



OCEAN BEACH MARTIAL ARTS CENTER

*For years now I have been examining the advantages and disadvantages of non contact martial arts sparring in our school. Those of you who have met me through my association with the **Ocean Beach Martial Arts Center** know that I am a proponent of a padded version of light to moderate sparring. I suppose it has had some bearing on why we hold our annual tournament as a light to moderate contact event.*

Each year at our tournament someone will ask, when we are going to have a non contact sparring event. Every year I say the same thing. We sponsor this event to expose our students to a practice of skills that we can't adequately teach in a non contact environment. Every year there are those who take issue with this statement. So for the record I want to address this conflict in a way that best communicates what we are trying to achieve here at **OBMAC**.

We are first and foremost a **Chung Do Kwan** school. We regularly practice our sparring in a non contact environment. Sparring this way is essential for coordinating the skills we teach, in a dynamic environment. Practical execution of kicks, punches and blocks, are best practiced with an opponent who is resisting with countering techniques. Both students share the experience of practicing their skills in an environment of relative safety.

In maintaining the safe distances that are critical between fighters in non contact sparring, we eliminate skills that can only be practiced when an opponent moves inside one's "circle of safety." Let me provide some examples of this.

When a kick or punch has been executed, there are only three actions one can use to avoid getting hit. You can stand your ground and block the strike. You can move out of the way of the strike. Moving back or off angle is how we avoid strikes by movement in the non contact environment. But there is another type of avoidance that cannot be simulated in non contact environment; that is moving in or "**crashing**." I define "**Crashing**" as stepping inside the focus point of any given technique. It is as effective as moving out of range of a strike. If you have been instructed on how to manage your center of gravity, keeping your hips down, you might actually find yourself at an advantage.

In the picture below is an example of the “Crashing” technique.



Mr. Blamey has closed **inside** Master La Blanc’s kicking range. He is trying to control the left arm so he can use a hand technique. Master La Blanc has better knee and hip position putting him in a good position to defend. For the record, Master La Blanc was a boxer.

In this example the player in white has negated the opponent’s roundhouse kick by closing the distance between herself and her opponent.



The attacker cannot deliver a forceful blow because white is inside the focal point of the kick. This is a practice we call “**Zoning.**” In zoning there are two reference points, at the beginning and end of a strike. Liken it to avoiding the swing of a bat. The closer you are to the focus of the bats swing, the more force it hit you with, until it passes by you. Being hit at the point of focus or the apex of its movement, well, that’s going to hurt. Closing the distance allows you to move to a point inside the zenith of the strike, catching a **zone** of opportunity.

A closer inspection the above picture will render another technique used from the inside position; **The Trap.** Note blacks right arm. It is “**trapped**” under whites left leg, pinned against her body and she was unable to position it in time for the punch that followed.

In the picture below white has avoided the kick through a **rocking** technique and is closing the gap so he can strike. Note that the timing of these techniques is critical. So having a forum for practice is essential to the development of these techniques.



Perfection is our goal not our reality. It is safe to assume that someday somehow you will miss a block. A punch or kick will slip through your defense and you will be struck. You are now in the contact environment. The only way to learn how to manage a blow is to train, the taking of blows. In the non contact environment blows that land are either incidental in nature or due to a lack of control. The contest is stopped, warnings are issued then we begin again. In contact sparring taking a blow is a fact of life. You will learn to move and block blows or you will learn how to take a blow. Being hit even with the pads absorbing most of the blow, is the best motivation for learning how to block.



The player on the right is one of our youngest Black Belts showing his control on a kick to the side of the head. He hit his target but with the control he has developed from numerous contests such as our tournament. His opponent has never experienced a contest where the head is a target. He was not prepared to block a kick to the head.

Blocking techniques have more urgency when one participates in a contact tournament. In the non contact version of sparring, if you're doing things correctly, there is no contact. The picture below is an example of Mr. Blamey defending **Master Conboy's** attack. I call this a **Seal** block because it seals off an entire side of your body. If the kick was not properly blocked Mr. Blamey would have taken a kick to the side of the head.



There is little question here that the technique was blocked. **These are excellent martial artists playing as hard as they can.** If you miss the block you get hit.

I often hear that with **Chung Do Kwan** we are training for a real life situations where practicing or contact would be impractical as well as dangerous. That practice of a contact tournament offers little value since we can learn all the necessary skills by non contact contests and the breaking of wood.

Have you ever tried to break boards when the holders don't hold the boards solidly? Try it some time. Has your board holder ever allow for their elbows to bend slightly absorbing some of the blow? Even the slightest shift of the target will lessen the impact on the wood. This reality brings me to another question. How do we know what the level of impact is on our moving target when sparring in a non contact contest?

In the contact environment you can feel the resistance from the strike. You learn to develop a feel for the depth of penetration of your kicks and punches. It is this skill that allows a student to adjust "on the fly" their body position and foot work to get the most out of each strike.

Boxers train movement as a part of their tool kit. Bobbing and weaving techniques help these athletes learn how to use these movements minimize the impact of a blow. One of the techniques using movement is "**slipping a punch (kick).**"

The picture below is an example from one of our tournaments on how to "**slip**" a kick. Here the player in Blue threw a beautiful front kick and the opposing player slipped the technique.



There are many techniques with which a striker (kicker or puncher) can use when once they have moved into a contact range. There are whole martial art systems that operate inside our circle of safety. The **Chung Do Kwan** practitioner who never leaves the safety of space is never given the chance to adapt their “tool kit” to the “inside” environment.

For the students that I instruct, there are cut blocks, parries and deflection techniques that they learn as a last level of protection from an attacker. They block kicks with shins and check legs. They are taught **never** to reach out in an attempt to block a kick or punch. A leg kick extended and not withdrawn quickly is subject to being grabbed. The students are taught these techniques because we are trying our best to safely simulate a real life scenario. I teach the application of the skills we have learned in **Chung Do Kwan**. My students are also exposed to the practice of self defense inside the circle of safety.

Quoting Butch Cassidy...” *there are no rules in a knife fight.*” The truth is that **practical** applications of **Chung Do Kwan** skills do not have rules of engagement associated with them. With emphasis on the practical, my students are probably a bit more intense than most but they come to me directly from our Ocean Beach dojang. Their core is developed in the **Chung Do Kwan** tradition of martial arts. We just try to offer these students a broader spectrum of use and approach the self defense portion of our art.

Students take a martial art course for a number of reasons. It’s great exercise. There is social interaction, developing friendships, learning a code of conduct that, simply put, makes us better people. I can’t help but feel that somewhere in the back of their minds is the thought that the study of a martial arts might aid in personal protection.

Chung Do Kwan is a **Martial Art**. It is made of two parts, which together, make it a whole system. We are what we train for. If you only train in a non contact manner you will be training the skills that can be trained without the contact. The movement, the balance, the flow of combination techniques, can all be exercised and developed within the distance of a non contact contest. The power and grace of **Chung Do Kwan** can still be expressed in a non contact sparring experience. **This is the Art.**

The Martial is about combat. I remember reading in **Grand Master Kim’s** news letter an article written by **Master Jerry Bates**. In the article he was addressing the difference between **Chung Do Kwan** and Self Defense. **Master Bates** wrote that in **Chung Do Kwan** we study

the theory of self defense. **Chung Do Kwan** whether practice for the Art or practiced for the application provides the tools of self defense. A kick to the knee or a knife hand to the larynx would be insane to practice in a sparring contest. But making the practice as safe as possible with as much of the contact as can safely be allowed, provides as close to combat as we can achieve. We are how we practice.

Mr. Blamey has a saying ...” *it’s as important to learn how to take a blow as it is to learn how to deliver one.*” It is with our yearly tournament that we offer the opportunity to practice an additional set of skills that we cannot practice in the non contact environment.

Skills like Crashing, Zoning, controlling your center of gravity, the feel of depth of your strikes, chambering kicks, slipping punches, rocking, trapping and learning how to take a blow, make contact sparring as close to real combat as we can safely practice. Lastly is it extremely aerobic and downright fun.

So the next time you get the opportunity to participate take us up on the experience. It’s our attempt to continue our growth as students of Chung Do Kwan. Take a chance, step outside of your comfort zone. If nothing else you will have experienced a great workout with old friends and had a great time. Besides San Diego is a great place to visit in October. This year’s tournament is on the 2rd of October, join us. If you have any questions on gear or would simply like to communicate with me about this topic, send me an email at jonsheer@cox.net. You can also go to our website for more information on our tournament experience at www.obmartialarts.com. Train safe and train hard.