward they will launch their strike to their chosen target.

### **So You Deal With These Types Of Fighters As You Would Tame A Lion**

- 1. Constantly move.** Moving or circling around, and constantly changing directions, distances etc will prevent them from being able to sit in their poised stance. They will have to constantly move out of stance to keep up with your movement.
- 2. Use all four prongs.** The four chair legs (or prongs) divide the lion's focus making it difficult to hone in on a chosen victim (in this case, your head, chest, ribs etc). You can do the same by keeping all four of your prongs busy. In your case, the four prongs are your left hand, right hand, left leg and right leg. Most fighters only use their favourite attacks but this makes it easy for your opponent to focus on a target because their attention is not divided. By throwing out techniques from all four prongs the defender must keep their peripheral vision open (making it difficult to tunnel their focus in to one technique).

Right now some of you may not like this idea because you aren't confident throwing attacks from all four prongs. But keep this in mind - you don't have to throw each technique out to score. In fact you shouldn't! You should purposely throw techniques out too far to score. It doesn't matter if you aren't scoring with every technique, what matters is that you are dividing your opponents attention and giving them much to think about.

» While it seems easy and is highly effective, we have waited until 3rd kyu to offer this kumite suggestion because it's not recommended for lower grades. Too often when a lower grade tries this strategy they make errors and end up getting themselves into trouble. For example, they throw a technique to distract their opponent or divide their attention, but end up too close afterwards, so their opponent attacks. Or they throw a technique as a distraction, yet recover slowly or have poor zanshin, seeing this their opponent attacks.

» As a higher grade however, you will have a wider arsenal of 'refined' techniques. You will also have a much better sense of distance and recovery (zanshin). Your opponent

will not see many openings; in fact they will see none. And as a result, they will hesitate.

» There is no better way to build confidence in your opponent than to offer obvious openings. Spotting openings will give them a target to focus on; this in turn sets their mind into gear to hitting that target.

» In contrast there is no better way to reduce your opponent's confidence than to offer them no obvious openings. When an opponent does not have a target to focus on they will hesitate and withdraw.