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01043 DECEMBER 2001

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P R O W

A martial arts maxim holds that the road to victory often begins with understanding your opponent's fighting style. Two of the most popular forms of competition today are the Korean art of *taekwondo* and the Thai art of *muay Thai*. Although both styles employ effective hand techniques, they are known primarily for their devastating kicks. Even if you decide not to adopt any of their winning ways into your own repertoire, you can certainly benefit from knowing how their adherents fight.

For expert assistance, *Black Belt* sought out two of the best authorities in the kicking game: taekwondo master Young Bo Kong, and muay Thai trainer and taekwondo eighth-degree black belt Bob Chaney. Good friends in real life, they squared off in front of the camera and the tape recorder to illustrate and explain how you can

Comparing the Leg Attacks of the Renowned Kicking Arts of Taekwondo and Muay Thai



Taekwondo expert Young Bo Kong (right) and muay Thai trainer Bob Chaney analyze the offensive and defensive philosophies of their arts' kicking techniques.

by Terry L. Wilson

fight offensively and defensively against a follower of either kicking art.

Attacking with Muay Thai

To demonstrate the strategic approaches of the two arts, Kong adopts a fighting stance while Chaney describes how he would attack someone in that position using Thai boxing: "The most popular technique in muay Thai is the low kick. It's very important to use your peripheral vision to lock onto your target. A lot of people tend to look at the leg, but that's not what you want to do. You should look at his face, chin or chest. Choose any of those areas, lock onto it and never allow your eyes to roam. Use your peripheral vision to see everything your opponent's doing."

Once you know how to "watch" your adversary, it's time to deliver the kick. In muay Thai, it takes only one nerve-shattering blow to an adversary's leg to end a fight. "Unlike a traditional karate or taekwondo kick that uses a snapping action, a muay Thai low kick is swung out and down as if someone were swinging a baseball bat," Chaney explains. "Instead of striking with the

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Against a taekwondo punch, muay Thai stylist Bob Chaney (left) slips to the outside and responds with a roundhouse kick to the thigh.

foot, you hit the target with your shin, striking a nerve approximately one-third of the way up your opponent's thigh."

To avoid getting clocked with a right hand, Chaney says, you should step to the side of your opponent, then close the gap by twisting your hips and pivoting your kicking leg at a 45-de-

gree angle as you deliver the blow.

Another difference between delivering a muay Thai kick and a traditional taekwondo or karate kick is that your body turns into the kick, often spinning you in a semicircle. Your arms also swing along with your hips, adding force to the movement and power to the technique.

Defending with Taekwondo

On the receiving end of the attack is Kong. He explains the options for evading a muay Thai kick and responding with a traditional taekwondo technique: "To counter a low kick, you can move back away from the initial kick and counter with a front-leg hooking kick to the head.

"Timing is very important here," he says. "You must wait for the attacker's foot to swing past the target, putting him off-balance, before you move in to attack."

Back and Forth

Next, Kong attacks Chaney with a front-leg thrust kick. Chaney avoids the attack, stepping off to the side while he blocks the kick by placing his



When the muay Thai stylist (right) punches, Young Bo Kong steps backward to avoid the blow (1), then fires a side kick into the other man's ribs (2).

PHOTOS BY JERRY L. WILSON



To counter a taekwondo roundhouse kick, Bob Chaney (right) maneuvers into close range (1) before driving a right cross into the opponent's solar plexus (2).



hand under Kong's heel, thus guiding it off-target. This technique effectively sets up a muay Thai counter shin kick to the thigh. The instant Kong's foot hits the turf, Chaney pivots into the "locked" leg.

Next, Chaney attacks with a muay Thai push kick. This technique is frequently used like a jab, except that you strike with your foot instead of your fist. To counter this technique, Kong returns to his art's ultra-effective basics. "You can slide back a little to avoid the kick while you knock it down with your lead hand," Kong says. "Then you can throw a straight punch at him. The punch should cause him to lower his blocking hand, which will give you an opening to attack with a kick to the head.

"Counters don't have to be fancy to be effective," Kong adds. "This attack employs two basic techniques, but if done well, they can put your attacker down quickly."



Using the elbows to block high kicks is a key component of Thai boxing's defensive strategy.

Ultimate Tool for Power-Kicking

Young Bo Kong long ago recognized the need to develop power to accompany the speedy kicks of *taekwondo*. He then set about adding that often-overlooked essential component of killer kicks, and the heavy bag proved to be the ultimate tool.

"Many people kick the bag merely to get it to swing high into the air," Kong says. "But there is no power there. It is merely a lot of pushing. When you have a fast snap and the bag does not move, but rather it bends or caves in, you know you are developing your power. If you just push an attacker, you cannot deliver a critical injury to his body. But when you snap a kick so hard and with such speed that it lands properly, it will break right through his bones." —TLW

Muay Thai Elbow

One of the most devastating weapons in the muay Thai arsenal is the elbow. This bony body part can open flesh like an ax cutting through a watermelon. Not only is the elbow an effective attacking weapon, but it's also a great way to inflict pain while blocking an arm or leg.

"It's easy to sucker someone in close to set him up for an elbow attack," Chaney says. "When he kicks at you, you can do a couple blocks to 'bait' him in, then roll over, turn your body and use part of your elbow and forearm

against his wrist or ankle. The force of this block can easily break a bone; at the very least it will cause severe nerve damage, making that particular limb useless for the rest of the fight."

Leg Work

To defend against a muay Thai jab or karate lunge punch, Kong advocates using a fade-away side kick to stop the attacker. As with most defensive methodologies, you must learn how to "read" your opponent to be effective, regardless of which style you're up against.

"It's important to stay loose," Kong says. "That way, you can react to whatever your opponent does. In the case of a lunge punch or any kind of hand attack, it's important to either block and counter the attack or to distance yourself from the strike. A preferred response is to slide back with your rear foot, causing the punch to fall short of its mark. While your opponent is still

stretched forward, you can use your front leg to deliver a side kick to his ribs or chest."

Hand Work

Although muay Thai and taekwondo are categorized as kicking arts, both styles teach practitioners how to generate significant force with their hands. Of the two styles, muay Thai is considered to be the source of a wider variety of powerful punching skills.

Nevertheless, Kong says his discipline also stresses hand techniques, and the Pittsburgh-based instructor

Power Tools

Whether you're a taekwondo stylist or a muay Thai practitioner looking to boost your kicking power, you can benefit from waling on a heavy bag. The following products will get you up and running:

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- Unfilled Canvas Bag, from Immortal Creations. Made of canvas for those on a tight budget. \$39.95, (800) 477-3359, <http://www.immortal-usa.com>

—Robert W. Young

believes his brand of taekwondo is second to none when it comes to trading punches. "Traditional taekwondo teaches very strong punching skills," he says. "I personally like to punch, and once an opponent begins to fear my punching attack, I'll use that [apprehension] to set him up for a kicking attack."

To demonstrate his point, Kong throws a lead-hand punch at Chaney's chest. The instant Chaney blocks the attack, the taekwondo expert executes an ax kick off his front leg, looping it over his opponent's extended blocking

arm and landing it squarely on his collarbone.

Counterpoint

Illustrating the yin-yang nature of the martial arts, Chaney volunteers to demonstrate how he would counter that same technique using muay Thai. Focusing on the boxing part of Thai boxing, Chaney says he would use his dukes to lay out an attacker attempting an ax kick. Muay Thai fighters often like to get in close and throw combination punches, he says, and that can work to your advantage as you try to defend against a kicker.

"If you're fighting a taekwondo stylist, you will want to stay away from his legs," Chaney says. "You should try to get so close that your nose is practically on his chest. For example, if he starts to throw a roundhouse kick or an ax kick, you can walk in on him as he ex-



Because Thai boxers prefer to deliver full-power kicks, their attacks require more commitment than taekwondo techniques do. Therefore, the time Bob Chaney (right) needs to throw and recover from his leg kick (1) gives Young Bo Kong an opportunity to advance and execute a hook kick to the head (2).



In keeping with his art's minimalist philosophy, the Thai boxer (left) does not use a hard, over-committed block to stop the taekwondo stylist's front kick. Instead, he merely guides the foot away from its target.

ecutes the technique. That will keep his kick on the outside of your head and put you on the inside of his body where you can counter with your hands."

Making sure his lead hand is held above his temple for maximum protection, Chaney slips inside Kong's kick, then fires a right-left combination into his opponent's stomach. A third move for the sequence might be a rear-leg "baseball bat" muay Thai kick to the outside of the attacker's supporting leg, Chaney says.

Conclusion

Although each man can easily create combinations to counter the best attacks of the other, Kong and Chaney agree that there is no such thing as a superior martial art. Effectiveness comes from attaining excellence in the style you choose, and that invariably comes from investing time and effort in your training sessions.

Kong and Chaney also agree that a wise fighter strives to understand the philosophy and techniques of other styles. They know that in knowledge there is strength, and with each lesson learned, they insist you will grow as a fighter and as a martial artist. ✕

About the author: Terry L. Wilson is a free-lance writer and jujutsu practitioner based in San Diego.