

P.E. SPORTS AND ACTIVITIES

KARATE



“The secret to my success is my simplicity, my character, and my heart. From the point of view of sports training, the most important asset of any athlete is their mind.”

Rafael Aghayev, Azerbaijani Karate competitor, five-time World Champion, and eleven-time European Champion

INTRODUCTION

Karate is a system of unarmed defensive and offensive techniques. The word “Karate” means “empty hands” in Japanese. Karate is one of many martial arts whose defensive and offensive techniques are performed without knives, swords or other weapons. The basic techniques of Karate are punching, blocking, striking and kicking. Each of these basic techniques has many variations, depending on the situation and the persons involved.

HISTORY OF UNARMED FIGHTING SYSTEMS

Legend has it that early forms of unarmed defense were developed by Buddhist monks in their journeys from India to China during the third century B.C. Their beliefs prohibited them from using weapons to defend themselves. But the roads and trails were full of dangers from highwaymen and other thieves and murderers.

As a consequence, the monks developed different ways of defending themselves without using weapons. By the time they reached China, they had perfected secret and mysterious forms of unarmed defense, and were believed by many to be masters of magical powers and utterly invincible. The Shaolin fighting techniques are thought to have been created by the first of these wandering Buddhists. Even today, a syndicated television show continues the legends of the Shaolin priests and their mysterious powers.



As word of these unarmed defense techniques spread to other countries, each locale developed its own version, with variations on the basic techniques. Thus in China, unarmed fighting became “Kung Fu,” while in Korea, it became Tae Kwon Do. In Okinawa, it became Okinawa-do (The Way of Okinawa) and in Japan, it became Karate. In modern times, systems have been developed which use combinations of Karate, Kung Fu, Tae Kwan Do, boxing and kick boxing. Notable among these systems is Jeet Kune Do, which was developed by the late Chinese television and movie star, Bruce Lee.



Unarmed fighting techniques were adopted by many as a means of attacking and defeating an enemy when weapons were either not available or were forbidden. Thus what started as a holy man’s means of peaceful self-defense became a “martial art” among other fighting techniques, such as kendo (swordfighting) and was incorporated into Ninjitsu, the art of stealth. During World War II, what American news commentators called “Jiu Jitsu” was a combination of various fighting skills, including Karate and Judo.

Karate became a sport in 1927 through the efforts of Okinawan Karate Master Gichin Funakoshi, the developer of the Shotokan style of Karate. Funakoshi worked out a system of scoring points which enabled Karatekas to compete without injuring each other. The Shotokan style is demanding, and requires great concentration and hard work to master.



Today, for many, Karate is primarily a sport, although some people learn Karate neither for the sport nor for self-control. Especially with the growing popularity of gang membership, and with the fantasyland Karate techniques shown in movies, many people mistake Karate for something that it is not.

In the words of Hidetaka Nishiyama, onetime head of the All America Karate Federation, “Karate is not fighting. Fighting is for animals. Karate is a way to stop

fighting.” Nishiyama’s words echo those of the legendary Chinese General Sun Tzu, who said that the greatest general is the one who wins the battle without loss of blood or life. The greatest Karateka, then, is the one who always wins an encounter, but is never drawn into a fight.

So what is the purpose of modern Karate? Does it teach you to beat up the members of your gang? No. The purpose of Karate is to teach you self-discipline and a new way of looking at conflict. This is not a mysterious concept. If you are so skilled that no one can touch you no matter how hard he or she tries, what is the need to fight such a person?

As it is with many sports, Karate has taken many forms in the United States. If you were to confine your knowledge of Karate to what you learn in popular magazines such as Black Belt, movies such as “Enter the Dragon,” “The Karate Kid,” “teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles,” or any of Jan Claude Van Damme’s movies, you might get the idea that Karate is about mysterious martial arts masters who live as gardeners, or psychotic sociopaths who spend their spare time beating people up, or rough, bloody fighters who claw their way to the top smeared with blood, or lovable fantasy characters who kick and chop their way into your imagination.



This, fortunately, is only Hollywood’s version of Karate. True Karate is something else altogether, as expressed by the great Shotokan master and founder of the Japan Karate Association, Master Funakoshi Gichin:

“The ultimate aim of Karate lies not in victory or defeat, but in the perfection of the character of its participants.”

In short, Shotokan Karate is not so much a way of fighting as it is a way of life. More attention is paid to strengthening one’s character than to strengthening one’s punch.

Many years ago, Mr. Takiyuki Mikami, an international champion and today a thoughtful, modest, brilliant instructor in the International Shotokan Karate

Federation, shamed a group of rowdy American black belts who were students in a club he visited each month. He walked out onto the floor dressed in a sport shirt, a pair of slacks, and loafers.

With his hands in his pants pockets, he invited the four best black belts to attack him, all at once. Mr. Mikami was 5 feet, 5 inches tall and weighed about 130 pounds. None of the black belts ever got close enough to land a punch, strike or kick. Mr. Mikami blocked every technique, without even bothering to take his hands out of his pants pockets, smiling all the time. After about ten minutes, when the four black belts were worn out and gasping for breath, Mr. Mikami walked toward them, still smiling, and told them that it was time for them to earn the belts they wore. He did foot sweeps and sent all of them to the floor. Then he walked away laughing. His hands had never left his pockets. Mr. Mikami's performance had taught all of us that sometimes, a real Karateka needs only to injure an attacker's pride in order to stop an attack.

As you learn Karate, you will participate in seven elements of training, each of equal importance:

Centering or meditation exercises, done to help you control your emotions and develop your powers of concentration

Body conditioning, including strength, power, endurance, stamina, and flexibility exercises.

Practicing the various stances (right forward, left forward, kibi-dachi, back stance, etc.).

Practicing the basic techniques of punching, striking, blocking, hooking and kicking by learning the precise bodily movements involved.

Punching, striking, hooking, blocking and kicking a "makawara" board (a tapered 4x4, covered with burlap) and other devices to toughen your knuckles and feet and to develop power in the basic techniques.



Kumite (sparring), to develop the ability to combine techniques spontaneously, according to the needs of the situation.

Learning and performing the “Kata” or “Heian,” which is a choreographed, formalized fight sequence done with an imaginary opponent. Katas are performed with great precision, and combine all the techniques of Karate into a system of flowing movements. In the Japan Karate Association (which teaches the Shotokan style) there is a different Kata for each rank promotion test.

HOW TO TRAIN FOR KARATE

It is impossible to learn Karate without the help of a trained instructor. As described by Mr. Mikami, the Shotokan school, for example, has a rigorous training program for instructors, which includes (for Chief Instructor) three years at the home dojo in Japan. A 4th degree black belt is required in order to enter the Chief Instructor school. After three years of study, work and intense instruction, a candidate is given one chance to pass the Chief Instructor’s test. Only if you pass this test will you be made a 5th degree black belt and a Chief Instructor. For these people, Karate is not a game. It is a way of life.



While there are many people who claim to be experts in Karate (and there are many “storefront” Karate studios all over the United States), one has only to watch a real Master to understand the difference between the pros and the amateurs. Many black belts are gifted, but few are Masters. As it is with any sport or physical skill, championship performance demands unswerving dedication to the sport and superb natural physical skills in performing. It is truly breathtaking to watch the real Karatekas perform their art.

KARATE TECHNIQUES

Below is a description of how to perform two of the many variations possible for each basic technique. Be sure to warm up with stretching exercises for the neck, chest, shoulders, arms, upper back, lower back, hips and legs before beginning any full-speed technique.

STRAIGHT PUNCH

Straight punches are practiced as follows. Stand with your feet a comfortable distance apart, knees slightly bent and leg muscles relaxed:



Assume a left forward stance:

1. Stand with your left foot forward, with the left leg bent at the knee so that your knee is over the second joint in the left big toe. Turn your left foot slightly inward at the toe.
2. At the same time, extend your right leg backwards at a shallow angle from the direction of your opponent, with the right knee slightly bent and the leg muscles tensed. Turn the right foot slightly outward at the toe. Turn the pelvis slightly to the right. Feel the stance and become aware of its strength. It provides you with the stable foundation you need to perform Karate techniques.

Now perform the punch:

1. Make a fist by curling the tips of your four fingers so that you fold them into the palm of the hand. Clamp the thumb across your fingers.
2. Extend your left arm straight out in front of you, hand open and pronated (palm toward the floor). Bend your right arm at the elbow so that your right fist rests on the side of your pelvic bone. The right hand should be supinated (palm toward the ceiling).

3. Start the punch by rotating the hips in a counter-clockwise direction while straightening the right leg. Do this in slow motion until you get a feel for the movement.
4. At the same time, extend the right arm slowly to the front, while rotating the forearm counter-clockwise. When your arm is fully extended and level, your right hand should be pronated (palm toward the floor). Be careful not to hyperextend the arm—you may injure your elbow joint if you do. Position your arm so that an imaginary straight line running the length of your arm will go directly between the first and second knuckles of your closed fist.
5. At the same time you are straightening the right arm, bring the left arm back, make a fist with your left hand, rotate the forearm counter-clockwise and bring your left fist to your left side the way your right fist was at the beginning of the punch.
6. Now bring your right arm slowly to its original position by your side while extending the left arm to its original position. Repeat the motion slowly for 20 repetitions in order to get the feel of the technique. Performed correctly, the motion should flow smoothly, with the arms rotating as the punch is performed, and rotating again as the arms return to their starting positions. When you have become accustomed to the movement, try punching with the other arm. Then alternate arms.
7. Now gradually increase the speed as you straighten your arms. Work for precise form and smooth movements. Imagine that the entire force of your body is concentrated into the first two knuckles of your fist.
8. As you increase the speed of the punch, also concentrate on contracting every muscle in your body at what would be the point of impact if you were actually punching somebody. This is the physical component of what is called “focussing.” If performed properly, it will focus all of your power at the point of impact.



9. Slowly add speed to the punch without sacrificing form. Alternate arms at top speed for 20 repetitions.
10. Do NOT run off and start breaking boards or trying to break bricks. Such activities are NOT Karate. They are carnival stunts. They can also split the cartilage in the knuckles, resulting in loss of finger movement and considerable pain.

THE RISING BLOCK

This technique is used to block punches to your abdomen, chest and face. The top of your forearm will collide with the bottom of the opponent's forearm. Note that in this technique, the bony ridge of your forearm will strike against the soft muscular tissue of your opponent's forearm. Several perfectly executed rising blocks and your opponent's forearm will be so sore that he or she will have trouble making a fist. Here's how it's done:



1. Assume a right forward stance, with legs and feet in the opposite positions as described in the left forward stance above. Then perform the block as follows. Start with your left arm extended toward your opponent and your right fist at your right side as it was when you started the punch described above. Hips should be almost facing the front.
2. Start the block by rotating the hips to the left.
3. Slowly and simultaneously bring the left arm back and down so that the fist ends at your left hip, while at the same time bringing the right arm up, staying close to the body, elbow bent, until it reaches a point where the fist is still clenched and the palm is turned toward the front, slightly above and in front of the forehead. The forearm should be at about a 45-degree angle to the floor.
4. Return both arms to their original positions and repeat the motion slowly until you get the feel of the technique.

5. Slowly increase your speed. Imagine that an opponent is performing a straight punch to your chest or face. The rising block is used to block such a punch.
6. Now try the technique with the left arm, slowly at first, then with increasing speed, focusing each time.
7. Alternate both arms for 20 repetitions.

EQUIPMENT AND CLOTHING

Most Karate Associations recommend a plain white cotton Gi (uniform). They come with a white belt, which you can dye different colors (green, purple, brown, black, etc.) as you go up through the ranks. The Gi is a traditional Karate uniform, and provides touch, durable, loose-fitting comfort and a full range of motion for all limbs.



The Gi also “reports to you” when you have performed certain techniques correctly. For example, when you do a straight punch or a rising block, focussing the punch should bring a cracking sound as the inside of the arm of the Gi pops against your forearm. Also, the fist that is brought to the side will make a cracking sound as it collides with the side of the Gi. When the real pros do these basic techniques, every movement is accompanied by a sharp crack of the Gi.

The belt must be tied in a certain way. Here’s how:

1. Start by holding the belt vertically in front of you, with the two ends held by the right hand. Then wrap the belt around you, so that the two ends come around from behind. This will put the belt across your abdomen, around the sides, with the ends coming around to the front.
2. Pull the two ends of the belt forward to make sure that you have an equal amount of belt for each side. Otherwise, when it is tied, one end of the belt will hang down lower than the other.

3. Cross the right end over the left end, then tuck it under the belt next to your body and then up. Change hands and pull tight.
4. Pull the end that now hangs to the right under the end that hangs to the left. At the same time, pull the end that hangs to the left over the other end, under it, and up through the loop that has formed.
5. Pull tight. If done correctly, you will see a laterally symmetrical knot with the ends hanging loosely on both sides of the knot.



KARATE NOTES

Karate is a worldwide martial art with an estimated 50-100 million practitioners. Just as there are many different types of martial arts (taekwondo, jiu jitsu, aikido, etc.) there are many karate styles. Some styles use low, wide stances, while others have higher, narrow stances. The philosophy and influence is often different and the extent to which the styles incorporate internal elements varies throughout karate. However, people tend to think of Shotokan Karate as being the foundation for modern karate.

The development of Shotokan Karate in the United States is directed by the International Shotokan Karate Federation, which is the American branch of the Japan Karate Association (JKA). The ISKF has local organizations in many major U. S. cities. It has promoted true Karate in American colleges and universities for over 30 years. Intercollegiate tournaments are held under strict supervision. Contestants must reach a specified level of competence before they are allowed to compete. Competence is not limited to technique. It also includes attitude and character development. Another center for Shotokan Karate is the Midwest Karate Association, the highest-ranking non-oriental in the Japan Karate Association.

The World Karate Federation sponsors Open and Junior International competition. The International Cup often has more than 2000 participants and more than 50 countries involved. These events are streamed live over the internet. There are competitors of all ages (5-18 and 35+) and skill levels a chance to test their skills in multiple events.

The World Karate Championships are considered the highest level of competition for Karate. This competition brings together the best competitors, teams, coaches, spectators and officials from all over the world for a mind-blowing weekend of performances and memories that will last for a lifetime. The competition is held in a different country every two years.

Don't expect to see headlines about ISKF or JKA champions. If you want lurid headlines, buy a copy of Black Belt Magazine. Those who understand Karate know that the true winners are the ones whose characters are strengthened through the discipline of Karate. The real prize is inside.

Many YMCAs and park districts offer Martial Arts/Karate classes. Private lessons are also widely available.

You can keep up-to-date with what is happening in the world of karate at these sites:

www.usankf.org

www.jkr.com

www.itkf.org

www.ska.org