

# DUMMY TRAINING

By Chuck Sullivan

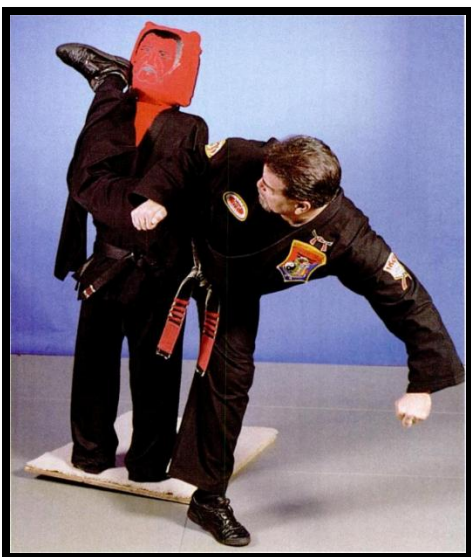
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It all started in 1964 around the time of Ed Parker's 1<sup>st</sup> International Karate Championships in Long Beach, California. Mr. Parker and I had become involved in several business projects, one of which was a karate school on my end of town. One evening, a student said he's recently had the opportunity to use the skills he'd learned in class. While everything had turned out satisfactorily, he said at one point he tried to extricate himself quickly from the situation by executing a kick to the groin. Unfortunately, he came up short – literally. He did the popular technique just the way he'd practiced, but he couldn't switch from not making contact in class to making contact on the street.

In martial arts theory, a target is supposed to be a target, whether it is a point in space near a physical object or the physical object itself. If you are able to hit that point in space every time you throw a technique, all you have to do is extend the blow a little farther and you'll hit the physical object, right? Evidently, not for everybody.

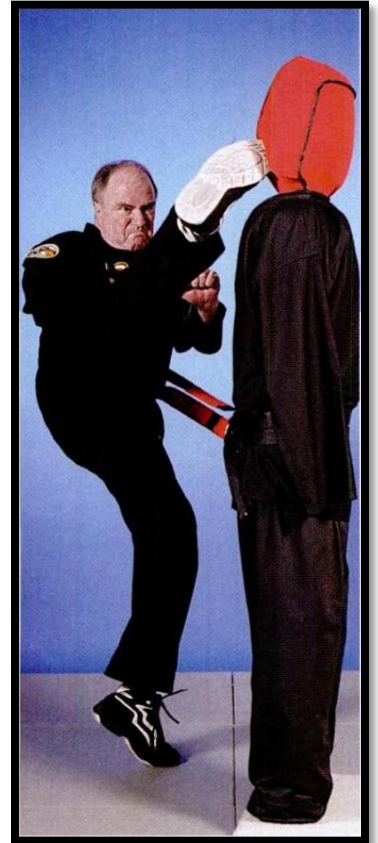
## Searching for a Solution

I knew then that my students needed a method of actually seeing the target get struck while being able to assess the effectiveness of their blows. The first thing I thought of was a heavy bag. I tried drawing targets on it, but it didn't work at all. A heavy bag is cylindrical and has no distinguishing features. It also spins when hit, and it swings and bucks in a manner that is totally unlike the way a person reacts when he receives similar blow. That's when I decided the only thing that could take the place of a body, was a body.



It took an entire weekend to build my first life-size dummy. It was a spur-of-the-moment project, so I had to make do weekend with what I could find in my garage: plywood, 2x4s, and screws, old clothing for padding and twine to bind it together. I named him "Frank N. Stine" because he was homemade. It took about half an hour for the animals at the dojo to kill him – and they didn't even give him a funeral.

A few months later I tried again, this time with galvanized pipe and more rags and twine (this was before duct tape hit the market). "Frankie #2" lasted a couple of months. That dummy was still inefficient cost-wise and time-wise, but it did teach us the value of such a training device. There have been a number of other home-builds over the past 37 years, each of which has had a tremendous influence on our training and the design of successive models.



Dummy training eliminates the guessing from practice sessions because it's easy to see and feel how well a roundhouse kick (above), or a hook kick (below) works.



Chuck Sullivan sends a spinning back kick in the UltraMan Dummy. (To minimize movement in the dojo, the plywood base should be larger than the one shown here.)

We've killed a lot of dummies in class, but during each one's life span we could see exactly where our blows were going and assess what kind of an effect they would have on a human attacker. In the beginning, it was a real eye-opener. Some of my students, who I thought wouldn't have any problems at all, couldn't hit the broad side of a barn. They were so far off the mark it was astounding. Speed was part of the problem. Some of our people had gotten so fast they could blow your socks off, but when it came to hitting targets, they just whiffed by them. Great shows, but few blows.

## Feeling Reality

To further illustrate the value of training dummies, let me recount a short story about an incident that happened a year ago. One of my students brought a teenage friend who had trained in another system to observe our class. We were working extensively on the dummies that night, and I could tell he was dying to try his stuff. When class ended, he asked if he could use a dummy. I said, "Sure, have fun." He stepped up and did as good a head-high kick as I'd ever seen. If had all the form and snap you could ask for; it just didn't hit the dummy's head. I said, "It's OK to hit him – that's what he's here for. Go ahead." The visitor executed another beautiful kick, which also failed to make contact. I said, "No, you don't understand. Go ahead and kick him in the head." Three kicks later, he finally made contact – and came very close to falling down because the impact threw him off so badly. It was frightening to watch.

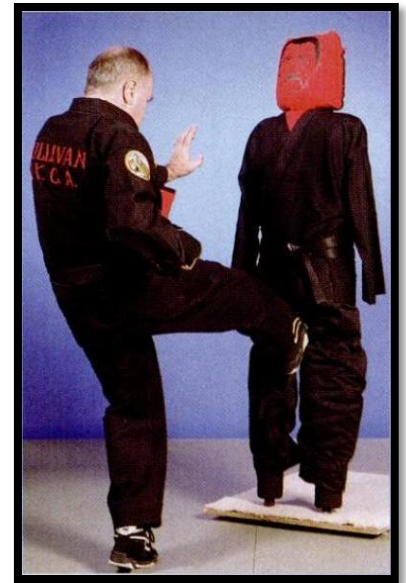
Aside from teaching accuracy, another advantage of working with a dummy is that they stop your blows, just a body does. In the air you can go like the wind, but when something stops your normal flow and you're not accustomed to it, it can be disturbing. It can interrupt your rhythm, timing, speed and balance. As if that weren't enough, it can throw off the accuracy of your subsequent blows as well. Can you afford that on the street?

It doesn't have to be that way, and dummy training is the key. It's challenging at first, but with a little practice you'll learn how to strike hard without losing your balance. Then you'll find your speed returning. In fact, with enough practice, you will get even faster. It's fantastic when you can simultaneously hear, feel and see a technique hit.

## Answering Naysayers

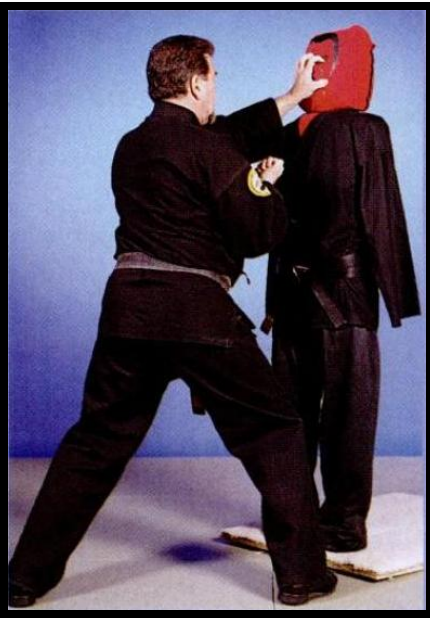
A frequently voiced objection to dummy training is that dummies don't react the same as a real person. That is true. However, sometimes a person doesn't react the way you think he will, either. We have found that most of the follow-up blows of the *Kenpo* combinations can be applied to a standing set of targets with just a little adjusting – which is what the art is all about. From your initial block or parry, you use strikes designed to take advantage of your opponent's reactions, but you are constantly ready to go to other techniques instantaneously if the action demands it.

Another objection is that dummies don't fight back. Well, they can if you want them to. We deliberately built our dummies without arms so a workout partner could stand behind them and use his arms to simulate a punch or use a padded weapon to try to hit you.

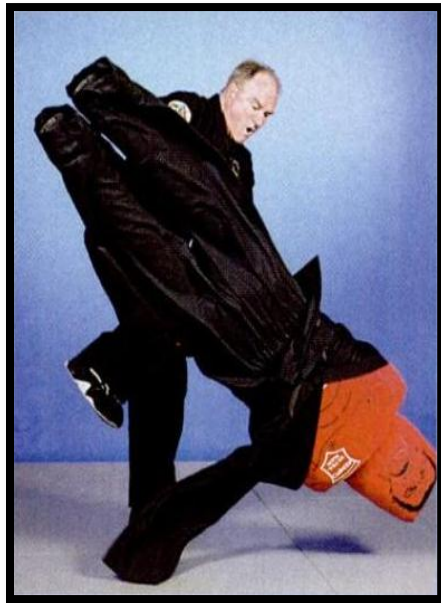


When a kick to the groin is 100% effective, both of the dummy's pant legs will jump. If the technique is slightly off target, only one will rise.





When a claw to the eyes is done properly, it leaves small indentations that last for a few seconds - long enough to see if you have delivered a powerful blow.



Chuck Sullivan prefers to dress his training dummy in a uniform so he can grab a sleeve or lapel while practicing sweeps and takedowns.

Can a dummy replace a live training partner? No, and by the same logic, a live training partner cannot replace a life-sized dummy. Each has its place in your training regimen. A dummy can't react like a live partner and a live partner can't be stuck with full force. If I could have only one, it would have to be the dummy. Training partners get tired, and sometimes their wives won't let them come out to play.

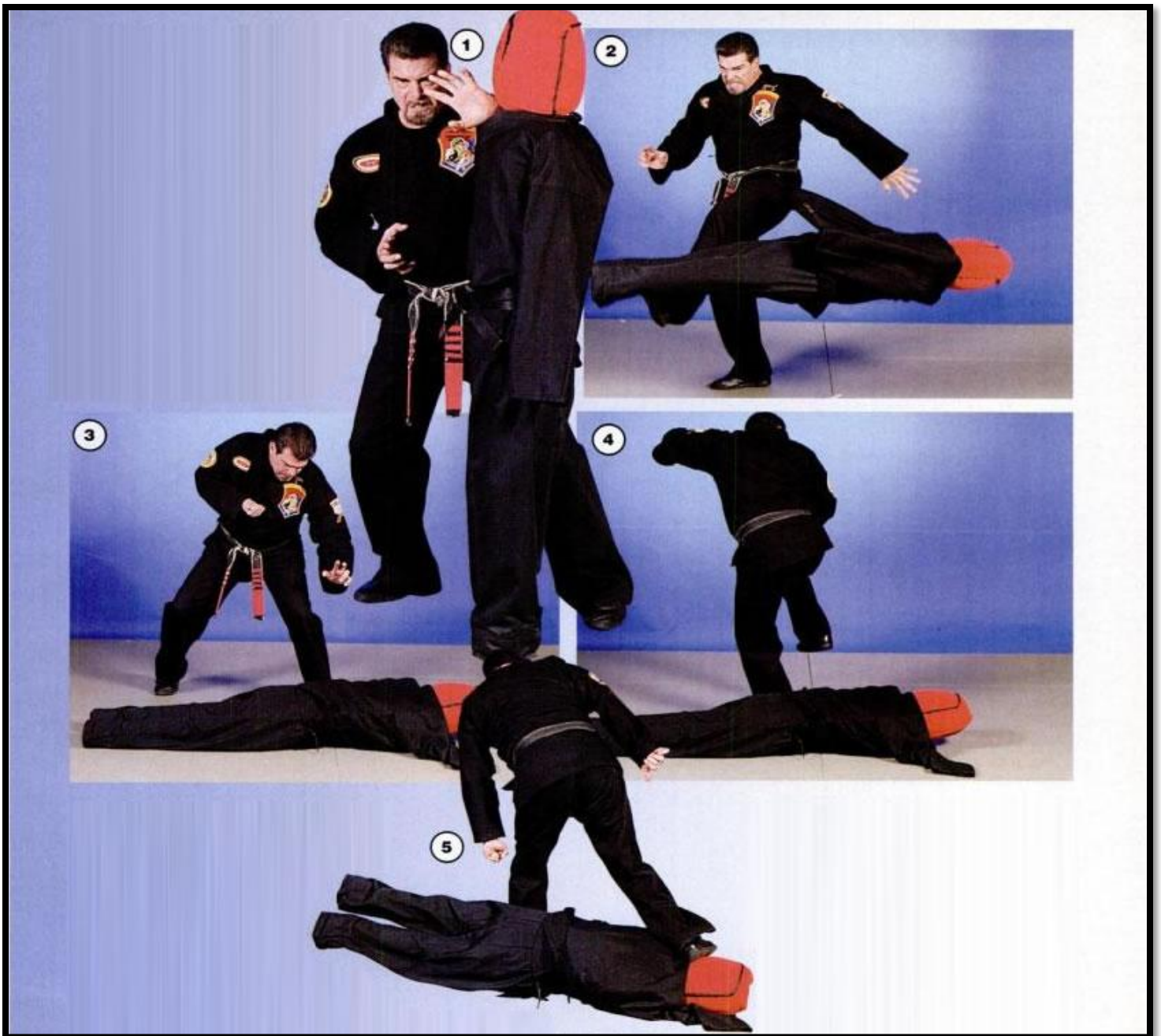
Another by-product of striking training dummies is the resistance it offers and the power you develop from that. An interesting exercise we discovered involves thrusting a claw into the dummy's face. When done with power, the point of impact of each finger will be evidenced as a short-lived indentation in its canvas face.



Because a training dummy lacks the weight of a human opponent, it is useful to have a partner add his mass to it during practice. Vic LeRoux pushes down on the dummy's head or shoulders, while Chuck Sullivan sweeps its legs.

## Setting Up a Program

When you begin using a life-sized dummy, you'll find yourself experimenting with various kicks and strikes. Once you're comfortable executing single shots, you should move on to simple combinations, then more complex series of blows. One of the best ways to utilize a dummy in the dojo is to employ it as a competitive tool. Devise a series of strikes consisting of front snap kicks, roundhouse kicks, rear heel kicks, punches, chops, elbow strikes, claws, hammer fists, head butts, back fists, ridgehands, heel palms or whatever else you wish to include. Do the combinations until you can move comfortably, and then do it on the dummy. Then do it for time I front of a panel of judges. In the beginning, you will see a conspicuous difference between what you can do in the air and what you can do on the dummy.



**Vic LeRoux supports the dummy with his left forearm (1). He then chops its throat and sweeps its legs, sending the dummy to the mat (2). Next, he checks the dummy (3), then spins and cocks his right leg (4), and drives a heel kick to the dummy's head (5).**

The best way to review this type of training and competition is with video. Sometimes the inaccuracies of your techniques will be very obvious as you see yourself miss the target altogether. Sometimes you will see your strikes graze the target. You can judge the effectiveness of such a partial hit by using the theory that if the dummy doesn't react, neither will an opponent. Watch for penetration and look for movement from the dummy. Leave enough play in the mounting device to allow for a reasonable degree of movement. If the kick was intended to be a groin shot, make sure it really hits the groin and not the inside of the thigh. That's another positive feature about the dummies: They don't lie, and neither does video.

Until you have worked with a life-sized dummy, you haven't felt the full effect of what you have learned in the dojo. So build one or buy one, but don't deny yourself this most important training element any longer.