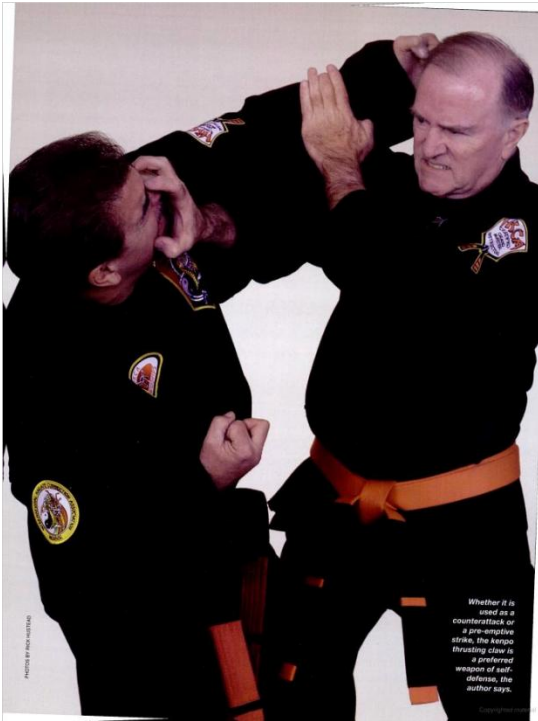


THE PRE-EMPTIVE STRIKE

Kenpo's Approach to Stopping Aggression Before It Starts

By Chuck Sullivan

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As a martial artist, you are bound by the creed of your style or school to use your potentially deadly knowledge only as a last resort. And so it should be.

Unfortunately, there are occasions when the worst happens and you perceive an attack to be imminent because the signs are unmistakable. It's at those times that it becomes reasonable for you to initiate the action to save yourself or a loved one from serious injury or death. You're entitled to employ a pre-emptive strike.

First, Avoid

First and foremost, it must be stated that when it comes to personal combat, the only true winners are those who exercise the art of avoidance. A fight that's avoided produces no losers, only winners. When there's no physical encounter, no one ends up broken and bleeding, no one goes to jail and no one has to pay an attorney or a doctor.

However, avoidance cannot be exercised in every potentially violent encounter. When there's no way out, you must eliminate the threat as quickly as possible. It's for those times that this article was written.

Take Action

The pre-emptive strike is the best way to ensure victory in a fight. As you execute it, everything you've learned and practiced in the dojo comes into play.

When violence looms, your brain will signal that action is required. Because the most opportune time to prepare for that possibility is long before you need to unleash your skills, it's essential to examine some strategies now.

The first component you must consider is posture. It's obvious that the best way to position yourself with respect to your attacker is not face-to-face because such an orientation presents him with easy access to all the targets and vital points he would just love to smash. Instead, you should adopt a stance that enables you to exploit the maximum number of weapons taught in your art while closing off his path of entry to your vulnerable targets. In essence, protect yourself but make sure you can still hit him.

Even though you're getting ready to throw down, you shouldn't look like you're in a fighting stance. Remember that in today's world, everyone recognizes a classic karate pose. Adopting one prior to defending yourself is

tantamount to tipping off your opponent that you're about to launch a kick or a reverse punch. You lose the element of surprise.

Stand and Deliver

So how do you assume a fighting stance without having it look like a fighting stance? First, toss out the classic bent-knee posture that reveals all your weapons to your opponent. Move your body into a position that places most of your weight over your rear leg; that will enable you to raise your front leg as a check or launch a quick kick without necessitating a time-consuming weight shift. Keep just enough weight on your front foot to push off should the need arise to put some distance between you and your foe.

Next, raise your hands in front of your chest and point your palms outward to affect a non-threatening appearance. Such a limb orientation will put him off-guard, especially if you combine it with an expression like "Just take it easy," "We don't want any problems here," or "Let's calm down a little." Then, if the situation deteriorates and violence erupts, witnesses will say you tried to defuse the situation until the other guy forced you to take action.

Try not to look intimidated because a bully loves it when his victim shows fear – and such a display might even inspire him to pounce. Instead, look as if you're attempting to resolve the situation and have the authority and confidence to do so.

Weapon Selection

When it comes to choosing a natural weapon for self defense, I'm partial to the *Kenpo* thrusting claw. I have plenty of reasons for making that selection, mathematics being #1. Using the thrusting clas gives you a ten-to-one shot at hitting your target, and that's about as low-risk, high-yield as you can get. Those odds result from the fact that you have five digits to strike with and two targets of equal value to hit. The target's, of course, are your assailant's eyes.

If you've ever been poked in the eye, you'll immediately recognize the value of targeting them in a fight. Long before martial artists began wearing gloves and other protective gear, I experienced an accidental eye jab during a freestyle match. My hands flew to my face to belatedly protect my eyes, and the bout was over for me. Immediately. Had the incident occurred on the street, it would have produced exactly the same result on my part because that kind of pain gives you no option. A poke in one eye affects the other as well, causing both to slam shut. And that's never a good thing in a street fight.

Legal disclaimer: Only the direst of situations warrant the use of an eye strike. Obviously it's not a technique you would use in response to being called a bad name. Reserve it and techniques like it for situations in which your life is in jeopardy.

More Bad Guys, More Targets

A pre-emptive strike is usually justified when more than one aggressor threatens you. Such situations call for the most explosive responses you can generate because of the need to employ quick strikes to reduce the danger. Because you can look at only one target at a time, the thrusting claw is still the preferred weapon. With a little practice, you should be able to make contact with at least one eye of the thug you target first without even looking directly at him. That will leave you free to immediately deal with the next one.

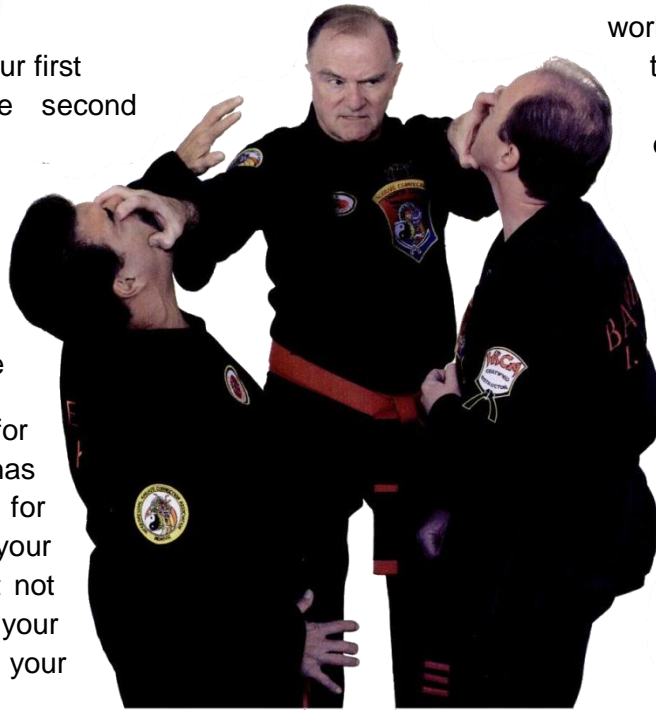


When facing a potential attacker, Chuck Sullivan prefers to operate from a non-threatening stance. His hands are raised as a gesture of peace, but they can easily be used for offense or defense.

The key to making it glance in the direction of your first divert your gaze to the second blast a thrusting claw to

Your goal is to exploit the holds that the strike you generally be faster than because of the time it sense danger and decide

If a follow-up is required for revert to what your art has comprises valid techniques for select the right one. If your target, however, you might not simply take advantage of your blindness to make your



work involves shooting a quick target to “place” him. Then you aggressor and simultaneously each man’s face.

action-vs.-reaction principle. It initiate (the action) will his block (the reaction) takes the human brain to how to respond to it.

either aggressor, feel free to taught you. Every system self-defense; it’s up to you to thrusting claws were on need the follow-up. You can opponent’s temporary departure.

When two opponents attack, you can glance at the first one to "place" him, then lock your eyes onto the second as you strike both at the same time.

Acid Test

To gauge the potential effectiveness of the thrusting claw as a pre-emptive strike, I asked an assistant to set up a digital video camera shooting at 30 frames per second. A shutter speed of 1/125 of a second was used to freeze the moment while leaving just a hint of blurring.

The first frame depicted the scene before the technique commenced. The second frame showed the strike being initiated and the claws being formed. The third frame showed the fingertips about to make contact with the target. The fourth frame showed the penetration that resulted when the fingertips impacted the target.

Note that only three frames in the sequence revealed movement. It can be extrapolated that if 30 frames were recorded in one second and three frames contained all the action. The technique from start to finish needed only 1/10 second to complete.

In other words, if you have the position and distance and you’ve practiced launching from a standstill to full-out without telegraphing your intentions, your opponent won’t be able to move between the time you start and the time you make contact. A span of 1/10 second is simply too short. He could anticipate your strike and block it before it’s completed, but chances are, he won’t be able to intercept or avoid it.

What-Ifs

What happens if you’re not at the proper distance to take advantage of the thrusting claw? Let’s say two opponents are standing far away and you’re concerned about being gang-rushed. You decide that the crime needs to be stopped before it starts.

Because they’re so distant, you must rely on a long-range weapon such as a kick, and you won’t be able to hit both of them simultaneously. Your best option is to hammer the first aggressor with your foot, then move on to the second aggressor as quickly as possible. To accomplish that with efficiency, you must use the *Kenpo* concept of re-cocking action. It will enable you to chamber your second kick while you recover from your first.



One way to apply it in the dojo is as follows: Assume a suitable stance (1), and then deliver a snapping front kick to the (protected) groin of your first opponent (2). Immediately after making contact, re-cock your leg and drive a thrusting rear kick into your second opponent (3). You can then snap a back fist into the face of the nearest man as you step past him (4) and follow up with a spinning back fist (5). To make certain the second man is disabled; smash him with a second kick (6).



If your opponents have positioned themselves in front and behind you, or are heading in that direction, you'll need to use the strategies discussed earlier to get close enough to the man in front to take him out with a pre-emptive blow.

Training Time

Practicing on a life-sized dummy is an excellent way to become accustomed to shooting a claw technique in one direction while looking in another. With the right type

of dummy, you'll know if your blind shot was accurate because a proper strike will leave indentations in the dummy's face. You'll know if you hit the other opponent because you'll be able to see it and feel it.



When confronted, Chuck Sullivan forgoes the typical karate stance (1). The Kenpo expert shoots a thrusting claw into the first man's eyes (2), and then executes a rear kick to the groin of the second man, while driving a punch into the chin of the first (3).

Of course, the best form of training is that which prepares your mind as well as your body. Create scenarios that require you to do everything in your power to avoid a fight. Sometimes it should be allowed to work and sometimes it shouldn't. As soon as you believe an attack is imminent, plunge into your pre-emptive strike. Make it as fast and hard as possible without alerting your opponent. But try not to hit him too hard or too often. After all, he'll only have 1/10 second to intercept your technique.