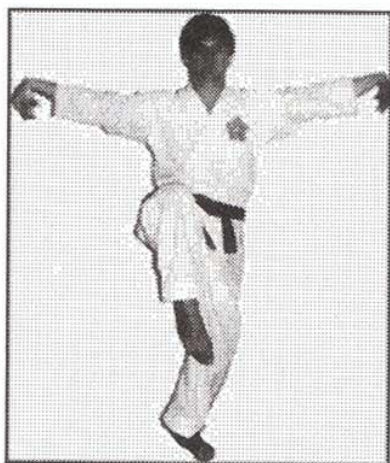


# The Kicks of Okinawan Goju-Ryu Karate

Potent, Practical and Potentially Painful

*by Scott Lenzi*



*We're all familiar with this pose, made famous in the film *The Karate Kid*. From this stance, the goju-ryu stylist can snap his leg out for a front kick.*

Nearly all Japanese, Chinese and Korean martial arts include a variety of kicking techniques. In Okinawan goju-ryu karate, however, the legs are utilized primarily for balance and locomotion. A slightly less important function of the legs is kicking.

Goju-ryu does not possess a vast number of kicking techniques, but those it does include have proven effective in countless combat situations over many decades.

Goju-ryu is considered primarily an infighting system. Thus, hand techniques are used approximately 70 percent of the time, while kicks are employed the other 30 percent. The system's kicks must be quick and efficient, and must be effective against an opponent of any size.

Although some instructors have modified the original kicking techniques for tournaments and sparring sessions, goju-ryu kicks traditionally targeted areas below the opponent's waist. No matter how much an opponent weighs, he can be felled by a kick to his knees. The same kick, delivered to a muscular or large opponent's midsection, might not be as effective.

In addition, goju-ryu kicks seldom rise above a 90-degree angle to the kicker's body. This allows the kicker optimal balance, which in turn generates maximum power, since the angle of impact is minimal. In other words, a straight line is the fastest, most effective route to take to the target. Goju-ryu kicks commonly target the opponent's groin area, inner thighs, knees, shins, and instep. Regardless of your adversary's size



or disposition, a kick to one or more of these targets can be extremely effective and debilitating.

The most common striking surfaces utilized for goju-ryu kicks are the heel, ball of foot, outer edge or "blade" of the foot, instep and, on rare occasions, the toes. The heel, the most effective striking surface of the foot, is generally targeted to the opponent's groin, knee or instep.

Anatomy plays a major role in the heel's effectiveness as a striking surface for kicks. With the toes pulled back, the heel is braced by the entire leg when it makes contact with the opponent.

There are three basic types of goju-ryu kicks: thrusting (linear), snapping (rotational), and a combination of thrusting and twisting. A snapping motion is utilized in kicks such as Agorae Albert (front kick) and mawashi germ (roundhouse kick). Mae geri is the most fundamental and essential kick of goju-ryu karate. The technique has been misconstrued and altered over time, but the correct and original method to perform mae geri begins with the practitioner raising his knee to waist level in a movement that can also serve as a hiza geri (knee strike). From here, the foot is not thrust forward, but rather swung upward with the knee in place. This allows the goju-ryu stylist to strike the center of his opponent's body with the ball of the foot. As students began participating more in tournaments and sparring sessions, the mae geri technique was modified and was thrust straight forward to the opponent's stomach, or higher.

Mae geri is equally effective whether the goju-ryu practitioner is moving backward or forward, or is stationary. Another important advantage of this kick is that, while maintaining the knee in its raised position, the practitioner can repeat the kick without a loss of power, speed or balance.

Goju-ryu's thrusting kicks are more powerful than their snapping counterparts and are generally delivered in a straight line to the target. These kicks include kakato, geri (heel kick), ushiro kakato geri (back heel kick) and uchi kakato geri (inside heel kick), to name a few. These kicks combine a dynamic lowering of the body's center of gravity with the extension of the leg to create power. As with all goju-ryu kicks, uchi kakato geri is employed at close range and is directed toward the inside of the attacker's forward knee. The kick does not require the practitioner to first twist or turn his upper body, meaning he has full use of all upper-body blocking or striking techniques.

Ushiro kakato geri is delivered straight backward. The technique begins with the goju-



ryu stylist chambering his kicking leg, then launching it backward. This will cause the kicker's upper body to naturally counterbalance the backward movement by leaning forward. This fully extended position leaves the kicker out of balance and vulnerable to a counterattack. In addition, the kicker must retract his leg, straighten his body, and then turn to face the opponent, who remains at a close distance.

The shorei-kan system of goju-ryu offers a solution for this dilemma. Once ushiro kakato geri is executed, the kicker's upper body comes forward and is braced with the hands, providing a strong, balanced posture. After the kick is completed-regardless of whether it struck the opponent-the shorei-kan goju-ryu practitioner is able to easily turn and rise into a "cat" stance (nekoashi dachi), ready to counter any attack by his opponent.

Ushiro kakato geri can be aimed at a variety of targets, including the opponent's knees, groin or inner thigh.

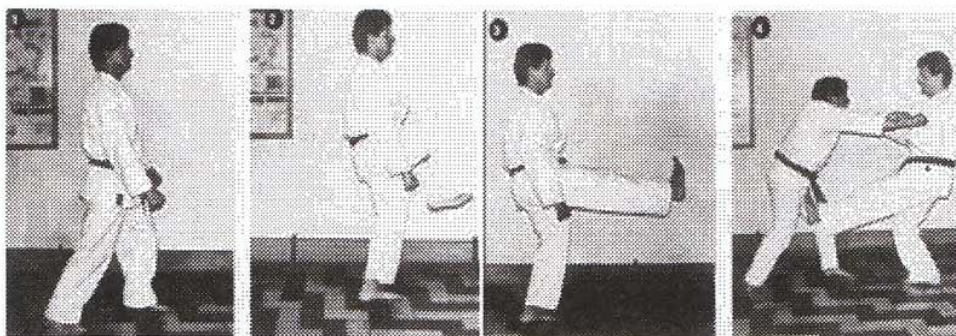
There are no shortcuts to developing effective kicking techniques. There are, however, three important principles to remember. First, you must practice. If that does not work, practice some more. If all else fails, continue practicing until you get it right.

About the author: Peekskill, New York based Scott Lenzi is the United States representative for shorei-kan goju-ryu karate.

## Technique Page

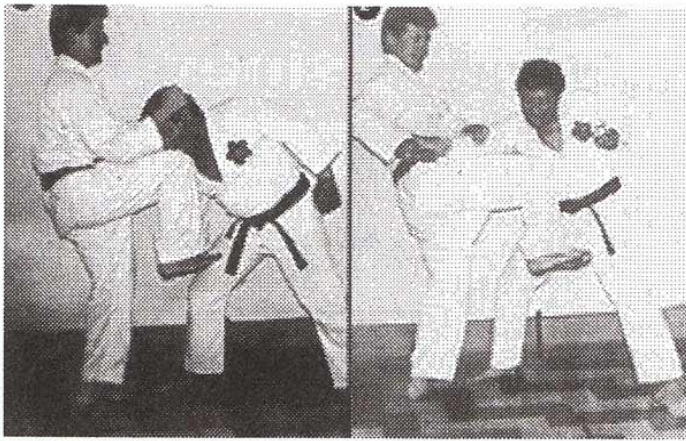


*Goju-ryu's ushiro kakato geri is a back kick performed while balancing yourself on the ground with your hands. It is generally followed by a forward shoulder roll, allowing you to turn and face your opponent.*

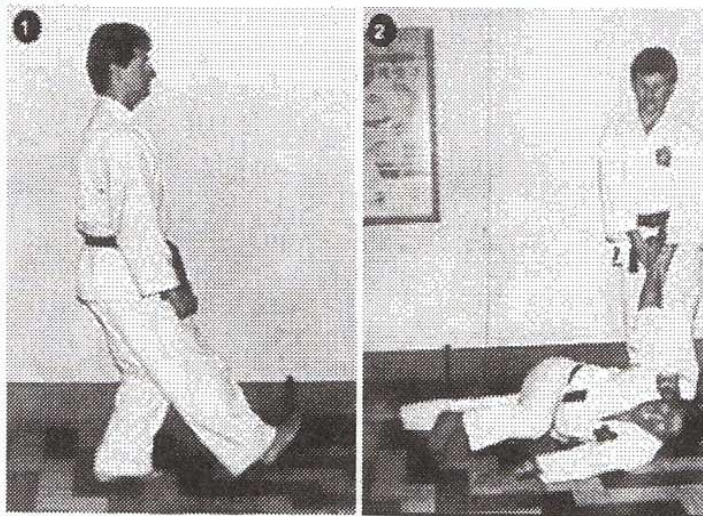


The most common kick in goju-ryu is mae geri (1-3), a front kick in which the practitioner raises his knee to waist level, then snaps the kick out, usually to the opponent's groin (4).

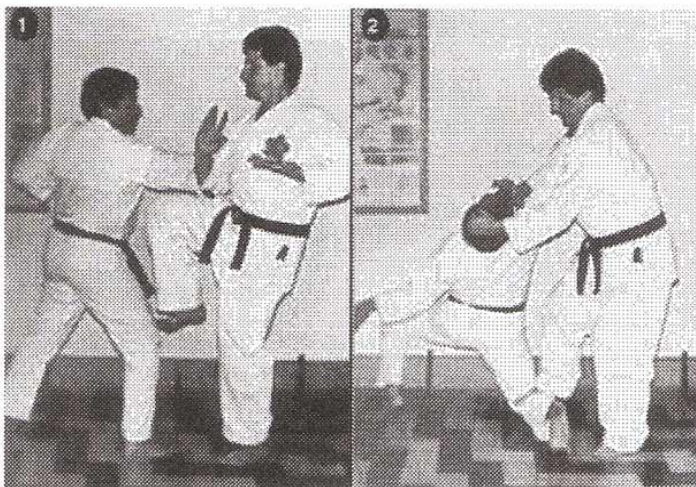




**Goju-ryu's front kick, above, begins with a raising of the knee, which can be used as a knee strike (1) or to deflect an opponent's strike (2).**



**Kakato geri (1) is a low kick commonly employed (2) after an opponent has been brought to the ground.**



**Goju-ryu's gedan sokuto geri (1-2, above) is a close-range side kick commonly delivered to the opponent's knee joint, with the heel and edge of the foot serving as the striking surface.**