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The Joy of Breaking

The Downward Knife Hand

by Master Wiz

A proper downward knife hand break is a difficult break to perform properly because it is so easy to cheat and turn it into something else in the pursuit of power.

As we discussed in a previous article, an outward knife hand generates power from the outward rotation of the body and the joint-by-joint extension of the arm. The downward knife hand also generates power through the joint-by-joint extension of the arm. However, rotation is replaced with the downward motion as a means of increasing the power and effectiveness of the strike. The key to both of these strikes is that the joint-by-joint extension of the arm creates a whip-like action. Remember, a whip can cause amazing damage, not due to its weight but the speed at which it travels. The “crack” of the whip is actually the sound of the whip breaking the speed of sound barrier.

The Preparation

Place the board with the crack (or grain) running front to back.

The striking tool is the same as for outward knife hand: the side of the hand between the little finger and the wrist (primarily the thicker part near the wrist), with the thumb and fingers slightly curved inward to contract the muscle on the edge of the hand.

In order to correctly position yourself for this break (assuming you are breaking with the right hand), place your left (front) foot on the left side of the board holder with the toes even with the farthest edge. The right (rear) foot is positioned directly in line with the crack of

the board in a good walking stance position but with the ball of the foot on the ground and the knee bent pointing downward. If you find yourself slightly off balance due to a too narrow stance, move the left (front) foot outward to widen your stance. If this happens, you may have to shorten your stance slightly by bringing the right (rear) foot forward slightly.

The striking hand (right) should be able to reach the far end of the board with the fingers off the far edge of the board.

The Pre-Action

Start with the left (reaction) hand hanging outside the left knee height, and the right hand held at waist height palm up. As you rise upward, swing the right arm upwards above your head (palm backward) while swinging the left hand down (palm backward).

Synchronize swinging the arms with raising the body upward by straightening the rear leg, maintaining the ball of the foot on the floor. The front leg mostly straightens with the foot staying flat on the floor. Keep the upper body in the same relative position by pushing the chest forward and upward and keeping the back mostly vertical. The chest is pushed forward and upward as the body rises.



The Break

Swing the striking arm downward to strike the

board while swinging the other arm upward in reaction. Both palms rotate at the time of impact. Simultaneously lower the body. The proper striking position has the striking arm bent around 135 degrees (inside of the elbow) and the upper body rotated slightly towards the front knee with the shoulder in line with the front foot. The rear knee should be just above the ground

and bent almost 90 degrees. The knee rests on the ground on completion of the break.

Most Common Errors

If the front shoulder ends up on top of the breaking hand and the body shifted forward, this is no longer a true knife hand break but instead has become more of an open fist (or palm heel) strike. Remember this is a knife-hand and the power generation is from a WHIPPING action, not a pushing action using body weight.



Training Drill

A good drill for training and increasing the “whipping” action of the arm is to assume a pseudo pushup position with the body supported by the balls of the feet and the non-breaking hand far enough back that the breaking arm is almost straight in order for the knife hand tool to reach the closest edge of the board while the body is in the “up” position. Practice breaking the board only using the whipping action of the arm from this position.



Safety Tip

A stable breaking platform is vital for both the break and the training drill. Bricks that fall over onto the breaker’s feet are not recommended.



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