

Jumping Kicks

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Translated literally "tae" means jumping or flying, to kick or smash with the foot, "kwon" denotes the fist - chiefly to punch or destroy with the hand or fist, "Do" means an art or way (ITFNZ Theory handbook). This essay will concentrate on the "tae" side of Taekwon-Do, jumping and flying techniques.

Jumping kicks only requires two prerequisites, firstly to be able to lift both feet off the ground at the same time (jumping) and secondly to be able to perform the kick on the ground (kicking), this includes balance.

The advantages of jumping kicks are probably known by most people who practice martial arts. Some of these advantages include the ability to kick targets at a greater height, kicking whilst jumping over objects - hence tucking the non-kicking leg is important, gaining horizontal distance in the kick (jumping-in kicks), being able to move into a position that enables you to kick at the desired target eg dodging kicks.

Unfortunately, like most things, it has its disadvantages. Jumping kicks can be very predictable and slow especially if one is trying to gain height in the kick. Swinging the arms and bending the knee before jumping can make you jump higher but also alerts your opponent and tells him/her that you are about to jump. If balance is not maintained throughout the kick then when landing you become very vulnerable to attack. The saying 'practise makes perfect' still applies and jumping kicks become very tiring after a few jumps. They cannot be practised as frequently as ground kicks, therefore, they may take longer to learn.

Practising jumping kicks can be summarised under two sections, mental and physical practise. To me, both are equally important and one should not be practised without the other. Mental and physical exercises act synergistically, that is, they act additively therefore by practising them together you will develop your techniques more quickly than by practising just mental or physical skills by themselves.

Firstly, the physical training will be mentioned. I have already assumed that you are capable of performing the kick on the ground, because if you cannot perform the kick on the ground then you obviously cannot perform the kick in the air. Therefore, the only other aspect that needs to be covered is jumping.

Most jumping exercises are very simple. For example, exercises that high jumpers (the track and field event) might use are repeated high bouncing, particularly from the takeoff foot, which the body drops as low and bounces as high as possible. Sprinting and emphasising a high knee action and an exaggerated bounce from the feet and ankles. Other methods include jumping up onto a bench and then down again and gradually increasing the height of the bench, that is, concentrate on jumping high rather than how long you can jump up and down. But jumping kicks are techniques that involve a combination of jumping and kicking so therefore I believe that

practising the technique is more important than practising jumping by itself. Even coaches that coach high jumpers believe in this. The athlete must not jump too much because it is asking a great deal of a leg to lift the body higher than the head and too many leaps will wear out the spring (Modern Track and Field, 1953).

The above exercises can be easily applied to Taekwon-Do. For example, when performing short sprints up and down the hall as a warm up exercise the sprinting and the jumping exercises can be applied in this manner. Making the students run around the perimeter of the dojang and putting obstacle in their way which they jump over eg a chair, this is good for practising gaining horizontal distance in the kick. Holding a broom handle horizontal in the air, at a height that is suitable for each individual, and making the students jump over it in either a side cocked position or a front cocked position (eg preparing for a jumping side piercing or a front snap kick, respectively).

Actually practising jumping kick as 'one unit' is more difficult. Instead of practising the drills which are normally practised in the club, I have included some different exercises that may help develop more control and 'flexibility' in the jumping kicks. For beginners, practising the kicks and landing on a soft mat (about 0.5 meters high) is a good starting point since they can concentrate on what the kick feels like in the air and not have to worry about landing. Therefore, when they start practising their jumping kick they know what the kick should feel like in the air and therefore will have something to aim for.

For more advanced students, other techniques can be employed. One example is developing what basketball players call 'hang time', hang time is the time in which you are airborne. This technique involves kicking after you have reached your maximum height and before you land. For example, for a jumping turning kick this may involve jumping up then clapping the soles of your feet together (this helps 'stall' the kick) and then performing the kick. Try performing the jumping kick in a slow motion, this will help develop control.

Lastly, the final emphasis should be placed on the mental training, that is, mental imagery. Mental imagery is a bit like running your own video tape replay in your mind or being inside your own video camera and seeing outside (ITFNFZ Instructors' course manual, 1994). It involves rehearsing the jumping, cocking the legs, kicking, and then landing at the same speed as needed for the actual kick. When learning the kick it may help to slow down the imagery but once the jumping kick is learned the mental imagery should be increased to the real life tempo. The mental rehearsal should be successful, not perfect, and you should imagine that you are performing equal to or better than your previous best jumping kick. If you have access to a video camera, and if you have been taped during a superior jumping kick then you should view this tape several times and think about how you felt when you executed the kick. This will provide you with the necessary information for mentally rehearsing every detail of the kick for producing future superior kicks. Re-experiencing a successful jumping kick as soon after it has occurred will help you establish how the kick feels and gives you a reference point future mental images which are equal to or better than your previous ones. Mental imagery is excellent when performing line drill in the club, it gives you something to do in between the kicks.

Mental imagery is not wishful thinking about how you would like to perform, instead it is a skill that requires effort, concentration, and discipline to acquire. For more information on this subject of how you can develop mental imagery then the references that the end of this essay may be of some help to you. Using physical and mental exercises to learn and develop your jumping kicks will prove useful in the long term. The exercises in this essay are merely a starting point for this subject and I would like to suggest that you develop your own exercises that challenge your own level of performance so that you are always persevering towards some goal. Have a go and put some 'tae' back into your Taekwon-Do.

References

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