

Jiyu Ippon Kumite (Semi Free Sparring-SFS) - PART I

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Jiyu Ippon Kumite (semi-free sparring)

This exercise is important as an intermediate step between ippon kumite and free sparring. Without developing the skills introduced in semi free sparring, free style kumite could be both difficult and very dangerous. Students should therefore focus on maintaining good posture, sharp attacks and decisive blocking techniques. This type of training is introduced at the intermediate or brown belt level. By this time, students have developed good coordination and a sense of kime. Brown belts often have strong technique but are unaware of their strength. They seldom have a regular makiwara or heavy bag regimen and seldom have an accurate or realistic perception of their power. Therefore, both parties must concentrate fully to avoid serious injury.

In ippon kumite, the attacks are announced and the defense is executed from natural stance. One should emphasize correct distance (mai), quick reaction time and a sharp counter attack. In semi free sparring, both participants remain in fighting stance and the distance is not fixed. Both students are free to move in any direction as long as the attacker can cover sufficient distance to reach the target and the defender can block and counter effectively. This adds a dimension of "freedom" to SFS. This space can be covered by stepping, sliding, shifting and pivoting. Once again, this is the opportunity to develop patterns and skills that will be used in full kumite.

Many students have difficulty finding a comfortable and effective free stance. We are taught the more rigid stances, like zenkutsu and kokutsu dachi, and the idea of standing in a relaxed posture, with no definitive weight distribution, or hand position, is at first fairly awkward. The following hints may be helpful. The front or lead hand should be positioned so that both a quick parry and a sharp jab are easily executed. The elbow should be fairly close to the rib cage and the elbow and shoulder joints assume a relaxed and natural position. The counter hand should also be close to the torso with palm facing upward. Again, both hands should be prepared for attacks and defensive movements. Weight should be fairly evenly distributed between the front and rear legs. The rear foot should be no more than 45 degrees of the vertical to achieve optimum mechanics for quick forward motion. In this position, one should feel free to move forward, backward, to the side or in any rotational plane. The most common error in semi free sparring is that students remain fixed in one spatial position. They fail to take advantage of the newfound "freedom". Both parties should move freely until the exact distance and opportunity presents for a sharp and decisive attack.

In semi free sparring, the attack is announced prior to delivery. The defender has no idea when the attack is going to take place. In more advanced forms of semi free sparring, the defender may block and attack simultaneously or may actually counter attack prior to the full execution of the offensive move (diai). These options are reserved for the more experience students as they require tremendous timing and distancing skills. Another

advanced form of semi free sparring requires the defender to predict the type of attack and defend rapidly. For example, one side will be designated as the attacker. They will both begin from kamae position. When distancing is appropriate, the attacker may choose to initiate any attack that involves oi or a stepping movement. They may select oi-zuki, oi-geri or oi-uchi, punching, kicking or striking. Without knowing the intended technique, the defender must effect a strong defense and counter attack. This is the last stage of semi free sparring just before advanced kumite.

The attacking side should focus on several important points. When advancing, hold form until the last minute. This allows the attacker to conceal the technique until the last minute. This should be practiced in basic sparring drill as well. If this is ingrained early, it will be very effective in more advanced kumite. The second most common problem with SFS is poor attacking posture (mental and physical). We often fail to attack with our legs. A swift leg action coupled with strong intention is the recipe for a decisive attack. The attacker should "invade" the space of the defender and force them to block quickly and sharply. Don't attack arbitrarily. Find your distance, watch the defenders weight distribution and balancing tendencies. Once you feel or see an opportunity, attack quickly with serious intention. A strong kiai compliments the attack.