

A PERSPECTIVE ON HOJO UNDO

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IOGKF 8th Dan and legendary Karate Instructor, Sensei Bakkies Laubscher, utilises his amazing sports science knowledge and vast training experience to share his instruction, opinions and methods on Hojo Undo training.

INTRODUCTION

Most of us are familiar with the 'Hojo Undo' in our system, but for various reasons, we do not always get around to it in depth and therefore miss out on the benefits and enhancement this could add to our Karate. This article is aimed at a general audience and so I will try to keep it non-technical and simple in a language everyone can understand.

My experience is that many practitioners know how to use the different apparatus, but don't use them effectively and regularly! It is also a concern of mine that at all our high profile Gasshuku's, we do not have Hojo Undo apparatus available for actual use. In 1979 in Poole, and a few subsequent Gashukus in the 80's, we always had at least enough 'Chi'shi' for participants, be it maybe just enough for various group training.

I regularly experience students telling me they do Chi'shi every day/regularly, but I do not see any improvement in their power and speed after a long period, such as between dan grading examinations. The answer is simple: *'If we keep doing what we've always done, the way we've always done it, we will be what we have always been!'* If we do the same routine, with the same weight of 'Chi'shi' every day, we will not get stronger or better! I will not go into technical detail on muscle hypertrophy – basically we need to know that individual muscle fibers get bigger with constructive resistance training and thereby increase strength and speed and power.

I recently conducted a mini Gashuku in Holland where I was specifically invited to cover 'Hojo Undo' training – enough 'Chi'shi' were available and from the feedback I received, a different understanding was experienced by members when the transition from 'Junbi Undo' to 'Hojo Undo' to 'Sanchin' to 'Kihon' to 'Kakie' to 'Kata Bunkai' – the Goju Ryu system! – was practically 'walked through'.



UNDERSTANDING WHAT WE DO AND WHY.

We practice 'Traditional (Okinawan) Karate Do', - these are the core words of our main objective or 'Mission' – supported by a 'Set of Values', the 'Dojo Kun'.

'**Traditional Karate**' – originally practiced as an unarmed fighting method to survive a physical threat in a civilian environment. This implies that we should be physically able to handle ourselves.

'**Do**' – ('*Michi*, '*The way*') emphasized especially since WW II, when occupying Allied Powers prohibited practice of Japanese Martial Arts which 'incited militarism'. The basic meaning is to strive for peace – within oneself and the universe. '*Do*' has a different meaning to different cultures, but the essence stays the same, manifested in the '*Dojo Kun*'. – practicing a lethal martial art to 'discover' and gain control over one's own limitations and potential, with a longevity objective.

In my own opinion, *we should guard against making a fighting art too philosophical, academic and theoretical –frankly, theories and hypotheses don't work in the street –* ***composure***, combined with ***speed, power and strategy*** or plan does! (One could/should also add ***luck***, but seen in the context of the remark by renowned golfer, Lee Trevino: '***The more I practice, the luckier I get!***').

'*Traditional Karate Do*' must be a balance between the physical, fighting skills side, and the non-violent, strive for peace side.

GENERAL REMARKS ON SUPPLEMENTARY TRAINING

Physical Categories required for Karate training.

The main basic categories of physical (fighting skills) proficiency required for Karate-ka are: **Strength** (see definition of Power below), **Anaerobic Power**, **Muscular endurance**, **Agility**, **Cardiovascular Endurance** and **Flexibility**.

Supplementary training is done:

- To develop and increase proficiency in the above categories with the ultimate objective of increase in power.
- To prevent injuries.
- To strengthen joints for Karate-specific techniques by preparing muscles, tendons and ligaments groups – Karate uses a lot of ‘snap’ techniques, as well as joint locks, we need to prepare the joints for this – e.g., a bench press strengthens the muscles for punching, but not necessarily the joints, and does not develop ‘kime’ and ‘muchimi’, whilst ‘Chi’shi’ and ‘Kongoken’ training mostly consists of circular movements with demands on the joints to prepare it for the snap, ‘kime’ and ‘muchimi’.
- Our hands and arms are our ‘first line of contact’ with an opponent - punching, grabbing, and stabbing. They should be specifically developed to be able to do this
- To develop Karate-specific qualities, such as ‘Muchimi’ and ‘Kime’.

Principles of Power and Strength training

Definition of power:

Power = a balanced combination of strength and speed.

- *The amount of force produced during a muscle contraction can be varied or graded by varying the number of motor units involved or*
- *Changing the frequency at which the motor nerves fire or*
- *A combination of both.*

To increase strength and thus power, we need Resistance training, the main components being:

- Dynamic resistance, when one endeavors to either move the body or an object through a ROM (Range of Movement) – in the Dojo, we can use
- **Manual resistance** (using a partner , ‘**Kakie**’),
- **Free-weights** (barbells, dumbbells, ‘**Chi’shi**’, ‘**Kongoken**’), and
- **Resistance machines** (many variations, pushing/pulling pole, ‘**Makiwara**’).
- **Plyometric** training, which utilizes the stretch reflex and the accompanying stretch-shortening cycle to elicit more powerful contractions (Partner jumps, Rubber band training are probably the best examples)

Because Karate training is long and intense, one can only really learn and benefit (as opposed to merely surviving) if you have sufficient **cardio vascular** and **muscular endurance** ability to endure long hours of training with an intense workload.

Who is our 'client' and how do we accommodate him/her?

By choice, our students join a Dojo to learn a Martial Art and not a gymnasium. So, in order to still achieve the power objective in our students, we must to utilize what we have:

- 'Junbi Undo', 'Hojo Undo' and 'Kumite' forms (Strength, Muscular Endurance, Flexibility)
- 'Kihon', 'Kumite' and 'Kata' (Agility, Cardiovascular Endurance) and
- 'Sanchin' (Anaerobic power)
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- Basic training guidelines:
- Concentrate on involving as many joints as possible in a single exercise, e.g. only concentrating on bicep curls will not really benefit your 'Tsuki', in fact, it could lead to imbalance in your structural and muscular development and subsequent injury (Many Karate-ka suffer from shoulder injuries – when one observes their arm techniques, you would usually find a concentration only on the frontal muscles, no stability or locking in the pelvic core muscles and posterior shoulder and back muscles, the arm floating forward away from the shoulder joint because the lateral muscles are relaxed, etc.).
- Keep to Karate activity specific joint application movements when exercising, e.g. dumbbell punching & blocking.
- Super setting works well for karate - you are alternating agonists and antagonist muscles & tendons of a joint, e.g. alternating pushing movements with pulling movements.
- Alternate between heavy load, fewer sets and repetitions to lighter load, more sets and higher repetitions, Lighter loads and higher speeds develops power, as it makes it easier for the body to fire a greater number of muscle fibers and increase the rate of force development.
- Alternate between activities and the intensity of execution of activities,
- Vary your regimen regularly – the body quickly gets used to one type of training and goes into a 'sleep' mode, thus, no progress
- Give yourself time to recover! You cannot do heavy sets every day, cannot do the below Kata and bag routine every day with the same intensity.
- It's not so much 'What' you do, but 'How' you do what you do. The buzzwords in business are to do the 'Correct things Correctly' – you can keep yourself busy with physical activities that might not specifically benefit your Karate, e.g. long distance running, cycling, marathon swimming.
- Do not try to 'fast track' by using substances!
- There's no 'silver bullet' activity for everyone – every individual needs a different emphasis on different activities. E.g., if you have an ex-power lifter, you would emphasize flexibility, agility and cardio vascular activities more.
- Nutrition and lifestyle are intangible in any physical progress! You cannot drive a motor car with inferior or the wrong fuel and expect it to perform!

PRACTICAL APPLICATION SCENARIO

Let's conclude with possible scenarios that can be done privately or in class, using 'Chi'shi' and the swinging bag or punching pads, as an example. 'Chi'shi' are easy to make, every member of your Dojo can/should have personal 'Chi'shi(s)' at home – different weights etc. I am not going to go into the specifications and dimensions for 'Chi'shi' – feel free to contact me.

For the correct execution of 'Chi'shi' exercises, feel free to contact me. It's a category on its own. Always remember that wrong training is detrimental and counter-productive to your progress, for example, if you use momentum to swing the 'Chi'shi' upwards instead of the wrist and arm muscles, you will not gain strength. There's also a difference between balancing a heavy 'Chi shi' and actually controlling it with the correct muscle and joint execution.

Here's an example of a weekly training regimen for instructors and black belt students. Each routine should take about 20 - 40 minutes, so you can incorporate it in classes – adjust for the level of students, increase or decrease the sets and/or repetitions - it would also mean maybe only two or three days per week in classes.



Monday, Wednesday and Friday:

Warm up phase

1. Start with 15 minutes '*Junbi Undo*', do the warming up/stretching and breathing phases. Then do your '*Neko Undo*' exercise as follows:

- 1 x set of 10 slowly – breathing forward, sideways and back, then
- 3 x sets of 10 continuously, like a pendulum, with 1x minute rest in between sets.

2. Take a 5 minute rest.

Execution phase

3. Take your heavy '*Chi'shi*' (about 8% - 10% of your own body weight), select any one, two or three '*one-hand*' '*Chi'shi*' exercises (depending on your condition, years training, etc.) and do the following routine:

First exercise:

- 1 x set of 20 repetitions with each arm
- Rest 1 ½ minutes
- 1 set of 15 x repetitions with each arm
- Rest 1 ½ minutes
- 1 set of 10 x repetitions with each arm

4. Rest 5 minutes and stretch the arms.

Then take Exercise 2: the same as above, rest 5 minutes, then Exercise 3.

Cool down phase

5. Finish of with '*Gekki Sai Dai*' Katas normal speed, emphasis on technique and power. Stretch for 10 minutes.



Tuesday, Thursday

Warm up phase

1. Start with 15 minutes 'Junbi Undo', do the warming up/stretching and breathing phases. Then do your Straddle runs ('mountain climbing' – I explained in Okinawa in 2008 at the Budosai) exercise as follow:

- 1 x set of 20 slowly – front foot between hands, back leg stretched as far as possible back, keep the lower back and abdominal muscles semi tense, but allow spring in lower back.
- 3 x sets of 30 continuously, with 1½ minute rest in between sets.

2. Take a 5 minute rest.

Execution phase

3. Select one or more Kata and do the following routine:

- Do the Kata 2 x times – first one slow and with full power, rest 1 minute then as fast as you can with still emphasis on power. Then, immediately,
- Punch the swinging bag continuously for 1 minute – try not to stop, keep punching and moving – make sure of your distance and focus.
- Rest 1 ½ minutes.
- Do the Kata 2 x times – first one slow and with full power, rest 1 minute then as fast as you can with emphasis still on power. Then, immediately,
- Kick the swinging bag continuously for 1 minute using only 'mae geri'– try not to stop, keep kicking and moving – make sure of your distance and focus.
- Rest 1 ½ minutes.
- Do the Kata 2 x times – first one slow and with full power, rest 1 minute then as fast as you can with emphasis still on power. Then, immediately,
- Punch the swinging bag continuously for 1 minute – try not to stop, keep punching and moving – make sure of your distance and focus.
- Rest 1 ½ minutes.
- Do the Kata 2 x times – first one slow and with full power, rest 1 minute then as fast as you can with emphasis still on power. Then, immediately,
- Kick the swinging bag continuously for 1 minute, using only 'mae geri'– try not to stop, keep kicking and moving – make sure of your distance and focus.
- Rest 1 ½ minutes.
- Do the Kata 2 x times – first one slow and with full power, rest 1 minute then as fast as you can with still emphasis on power. Then, immediately,
- Punch and Kick the swinging bag continuously for 1 minute, using only 'tsuki' and 'mae geri'– try not to stop, keep punching, kicking and moving – make sure of your distance and focus.
- Cool down phase

4. Finish off with 'Sanchin' Kata, slow and medium power. Stretch for 10 minutes.

CONCLUSION

There are infinite scenarios you can formulate yourself along these guidelines using all the '*Hojo Undo*' apparatus as well as gymnasium equipment. Hopefully, this article is motivational and inspirational, for instructors and students.

Too many times I experience instructors and students trying to re-invent the wheel, formulating their own theories and hypotheses on the physical and other aspects of our art. We have incredible amounts of modern scientific knowledge of the human body, nutrition and physical performance mechanisms available today in an ongoing mode. **We also have an enormous wealth of expertise in the IOGKF in various fields** - we should utilize these much more.

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