



### Advanced fighting strategies of shotokan Karate.

When you want to get good at anything, it is always best to go to the source. When that anything is shotokan karate, the first source that comes to mind is anyone with the surname Funakoshi. Kyle Funakoshi, a martial arts instructor based in Milpitas, California. He grew up in Hawaii, where he started training when he was five. His sense; was his father, Kenneth Funakoshi, a man who is no stranger to the pages of Black Belt—he appeared on the cover of the June 1992 issue. The Funakoshi family moved to San Jose, California, 24 years ago so they could administer their association's many dojos from a more centralized location. Since then, they have built a reputation for offering the highest-quality instruction in the Japanese art. More than 31 years of traditional training and national and international competition have brought Kyle Funakoshi to where he is today—seventh-degree black belt. Ask him why he has dedicated his life to shotokan, and he will humbly hint that he wants to carry on the tradition of the art's founder Gichin Funakoshi, his fifth cousin. Black Belt arranged for Kyle to drop by for an interview and photo shoot to help readers better understand the advanced fighting strategies of shotokan. He immediately started explaining what could have been a complicated subject, breaking it down into terms and concepts anybody can comprehend. "Some of the factors involved are rhythm and timing, not only of your techniques but also your opponent's so he doesn't know when you'll attack," he said. "When he's unsure of when you'll strike, that opens up his body to you." Those two sentences marked the beginning of what amounted to a private lesson.

## Feinting

Feinting is defined as a strategy that entails using a deceptive movement to distract your opponent from your true intent. It is often a matter of partially executing a technique to elicit a reaction from him. “If a beginner tries to throw a feint, he’ll face several problems,” Funakoshi said. “Because he doesn’t know how to control his body yet, it won’t be believable. It is important to do it only after you have reached a level where you can relax your body enough. You want your opponent to believe you are attacking him and react to it. Then you can control the situation.” The key to executing a convincing feint, he said, is movement: body movement, head movement, hand movement and hip movement. “It’s not just about moving your hands. You have to make it believable in every way.” Challenge No. 2: Even though you are using essentially your whole body to sell the feint, you must avoid committing to the point that you cannot follow up with the real technique. “You have to make it short and quick,” Funakoshi said. “If it’s too long or there’s too much of a lag time, you might get caught or your opponent might not react because he knows nothing is coming in.” The master’s reference to the thought processes of the opponent begged a follow-up question: Are there some people who simply will not react to a feint and some who will react to anything? “Yes,” he confirmed. “If they don’t react, it’s because the feint was too fast or you’re not at the level yet to throw it effectively—in other words, your opponent is faster than you and can see that you’re not going to commit.” Knowing that feinting may fail if you are facing a faster foe, should you try the tactic once and immediately change course if it does not work? Not necessarily, he said. “I would give it a couple more tries because sometimes the person is slow. Maybe he does not have the reaction time to respond to your feint. Maybe you have to change the rhythm or timing of it. Instead of 100 percent, you might have to slow it down in the beginning to create an opening. “Also, if he’s tired, he might be too exhausted to react to anything. Then you can kick or punch him at will. If he’s fresh, he’ll be more on the ball and likely to react to your feints.”

## BAITING

In a way, baiting is the opposite of feinting. In feinting, you do something to create an opening. In baiting, you do nothing to create an opening. That “doing nothing” might entail keeping your hands high to give the impression that your body is exposed or keeping them down so he thinks your face is exposed. Either way, Funakoshi said, you counter when he comes in for the kill. The strategy would seem to be risky against an unfamiliar opponent because he might be faster than you might. “That’s why you should do it only when you feel comfortable and you’re fast enough,” Funakoshi said. “If you’re at a tournament, it’s a good idea to observe the competitors, to study how fast they are and what techniques they like to use.” Another key to success is following up with the right counter. Should your response be preplanned, or does it depend on how he takes the bait? “It’s not some- thing you can think of on the spot—as in, if he does this, I’ll do that,” Funakoshi said. “It has to happen instantly because there’s no time for thinking.” The secret, one would suppose, lies in having had sufficient kumite experience to figure out what the best counters are in each situation. “That’s right,” he said. “It has to be natural, like the way animals fight. They do not think; they just react. That ability comes from experience you gain in the dojo. There’s no secret to it.”

## Rhythm and timing

There are all sorts of rhythm,” Funakoshi explained. “There’s which you’re not moving”. You are pressing your opponent in a rhythm. You are doing a yori ashi, or sliding back and forth in a rhythm. “Whenever you have an opponent in front of you that changes rhythm again because both of you are moving— especially when he throws a fake, or when you do and he reacts to it.” One of the most common manifestations of rhythm can be seen when two tae-kwondo stylists face each other and begin to bounce. Funakoshi said such a tactic is valid but using it requires caution. “There are many ways to use rhythm in your ka-mae, or fighting stance. One could be you are stationary and pressing your opponent. Another is you are bouncing to get your own rhythm. You might be bouncing up and down or forward and back. If you bounce too high, you can be timed and hit with a reverse punch, front kick or side thrust. If you move forward and back, you have to be careful of the distance. If you bounce too far, it can leave you open to attack or telegraph your intentions. You have to find the distance that’s just right for your body.” If you are a beginner, be extra careful or you risk exhausting yourself before you even engage your opponent. “If you bounce too much or move inefficiently, you will tire yourself out and be ineffective, and it will be harder to throw the technique,” Funakoshi said. “Everybody’s bounce is different; it has to be adjusted to your body.” Blast from the past: “Back in the old days, they didn’t bounce around at all, “he said. “They had a more macho way of fighting. They would take their kamae stance and just press each other. There were no feints. Whoever was the strongest would win. A lot of it was intimidation. You did not show any emotion; you just came straight in and threw your technique, which was usually a strong reverse punch. “Why is kumite so different now? “There’s more timing involved because of the point system,” Funakoshi said. “It’s not just about scoring a killing blow anymore. Because karate is a sport, there is more emphasis on speed and timing. You move around more in the kamae stance before and after you attack because you don’t want to be stationary.” Like most things in life, that trend is both good and bad, he said. “It’s good because it attracts attention to the art and brings people in. In addition, if people just train in the dojo without competing, they can be burned out. It’s better if they have a chance to use their techniques in a controlled environment such as a tournament.” Timing goes hand in hand with rhythm, Funakoshi added. “If you aren’t comfortable with your own rhythm, it will adversely affect your timing. You will not be able to time when your opponent will attack, and you will not be able to time yourself. That means you can’t throw a feint effectively.”

## Practicing

The progression to mastery of these methods starts with practicing drills in which you try the strategies on your partner in the dojo. “After the drills, you have to develop your ability to apply them in dojo sparring matches,” Funakoshi said. “Once you have a feel for them, you can try tournaments. There is no easy way to master them. It’s like kihon kata: You have to practice slowly and correctly at first, and then the speed and power will come.” Now for the big question: How far along in your training should you be before you start using them? “At least first-degree black belt, who comes after about three years, assuming you train two or three times a week,” Funakoshi said. “Before first degree, you should be practicing the basics slowly and correctly, which leads to proper development of the

muscles that affect the execution of your techniques. Once you have the basics down and your body has developed, you can perform the techniques correctly and with explosive-ness. After that, you can get into these kumite strategies.”