



KATA COMBAT

BUNKAI TRAINING

DRILLS

Part 2

By Rakesh Patel



I state in "Bunkai Training Drills Part 1" that in order for training drills to be effective, they should be focussed and apply the sound combat principles extracted from Kata. The drills must be kept simple and be scalable - simplicity allows us to focus on the key principles and scalability allows us to extend these concepts in appreciation of just how chaotic combat is. Taking a stepwise approach to the drill and applying progression ensures that we are better equipped to deal with the chaos of combat.

This article builds upon the methods described in Part 1. The drills outlined below are simple and based on some key Kata Combat concepts. These concepts are explicitly identified in this article.

We have established that when all out striking, it's our primary strikes that are first chosen, as it's their gross dynamics that makes them primary. However in the chaos of combat, it's absolutely vital we have a backup set of secondary motions in our arsenal. Simply placing all reliance on what we feel most comfortable with is both naive and dangerous.

We as martial artists must have the self-awareness to recognise when a switch from primary to secondary and vice versa is required. Executing trained primary techniques should be our first choice, but we must be able to adapt and employ the secondary when required. If having switched to secondary striking, we must then seek opportunities to revert back to primary striking as soon as is possible whilst maintaining an offensive mindset.

One could argue that this recognition is inherent within us, and one would naturally revert back to primary striking, as by definition that is the nature of a primary strike. However, it's our training that will dictate to what extent this prevails under the stresses of combat.

Let us address how we can train and test the ability to seamlessly employ primary and secondary strikes as part of our offensive attacks within the realms of self-protection and defence. To recap: In Part 1, I lead through an example where my straight left (Reverse Punch) was used as my primary strike. My opponent upon being struck, covered the impacted area, forcing me to 'strip' their arm away (Downward Block) so that I could continue the primary strike onslaught.

Preserving this simplicity, let us apply some scale to this drill and add an additional layer of variability – but variability in that we explore further the instinctive reactions from my opponent as a theme. To ensure that the Kata motions are applied effectively, it's important to progressively build on this drill. I've therefore divided the drill into stages.

The **first stage** addresses the increased scale. Essentially, I perform the drill as set out in Part 1 and then add on my own follow up strikes and actions from each of the 3 intermediate techniques:

1. Shuto Uke (Knife Hand Block)
2. Gedan Barai (Downward Block)
3. Hiza Geri (Knee Kick)

The **second stage** adds a further level of variability and pressure is added as my opponent now reacts instinctively to my follow up strikes. Here I seek to either continue the attack, or transition to primary strikes before making my escape.

The **third stage** puts the previous stages together and forms a drill that encompasses all the principles outlined so far. The drill tests application of those principles under increased pressure. The notion of switching between primary and secondary strikes whilst maintaining the forward combative drive and advantage is the theme marbled throughout the drill. The third stage is where all the previous elements of the drill are put together and run as a whole.

First Stage

Leading on from Part 1, I explore the follow up strikes applicable from the three finishing positions. As an example, it must be stressed that the Knife Hand Block is purely a position of transition from secondary to ultimately primary strikes. The Knife Hand Block is a vital secondary technique as it ensures that the attacking onslaught is maintained. Therefore I have various choices as to how to transition to other effective (and ultimately primary) strikes. A key element is to choose and practice techniques that are effective under pressure. The most efficient way to ensure that I emerge the victor from the physical combat is to end it as soon as possible, and this means firing effective primary techniques. Any advantage that the secondary technique provides is not just maintained with further secondary strikes but exploited through further primary strikes. It's therefore critical to practice whilst under pressure, the ability to transform secondary strikes into primary strikes as quickly and effectively as possible.

The three secondary techniques presented in Part 1 are executed reactively to my opponent's instinctive actions (these are reactions to my primary left cross). I explore each one of these secondary techniques and record below the follow up technique(s) that they facilitate:

1.1 Secondary Technique: Shuto Uke (Knife Hand Block)
Follow up Technique(s): Elbow Strike & Rear Hand Hook

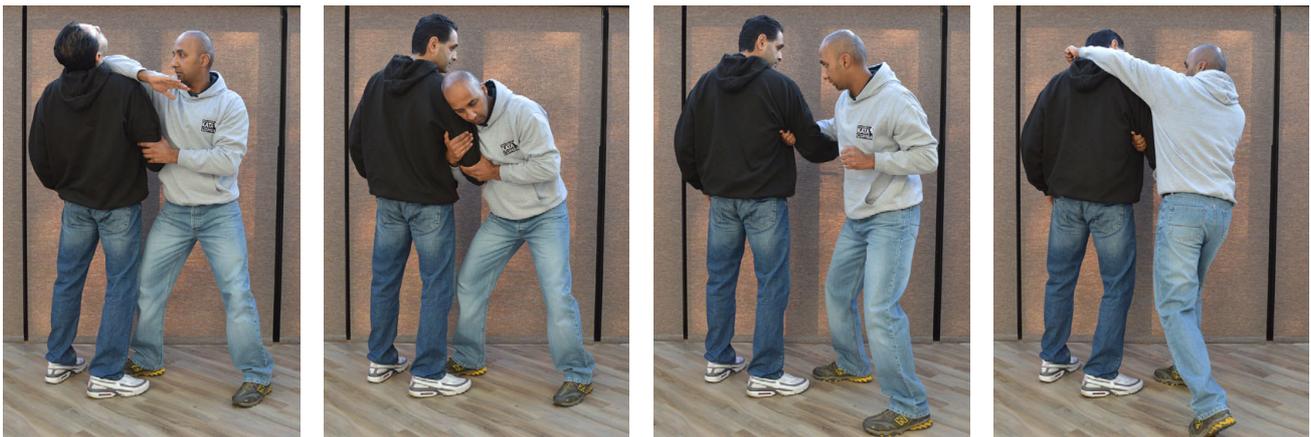


The nature of this application of the Knife Hand Block means that I'm controlling one of my opponent's arms with one of mine whilst slamming my forearm into their neck with forward drive. This does mean however that they will have one 'free' arm with which to strike out. My priority is to strike quickly, effectively and in such a way that renders my opponent unable to strike back.

Knife Hand Block allows me to grasp my opponent's arm with my controlling rear hand whilst seamlessly striking their neck/jaw with the elbow of my front arm. What makes this elbow strike seamless is the starting position; it's effectively executed from the finishing position of the actual Knife Hand Block forearm smash, making for an efficient transition of techniques.

The elbow strike is a secondary strike. Due to its quick and effective execution from my lead arm, it has two main attributes in my favour:

- It distracts my opponent from using their free arm in attack or defence
- Sets up my rear hand primary shot



In executing the elbow strike, bearing the above two key points in mind, implies that I move off at a slight angle away from my opponent's free arm – this shift, both moves me away from their free arm as well as facilitating the following primary strike. The move off at an angle also allows me to strike optimally as in shifting my body weight through footwork, facilitates a true strike from the floor upwards as my rear foot is grounded. In shifting off to angle I replace my rear controlling hand of my opponent's arm, with my lead hand – rather like an abbreviated "Arm Drag" found in grappling/wrestling disciplines. This also aids in avoiding further action from my opponent's rear arm by turning their body, and thus their rear shoulder, away from me.

The close proximity of this combative range gives me the opportunity to offload multiple rear hand Hook Punches. Striking in this manner and from this position is a skill that is isolated in class training sessions frequently.

1.2 Secondary Technique: Gedan Barai (Downward Block)
Follow Up Technique(s): Bottom Fist Strike & Stepping Punch



It's fair to state that there are many applications of the Downward Block, even within the way it is outlined in Part 1 (as a controlling technique, and not a strike). With this in mind, I'll focus on using this type of application to facilitate an effective primary strike.

Analysing this application of Downward Block reveals that, even when applied correctly, at best it will only really control my opponent briefly as no debilitating strike is executed. So an effective follow up is vital. With this controlling technique, I run the risk of my opponent recovering, significantly reducing any advantage I have and in the worst case, gaining the upper hand.

In this case, both my arms are 'tied up' in controlling just the one arm of my opponent. The advantage this brings is that I have the superior mechanical and combative position – I'm almost upright with my hips underneath my shoulders, my opponent is doubled over with hyper extensive pressure applied at their elbow joint. However, as stated above, my advantage is easily reversed if not exploited.

In order to capitalise on this advantage, timing and speed is the key. Under pressure, I should execute multiple distracting strikes to their arm in quick succession to first maintain my advantage before stepping in with a primary strike to a different target.



The quick secondary technique that I practice in this situation is the Bottom Fist Strike (or a downward forearm smash). To effectively execute this I first ensure I apply maximum downward pressure in the Downward Block controlling technique (to gain the advantage), then in the first instance, suddenly changing the emphasis of my lead arm from a pushing motion to one of a sharp dropping motion to their elbow joint (or just above) to maintain the advantage. During this strike, my rear hand is used to not only aid my strike but also to control my opponent's body as a whole, through pinning in at my side (*hikite* position). In each of the follow up consecutive strikes, my body weight gradually migrates backwards through footwork maintaining my rear controlling hand at my side. With this position, I'm more likely to move my opponent with me as they are more closely connected to my centre of gravity. This backward migration allows me use my body weight in driving my opponent down towards the ground and prevents them from regaining their standing position. Having maintained this advantage, I now exploit this and move in from a retreating direction to a forward and downward primary strike. I step in with a lunge punch - by pulling my lead leg back slightly to facilitate this.

Before I alleviate any downward pressure through stepping back slightly, I switch my lead hand from striking to pushing down at their shoulder setting up my primary strike.

Attention is now taken away from their arm as the lunge punch is aimed at the head/neck area, avoiding the upper section of their head.

1.3 Secondary Technique: Hiza Geri (Knee Kick)
Follow Up Technique(s): Forearm Smash & Escape



As described in Part 1, executing the Knee Kick is by far the most favourable of the three outcomes after having already executed my primary strike. Executing the Knee Kick implies that my opponent is in a significantly disadvantageous position, kneeling or prone.

With this in mind, it's important to isolate this scenario in practice and experience effective striking to a point where a successful escape can be made relatively easily. In this particular situation, I practice executing a good solid primary strike followed by a push or pull of my opponent to a fully grounded position before escaping.

The primary strike open to me here is an angular (downward) Forearm Smash to my opponent's jaw/neck area. I have the advantage of not being in direct contact with them, our limbs are not being seized, or 'tied up' performing control like functions.

Note that my vastly greater advantage can be diminished through careless footwork in executing the Knee Kick. Despite my opponent being in a kneeling position, the Knee Kick must still be effective through accuracy and the correct positioning of my feet. Whilst I actually perform the Knee Kick, I'm vulnerable whilst standing on one supporting leg. A well timed push from my opponent could degrade the fight to ground based grappling – a crisis point in any physical combat.

I make use of the fact that my kicking leg returns to the floor and execute a primary strike as my leg, and hence my weight is grounded. This will inevitably mean we are at very close quarters and within grappling range. Opting for a follow up Forearm Strike has two main attributes in my favour:

- It creates the required distance to ensure the primary strike is effective
- The extra distance created aids the escape (pull/push to floor)



Directly after the punch I execute on grounding my kicking foot, I choose to create the required distance for the Forearm Smash though a combination of footwork and the controlling of my opponent's head with my lead hand. As I step my front (just grounded) foot away from my opponent, I slap my hand onto the back of their head/neck. This slapping motion not only acts a controlling technique as I position my feet, but also provides a reference point for the actual Forearm Smash with my rear arm.

Second Stage

For the purpose of the drill, and in particular the training application that the drill is designed to test and enable, I address the ability to transition to primary striking and then escape.

This principle explores the close quarter fighting range that the above principles and techniques create. Self-Defence based combat at best will, unless finished within the first few seconds degrade to less than arm's length range. Trading strikes at this range will probably not be sustained and grappling is inevitable.

The three scenarios detailed in Part 1 allow us to practice the combative principles found in Kata and when extended to this article (Part 2), they lend themselves to practice and address close quarter combat and the potential degradation to grappling range.

Consider again the first two cases as above with respect to close quarter combat. I'll look specifically at how I can transition to a position of further advantage and strike whilst allowing a successful escape.

- 2.1 Secondary Technique:** Shuto Uke (Knife Hand Block)
Follow up Technique(s): Elbow Strike & Rear Hand Hook



In this particular case, my opponent is fully upright since their original reaction to my primary strike was to reel back with their hands up at head level. My follow up consists of Knife Hand Block that enables a lead hand Elbow strike followed by rear hand Hook Punches.

Since I have control over my opponents lead arm whilst striking with my rear arm using Hook Punches, my objective should be to continue with these strikes whilst preparing to escape. My best chance whilst striking is to continue to move towards their blind side and escape through pushing them away from me. Pushing hard, fast and forcefully will enable me to gain sufficient distance from which to retreat. My arms are out stretched in front of me keeping my opponent away from me.

- 2.2 Secondary Technique:** Gedan Barai (Downward Block)
Follow Up Technique(s): Bottom Fist Strike & Stepping Punch



In this case, my stepping punching means I'm quite close to my opponent as I punch down from my position above. Unless my strikes render my opponent defenseless, I remain vulnerable to being grappled in their attempt to cover the strikes and fight back. Here my advantageous position when striking can be diminished to one of extreme danger in an instant. It is important that I therefore continue to strike hard and in rapid succession leaving little or no room for my opponent to reverse the advantage. I then transition my strikes from their head area to their arm in and around the elbow joint as I migrate my hips and legs away from them as I continue with the rapid onslaught. Once I'm able to detach from them, I retreat to escape, again holding my arms out in front of me as protection and cover.

2.3 Secondary Technique: Hiza Geri (Knee Kick)
Follow Up Technique(s): Forearm Smash & Escape



Once I have executed my forearm arm strike down onto my now prone opponent, escape is imminent. Escape is facilitated by seizing their head with both hands and stepping away from them as I pull, or towards them as I push them to the ground at arm's length. The pulling or pushing motion is sought based on my opponent's relative position to the floor. If pulling, ideally I want to pull them such that they are falling backwards towards the ground, and if pushing, so that they are falling forwards face first. This will narrow down the chances of my opponent bringing me down with them to the ground – a situation to be avoided.

Third Stage

Executing the drill as prescribed in the former stages will ensure that optimal benefit is derived from its application.

In Part 1 I advised to isolate each of the three cases in turn and build up to practicing them in any order as dictated by the training partner (opponent).

This article (Part 2) extends that protocol to continue with the attacks to the point of escape.

The next stage is to run through the drill from the beginning. In this case, I start by readying myself, and the initial full impact striking of the pad. My opponent then covers the target, I strip their lead arm away and down, so I can continue my primary onslaught. They then choose one of the three responses (as in Part 1), I then react and execute my secondary motion and technique, immediately after which comes my follow up techniques. Then finally I test my ability to exploit my advantage and ultimately escape.

Once the drill has concluded with a successful escape, we restart the drill again without rest. The stress of physical exertion increases the pressure for the next time, reflecting real combat conditions.

Concluding Notes

To recap, Kata Bunkai drills should be focussed and apply sound combat principles extracted from Kata. Combative skill is acquired through executing the drills. The drills must be kept simple and be scalable. Simplicity allows us to focus on the key principles and scalability allows us to extend these concepts in appreciation of just how chaotic combat is. Taking a stepwise approach to drills and applying progression ensures that we are better equipped to deal with the chaos of combat.

It is also important to establish what your own offensive primary striking motions and techniques are. Through hard training in these motions, a solid foundation from which to build is laid, and forms the basis of drills. The main focus of this article is to integrate Kata motions as secondary level techniques into these already established primary level motions. In each of the three instinctive response cases, my chosen secondary level attacks are taken from kata, are not fixed, are consistently applied and are fit for purpose.

I hope this article serves as a catalyst to extend the drills already employed as part of your Bunkai training drills. I encourage you to devise drills based around sequences and techniques found in kata, and integrate these as supporting techniques to your primary striking motions.

This concludes the second article in the [Kata Combat – Bunkai Training Drills](#) series. Part 3 further explores skill isolation and the need to create, maintain and exploit the advantage over your opponent from a pre-emptive strike all the way through to a successful escape.

More downloads are available on www.Rakesh-Patel.com

Rakesh Patel