

Jiu Ippon Kumite - Part 2

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Students practicing jiu-ippou kumite

Semi free sparring gives the intermediate student an opportunity to develop timing, good reflexes and a keen sense of distancing. While ippou kumite requires both the attacker and defender to move from stationary positions, this higher level of practice gives both partners the freedom to move in any direction. For the attacker, it may mean closing the distance or moving on an angle to deliver a strong technique. Alternatively, prior to delivering an attack, it may be necessary to shift rearward to allow sufficient distance for executing a kick. The defender also has several options. They may choose to remain stationary, shift to either side or may elect to quickly close the distance, halt the oncoming attack and deliver a swift counter.

As always, learning to relax while remaining alert allows the participants to move freely and naturally. The kamae or fighting position should be both comfortable and practical. For example, both hands should be in a position to attack and defend. Weight should be fairly evenly distributed on both feet. If the shoulders, knees or hips are tense, quick movement, in any direction becomes difficult. A balanced and relaxed position gives both participants the option of attacking or defending with either extremity. In fact, in the more advanced forms of semi free sparring, the attacker may not announce the offensive movement. They may choose to shift and perform a round house kick from the front leg. If the distance is greater, maybe a simple stepping punch is more appropriate. In either situation, if the defender moves from a comfortable and relaxed position, not only will he see the attack developing, but he will learn to quickly deploy the appropriate block and counter attack.

Shifting and sliding movements are very important and can help students find the proper distance for both blocking and attacking. Shifting is accomplished by moving one foot while the other remains fairly stationary. For example, if a defender blocks from a high stance but notices the distance to the target is longer than anticipated, shifting the lead foot toward attacker while delivering the counter attack may help to cover the distance. In this situation, the rear leg helps to engage the hips and generate power. By contrast, a defender may choose to shift rearward to avoid an oncoming attack. If the attacker has a pattern of shallow stepping and does not adequately penetrate, simply shifting the back leg rearward may give sufficient distance to block effectively. In both scenarios, only one leg moves. Sliding movements are first introduced to students in Heian Sandan. During the final movements, students are required to shift from side to side while performing elbow strike. In semi free sparring, this same type of movement can be used effectively in defensive and offensive strategies. The movement of both feet away from the opponent to increase distance or toward the opponent to close distance is a very important skill to acquire.

In Heian katas, blocking techniques are large and powerful. As one moves to the Tekki series, both the blocks and attacks become much more subtle. The key is to decrease the scale of the techniques while maintaining their efficacy and power. As we learn to use our bodies more efficiently and exploit the large and powerful core muscles, small movements can be used in an effective manner. In semi free sparring, the attack is often so quick the defender does not have ample time to block using any of the basic blocking techniques in their classic form. Rising, lower and forearm blocks are usually performed in two motions; preparation and execution. This is the basic method to teach simple blocking techniques. However, in semi free sparring one must learn to use simple small scale blocking maneuvers that are quick and effective. To thwart a powerful kick or punch, often times body position and correct distancing are as important as blocking mechanics. Therefore, small scale techniques in combination with shifting or sliding movements should be explored extensively while practicing semi free sparring.