



CHINATOWN JKD



SECRETS OF PUNCHING POWER

Secrets of Punching Power

An Introduction to Power Mechanics

by Mike Blesch

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Something has been lost in the modern fighter's quest for brilliance in every conceivable aspect of the martial arts. Boxing on Monday. Wrestling on Tuesday. Core Conditioning on Thursday. Martial art hobbyists around the world now have training opportunities formerly available only to the pros (and they are taking advantage!). Undoubtedly this type of training breeds well-rounded and capable fighters. That is not in question. In fact, the "average" martial artist of today is head and shoulders above his or her counterpart of decades past. That said, what if there was a single missing element waiting to be (re)discovered that could separate even high level MMA fighters from their peers? Something so neglected I dare call it a secret. Prepare to have your striking tools transformed from adequate to elite. That secret is about to be exposed.

*The primary purpose of
martial art is applying
bodily force.*

- With respect to Bruce Lee & Edwin L. Haislet



LOWER BODY MECHANICS & FOOTWORK

THE FALLING STEP

Sometimes referred to as the “Drop Step,” the Falling Step is the foundation of all punching power. Famously described in Jack Dempsey’s “Championship Fighting” (1950), every fighter should already be familiar with the technique. I will discuss it here briefly because its mechanics relate to every other method of power generation within this writing.



► Assume a neutral stance with feet shoulder width apart, arms dangling at your sides. You may prefer to take a comfortable fighting stance instead, feet staggered, with no more than 18 inches distance between the lead and rear foot.

► Let the weight of your body begin to fall forward and lift your lead foot off the ground just enough to fall into a long lead step. Your foot should land flat on the ground just in time to keep you from landing on your face

► On a hard surface you should hear a loud slap when your lead foot makes contact with the ground as the step has all of your bodyweight and the added momentum of the ‘fall’ behind it.

FROM FALLING STEP TO SHORT STEP

Some may ask how the falling step can be used in a combative situation. Others will recognize its application right away. Like any large movement, the falling step should be condensed (from long to short) when necessary. Once the mechanics of the step are second nature, begin to apply it as a short, explosive movement to all of your straight punches. Vary the length of the step depending on the distance required to reach the target and work up to applying the ‘drop’ by stepping in place, or even with no step at all!

HEEL/TOE SWAY

This technique involves a shift of weight from the ball of your lead foot to the heel of your rear foot (and vice versa) in a quick, snapping motion. It will help facilitate the transfer of bodyweight from front to rear needed for powerful hooking punches (it also applies to straight punches as you will see!)



► Assume a comfortable fighting stance with feet shoulder width apart and no more than 18 inches distance between the lead and rear foot. Raise the heel of your rear foot approximately 1 inch off the ground so weight is resting on the ball of the foot. A good fighting stance should always have this as one of its features for maximum forward explosion.

► Snap your rear heel to the ground while simultaneously raising the heel of your lead foot approximately 1 inch off the ground.

► Without pausing, perform the same movement in reverse by snapping your lead heel back to the ground while raising the heel of your rear foot, returning you to the starting position.

***Steps 2 and 3 should be done in one smooth movement, causing your bodyweight to sway back and forth on the balls of your feet.**

THE SUDDEN DROP

This type of movement will be very familiar to the Hsing-I practitioner. I originally learned the technique from Sifu Jeremy Lynch of the JKD Wednesday Night Group. It was later shown to me by Sifu Tim Tackett (2nd Generation JKD Instructor and Hsing-I black belt) during a demonstration of power strikes from the Hsing-I system he learned in Taiwan in the early 1960s. Although I'm sure the technique is well known by readers, I've rarely seen it used (and in particular combined with the Heel/Toe Sway) in the delivery of a hook punch. We will discuss the combination of the Sudden Drop, the Heel/Toe Sway, and upper body mechanics later.



► Assume a comfortable fighting stance with feet shoulder width apart and no more than 18 inches distance between the lead and rear foot.

► Drop into a half-squat position by pulling your legs up toward your midsection. It should feel as if your feet almost come off the ground for a split second.

► As quickly as possible, return to the on-guard position (to prepare for the follow up attack). You should not remain in the half-squat position for any longer than it would take to execute a lead hook punch.

When applied to a punch, this movement is very subtle. You will not typically drop as far as a half-squat position (especially when striking a taller opponent), but rather condense the movement into a short, quick drop. This helps speed up the transfer of bodyweight that takes place during the execution of a hook punch.

UPPER BODY MECHANICS & STRUCTURE

HIP TORQUE & CORE ROTATION

Power starts from the ground (footwork and leg drive) and is transferred up to the shoulders via rotation of the hips. This is true for both hooks and straight punches. Here is a great medicine ball drill that Sifu Jeremy Lynch uses to illustrate (and develop) proper hip torque in hooking punches:



► Assume a neutral stance with feet shoulder width apart. Hold a medicine ball with both hands at chest height. Have a partner hold a focus mitt at head height for a right hook punch. Use a heavy bag if no partner is available.

► Rotate your upper body counterclockwise while keeping your feet in place. At full rotation you should be able to hand the medicine ball to a person standing to your left.

► Return to the starting position in one smooth motion. Repeat the counterclockwise rotation 3 times. Do not rotate farther than what is comfortable.

► On the 4th rotation, drop the medicine ball (mid-swing) and explode into the focus mitt with a right hook. Your upper body should feel like a stretched rubber band being released.

Repeat the process several times before working your left hook (clockwise rotation).

SHOULDER ROTATION

Jack Dempsey's book "Championship Fighting" contains an excellent description of the "Whirl," which is the whipping action of one shoulder forward and the other back. During one of my first lessons in Jeet Kune Do I was given a slightly different explanation which I believe is worth recounting. Imagine a chain connecting your left fist to your right. Every time you execute a straight punch and then retract it, the retraction causes your opposite fist to be jerked forward violently into a follow up straight punch. This technique is especially useful for 'negative/positive' strikes. Negative refers to a light punch with no real intention of penetrating deep into the target. This allows recovery (and follow up) to happen much faster than with a committed punch and can confuse an opponent when the rhythm suddenly changes on the follow-up shot. Positive would be a deep, penetrating shot and naturally slower. Think Jab-Cross with a O...N...E... TWO cadence (slow/fast).

POSTURE

This may be the most difficult aspect to explain. Consider a boxer's posture. (See Photo 1) Anatomically speaking it is considered very poor natural posture. The curved spine, shoulders sagging forward, elbows tucked in to cover the ribs. The critical aspect of the boxing stance or any fighting stance for that matter is what we call the "Two-percent tuck." That is the inward tuck of the midsection to support all other elements of the boxing posture.



Where the discussion of posture gets interesting is when we add elements of Hsing-I heavy hitting. (See Photo 2) I have observed Sifu Tim Tackett teaching this (along with the Sudden Drop) to large groups of students who are initially hitting with relatively little power. Within minutes of learning these principles the entire group will be hitting twice as hard! The technique was taught to Sifu Tackett as the "Downward Smash" (aka "Drilling") and involves sinking from the sternum (See Photo 3) into the boxer's posture and dropping all of your bodyweight onto your rear leg to deliver a brutal downward palm strike.

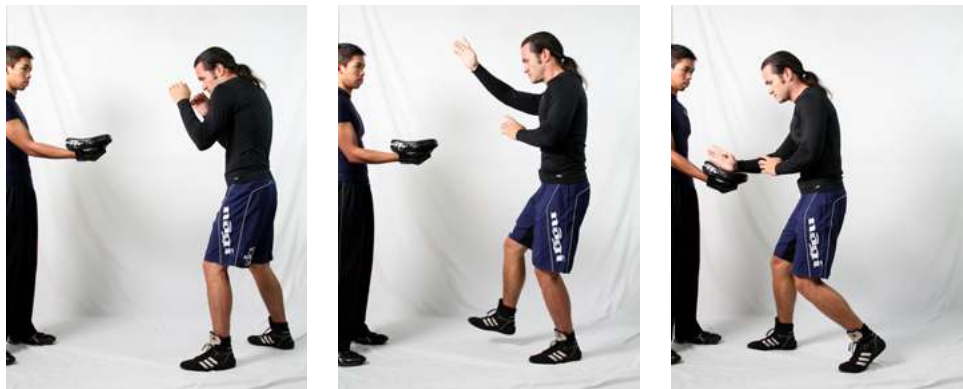
TOOLS & DELIVERY

DOWNWARD SMASH

We typically begin teaching this strike from the 3rd step of the progression due to it being the most practical. Also, the progression requires training time not usually available in a typical class or seminar. Drill all 3 steps with a partner holding a focus mitt out to the side of his/her body with the elbow slightly bent and the surface of the mitt facing upward at a 45 degree angle. The key is to make impact on the target with an outward thrust of the palm heel. For the first 2 steps, we will strike with the rear hand. In step 3 the lead hand will be used.



► Assume a comfortable fighting position and line up with the focus mitt, one large step from your partner. Imagine that your hands are incredibly heavy and totally relaxed. Raise both hands well above your head and step through with your rear leg, changing leads. Drop all of your weight from your sternum and bring the heel of your palm down on the focus mitt just as your foot lands on the ground.



► Line up with the focus mitt, one large step from your partner. Raise your striking hand to head height while stepping through with your rear foot and bringing all of your bodyweight down onto the focus mitt using the same mechanics as described in step 1.



► Line up with the focus mitt, arms length from your partner. Raise your striking hand approximately 6 to 12 inches above the target and while remaining stationary, strike with the heel of your palm using only sinking bodyweight.

**You now have the
body feel required to
execute a devastating
close range Palm
Hook.**

PALM HOOK

This is an incredibly powerful close range tool that can be used from many different positions. Maximum damage is inflicted by driving the full mass of your body into the hook. Ideally, this strike should penetrate approximately 4 inches into the target with an outward thrust of the palm heel. Drill this technique by having a partner hold a focus mitt at head height.



► Assume a comfortable fighting position and line up with the focus mitt. To achieve proper distance for the strike, your forehead should be approximately 6 – 8 inches from the edge of the focus mitt. Align your striking hand with the target, 6 inches away. You should need no more than 6 inches to generate knockout power.

► Apply the body mechanics you have learned in the following order:

Heel/Toe Sway → Sudden Drop → Hip Torque → Shoulder Rotation → Outward thrust of the palm heel → Impact!

► Recovery is an important factor in the successful execution of the Palm Hook. The 2nd half of the Heel/Toe sway movement (shifting bodyweight back from rear heel to a balanced on-guard position with the rear heel raised) will initiate recovery. Quick counter-rotation of the hips and shoulders will do the rest.

The Heel/Toe Sway initiates the fast transfer of weight. The Sudden Drop should start just before your rear heel touches the ground. Hip Torque is activated next, driving the Shoulder Rotation. Hand movement begins immediately after the rotation of the shoulders. It should feel as if your striking hand is being dragged slightly behind your body similar to a powerful round kick. Just before impact on the target, the palm heel is snapped outward creating a hydrostatic shock effect.

There should be no perceptible time delay between any of the actions described above. Everything should be executed in one smooth motion.

VARIATIONS OF THE PALM HOOK

The Palm Hook described here is a hybrid of what we call the “snappy” and “heavy” hooks. Some variations include:



Maintaining weight on the lead leg and driving the toes of the lead foot into the ground.



Stepping to 7 o'clock with the rear foot when hooking.



Striking with a corkscrew motion of the hand and arm so impact is made while the forearm is horizontal with the elbow raised.

CONCLUSION

If power is the ability to use strength quickly, then it's only logical to believe that in order to punch hard, you must possess a lot of muscular strength and speed. Logical as it may seem, it's not entirely true. When it comes to punching, we can overcome the limitations of our physical strength/speed by taking advantage of two things available to us all: Bodyweight & Gravity.

To be continued in part two of the Secrets of Punching Power.

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