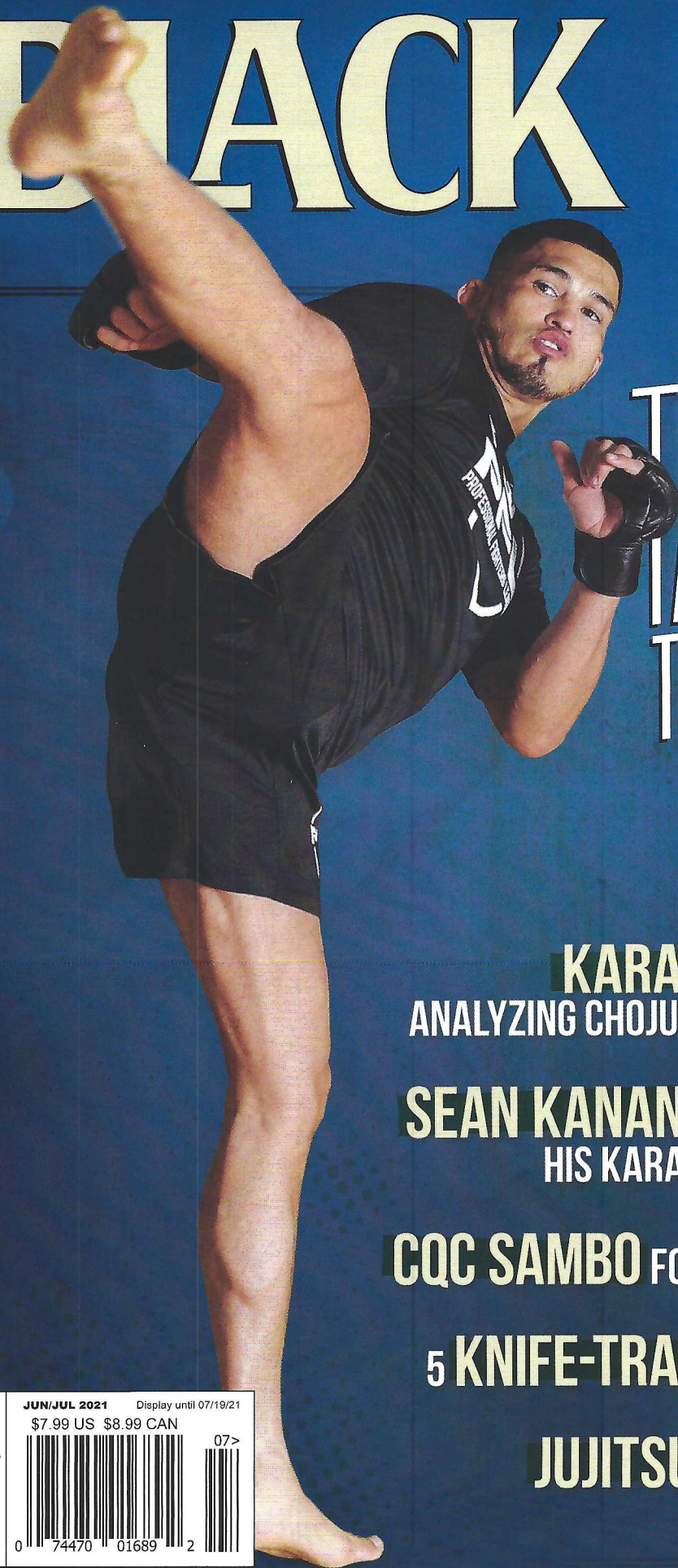


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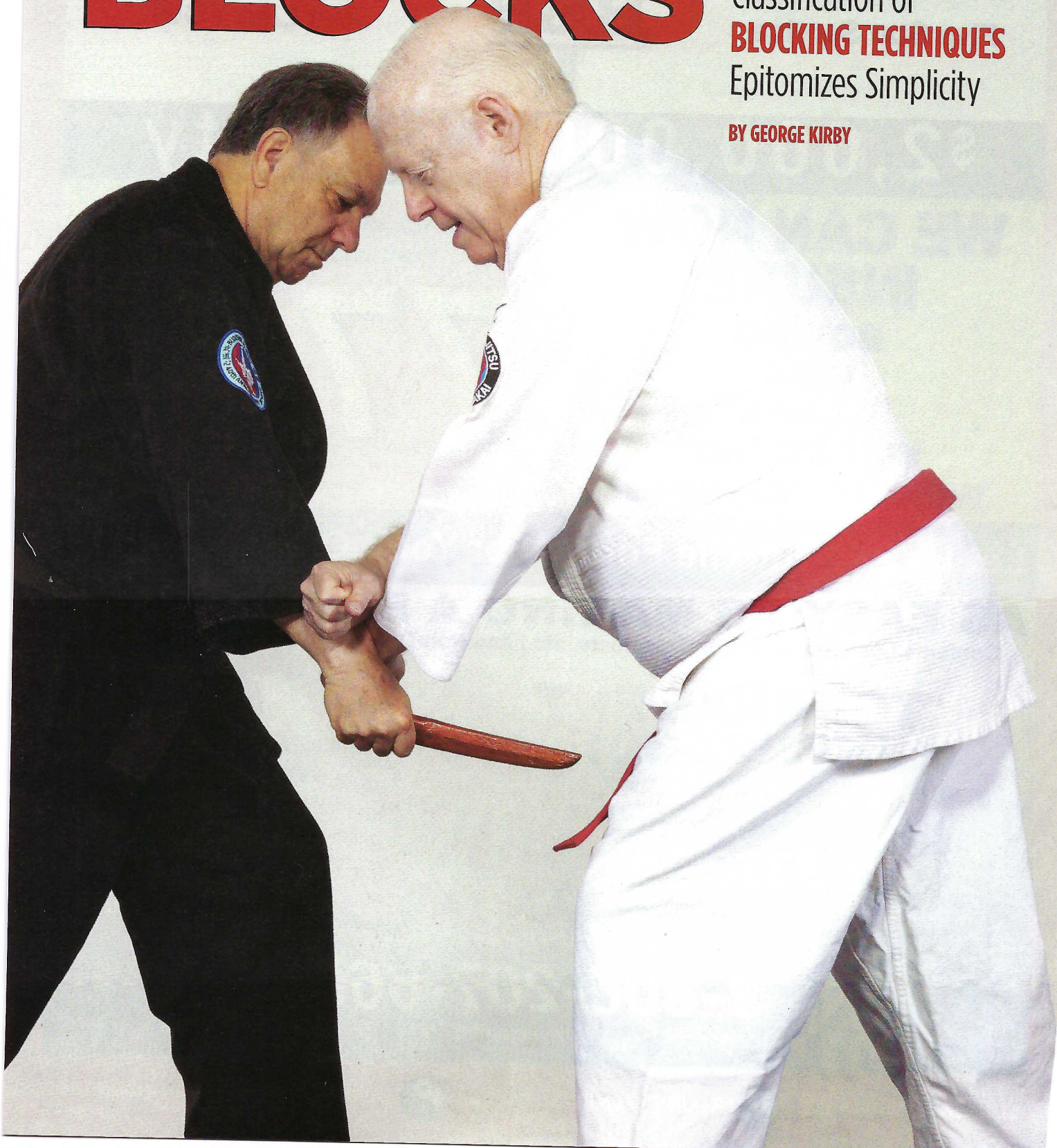


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BUILDING BLOCKS

Budoshin Jujitsu's
Classification of
BLOCKING TECHNIQUES
Epitomizes Simplicity

BY GEORGE KIRBY



Jack Seki, the traditional *sensei* who taught me Japanese *jujitsu*, never gave his students a separate term for each block they learned. For Seki, blocking was an integral part of any *jujitsu* technique that involved stopping or deflecting an attack before countering. Rather than it being a distinct movement, the block was just a step you took so you could protect yourself long enough to get to the attacker and deal with him.

There were only two terms Seki used: *te no tatake* for blocking a hand technique and *juji* for blocking an overhead strike or a kick. That was it.

Some *jujitsu ryu* and most karate *ryu* typically have 10 or 12 distinct names for blocks delivered at specific angles or elevations, and teachers devote lots of class time to conveying the proper terminology and the associated execution. But for Seki, all that was irrelevant. A block was just a motion you made as you moved in to continue your defense. It either worked or you got hit. Done!

Guidelines

According to Seki, a block executed while doing a complete *jujitsu* technique has one of two purposes. First, it can deflect the attack so the incoming weapon travels 2 to 4 inches to the side of its target, which is usually your head or torso. Second, it can stop the forward motion of the attack completely, which is sometimes called a hard block.

Most overhead blows, kicks, and roundhouse or backhand strikes require a hard block because of their greater momentum and potentially greater impact. Most martial artists effect their hard blocks at 90 degrees to the attack's trajectory because that's the angle at which they're most effective. Here are some common examples of this hard methodology:

- You block an overhead strike with a club by making contact with a part of the limb that's between the midforearm and the elbow.

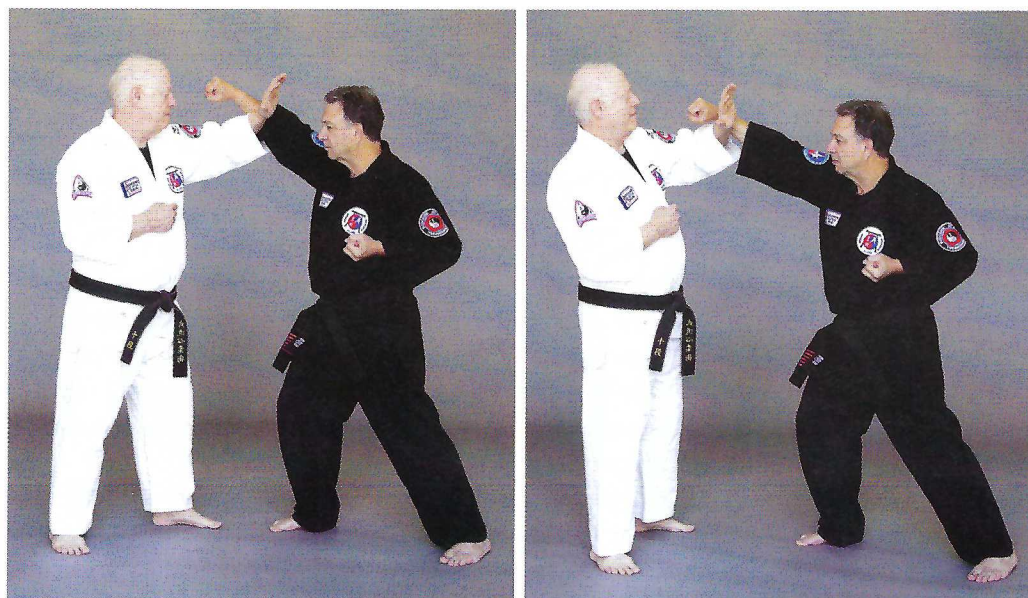
- You block a kick by making contact just above the kneecap before the opponent's lower leg extends beyond 90 degrees.
- You block a roundhouse swing by connecting with the forearm close to the wrist.
- You block a hook by intercepting the upper arm before the elbow extends forward of an imaginary line that would go through both shoulders.
- You block a backfist by using both forearms to hit the adversary's arm between the elbow and the fist, or by using one forearm to make contact above the elbow and one to make contact between the elbow and the fist.

Why is the point of impact important when using a hard block? Because a proper block can cause the closest parent joint to transfer the energy of the block to the attacker's torso, thus off-balancing him. In the case of a roundhouse, backhand or overhead strike, a properly executed hard block can make the attacker's hand lose strength and/or open, and that can cause the person to drop his weapon if he has one.

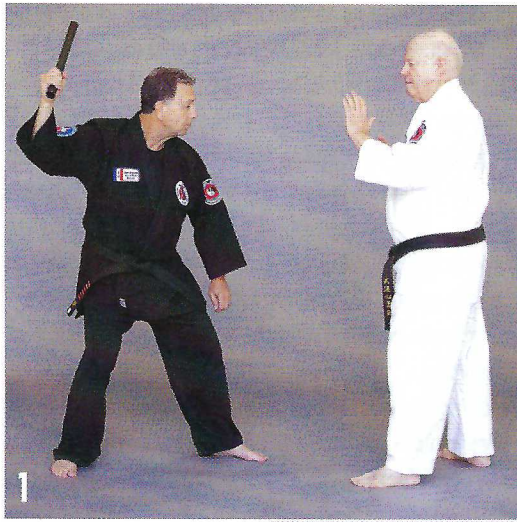
Mechanics

A hard block is a technique that impacts the attacking arm or leg at a 90-degree angle. Although all *juji* are initially hard blocks, a hard block also can be delivered with just one forearm against a punch. Also, a *juji* can deflect an attack slightly to either side after impact. Note that with a hard block, you typically "stand your ground" (refrain from moving your feet) or take a slight step toward your attacker with your lead foot so your body can better absorb the impact of the blow. In either case, it's your strong base that enables you to execute a successful block.

Most hand strikes and attempted grabs can be effectively dealt with using a deflection block. You're not trying to stop the forward momentum of the attack, just change its path by 2 to 4 inches to either



A balanced position and a strong stance are essential for a successful *te no tatake* block and a fast follow-up, George Kirby says. On the left, he blocks a punch from a stable stance that has his bodyweight over his feet, which enables him to absorb the power of his opponent's strike. On the right, Kirby is forced to lean back when he blocks because of his poor foot position. If he's able to recover, it will mean a longer response time.



**CROSS-BLOCK VERSUS
OVERHEAD CLUB ATTACK:**

Marc Tucker threatens George Kirby with a club, causing the jujitsu master to assume a defensive posture (1). As soon as he detects motion, Kirby steps forward and intercepts the weapon with a juji cross-block that makes contact just below the opponent's wrist (2). The crossed arms afford Kirby enough stopping power to deal with the force of the downward swing.



side. Deflection blocks are also different from hard blocks in that the target (you) usually moves slightly in the opposite direction of the block. This body movement, either a circular pivot or a side step, sets you up for your response. Deflection blocks give you the option of moving into the attacker (to execute a technique) or away from him (to create space) more quickly compared to hard blocks.

Tactics

Why would you choose a deflection block that gives you the option to move away from your attacker? Because on the street, you may want to give common sense a chance to prevail before tensions escalate even more. At that moment, if you can successfully deflect his intended attack and step back, one of two things will happen.

First (and ideally), he might recognize that his attack didn't work, that you're ready if he attacks again and that you actually might hurt him if he proceeds — although he doesn't know how you'll do it. Putting doubt in your attacker's mind can be a powerful weapon.

Second, you might opt to step back to force your opponent to move forward to continue his assault, which will make him look even more like the aggressor in the eyes of witnesses. The fact that he has to step forward to attack you also gives you a better opportunity to judge his direction and use his energy or momentum to your advantage.

Furthermore along those lines of thinking, when you deflect his attack and step back, it gives you the opportunity to verbalize that you don't want to fight. This can be an important factor in your

defense should you end up in court as a result of a physical confrontation. Witnesses will be able to verify your physical actions and your verbalizations, all of which were intended to defuse the situation.

Definitions

So far, I've focused on blocking guidelines, mechanics and tactics. However, I never really defined the terms "te no tataka" and "juji." There are some important differences that will determine how you implement these moves.

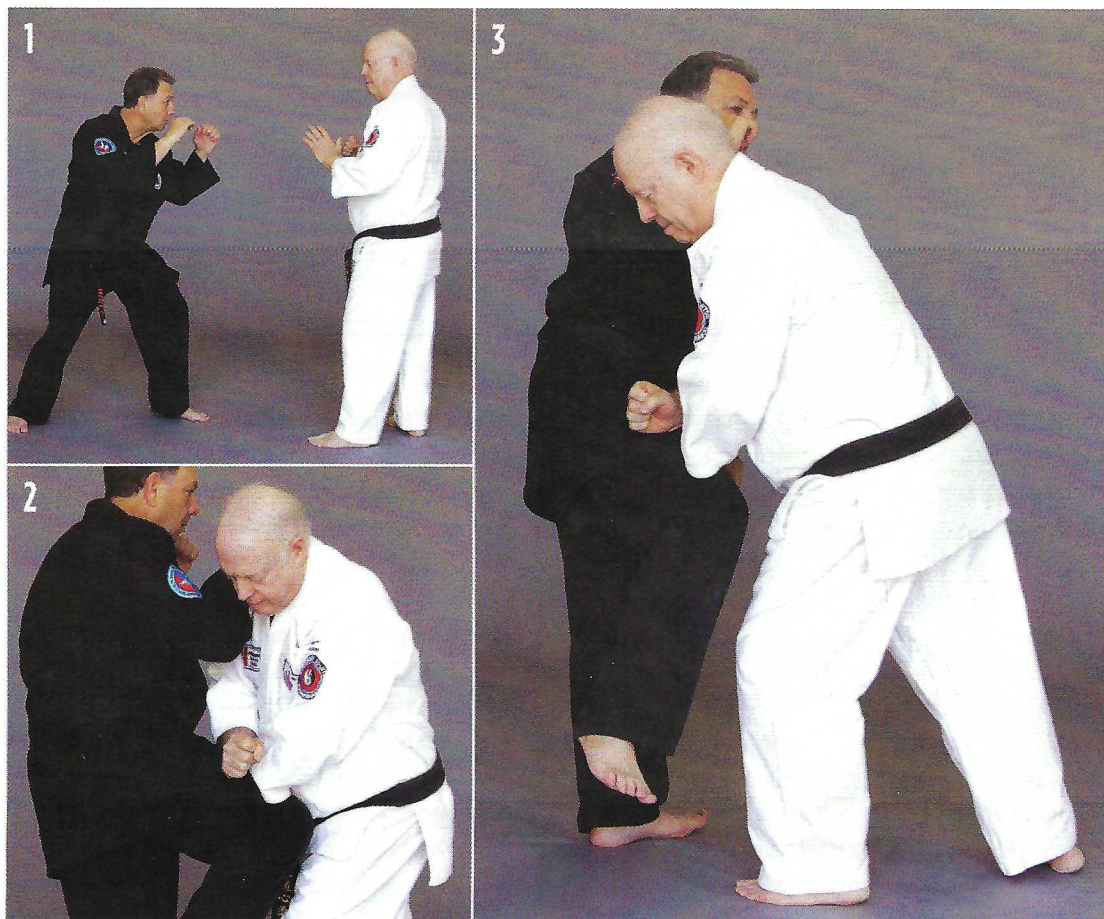
In my book *Jujitsu: Toward One Technique*, I defined a te no tataka as a "blocking hit" and a juji as a "cross-block, done with both hands clenched into fists and the arms crossed for a more effective and stronger block."

To elaborate, a te-no-tataka can be a hard block (effected at 90 degrees) or a softer deflection block delivered with one forearm — at the discretion of the defender depending on the situation and/or his automatic response. However, both forearms are used occasionally, such as when your inner arm is used for a counterattack (common in *krav maga*). A te no tataka is not as strong as a juji because it doesn't need to be. All it's supposed to do is slightly alter the direction of the attack.

To be more effective, a te no tataka is commonly done with an open hand rather than a closed fist. It's a given that a closed fist gives you a stronger and harder block. However, an open hand allows you to more quickly hook your hand over your attacker's forearm (called "sticky hands," this is an essential element of *wing chun kung fu*) and maintain your hold on his arm as he retracts it or continues his forward motion. This enables you to more effectively use his energy to set up and execute your defense. If you maintain the hook, it also makes it difficult for him to continue to use his arm offensively, thus creating a serious distraction for him.

A juji is *always* a crossed-forearm block that uses both arms. The right arm is over the left if it's a right-handed attack, and the left is over the right if it's a left-handed attack. Both of your arms and legs are bent slightly so they can serve as shock absorbers as you step in to meet the attack.

A juji always has another distinct characteristic: Both hands are closed to form tight fists. There are two reasons for this. First, having clenched fists allows you to deliver a stronger — and more painful — block. Second, because overhead strikes, roundhouse punches and kicks carry more force, having closed fists tends to protect your fingers from being broken should they get hit.



CROSS-BLOCK VERSUS

FRONT KICK: The attacker (left) confronts George Kirby (1). When he sees the kick coming, Kirby advances and uses a juji block to make contact just above the man's knee before the leg is extended past 90 degrees (2). The attacker loses balance because Kirby's outward block is designed to destroy the man's equilibrium (3).



DEFLECTION BLOCK VERSUS PUNCH: Jujitsu expert George Kirby is being accosted by Marc Tucker (1). The incoming punch is deflected by Kirby's right-hand block, which makes contact with the man's forearm (2). Kirby moves to Tucker's right side, which offers a position of relative safety (3). His forearm deflects the attacking arm even further, putting Kirby into a position that permits numerous finishes (4).

When it comes to blocking, two crossover variables exist and therefore warrant a brief discussion. A well-delivered juji can incorporate a slight amount of intentional deflection to help you off-balance your attacker. Conversely, a deflection block can be done with a closed fist if a juji isn't possible or if doing so works more effectively as a prelude to your next technique. There are no absolutes in blocking or any other subsets of the martial arts; there is only good training.

Guarantees

Do blocks always work? No. Even after 53 years of teaching jujitsu, I occasionally don't block as effectively as I should — and I usually suffer the consequences. However, as with any martial arts skill, the more you practice, the better you get. You learn that even when a block partially fails, in most cases, you can continue your defense.

As I mentioned, there are no absolutes when it comes to blocking. The situation determines what you can do. This is why Jack Seki didn't differentiate the blocks he taught beyond distinguishing the one-hand/one-arm *te no tatake* from the two-hand/two-arm juji. For him, they constituted an integral part of a complete jujitsu technique, and that's all they were. To separate them into their own categories with specific names and characteristics was anathema to their purpose, which was and is to quickly open a pathway to counter an opponent's attack.

For Seki, a block was a block. Either it worked or you got hit. Done! **305**

*George Kirby, 10th degree, is a Black Belt Hall of Famer and the founder of budoshin jujitsu. His most recent book is *Jujitsu: Toward One Technique*. For more information, visit shop.blackbeltmag.com.*

Sneak Peek at *Jujitsu: Toward One Technique*

Jack Seki used quite a bit of generic terminology either to make it easier for students to remember groups of similar techniques or because he believed that knowing a group of techniques under a common name and being able to apply them was more important than knowing all their specific names. (Although, he did give specific names at times.)

The latter supposition is probably the more accurate one: When Seki was working with nerve/pressure-point attacks in a class one evening, a student asked, "Why don't you tell us the names of the pressure points of the techniques you're using?" Seki responded, "Knowing the names of all the points won't help you in a street situation. Knowing where they are physically on the human body is more useful than knowing their names. If you want to learn the names, get a book on acupuncture or pressure points."

One example of a generic term Seki used was *te no tatake* (blocking or deflecting technique). He didn't break it down into terms such as *yoko uke* (outward block), *uchi uke* (inward block), *jodan uke* (upper-level block), *chudan uke* (center-level block) and *gedan uke* (lower-level block).

For Seki, a block or deflection was an inherent part of any response to a hit or grab. The block or deflection could be outward, across, downward or upward, with either the left or right hand, depending on the technique being used. And, yes, each of these variables has a distinct name, especially in the "hard" martial arts. But keeping their purpose in mind rather than just their names, he emphasized that all blocks or deflections are essentially the same: to change the direction or stop the forward movement of an attempted grab, choke, hit or kick so the student can safely move in and execute a *jujitsu* technique.

For Seki, it was probably more important to understand the commonalities of blocks/deflections and to block/deflect effectively than it was to memorize a bunch of names.

To order George Kirby's *Jujitsu: Toward One Technique*, visit shop.blackbeltmag.com.

