

Basic Sparring Strategy

There is a strategic science to sparring. From the outside, sparring looks like random kicks and punches thrown mercilessly with the objective being to injure. From the inside, however, a sparring match is like a chess game. For example, one could not win a game of chess by mindlessly moving around the pieces anymore than one could win a sparring match by mindlessly throwing techniques. Strategy is prerequisite to chess as well as to sparring.

What is strategy? Strategy goes beyond "What kick should I throw now?" and it answers the question "How can I manipulate the situation to give me the advantage over my opponent?" This strategy comes in two main forms: Overall strategy (macro strategy) and exchange strategy (micro strategy).

Macro Strategy

Macro strategy encompasses overall and generalized aspects about any sparring match that will make you spar one person one way and another person another way. There are several things that will affect your macro strategy:

- The setting or main goal of the match. If you are sparring someone who is taking his or her belt exam or if you are sparring in a tournament, your main purpose and strategy for sparring will be different. So before you spar, ask yourself, "What is my goal? What do I wish to accomplish in this match?"
- Your own personal strengths and weaknesses. These are very important to how you spar. For example, if you feel really comfortable with turning back kick, and not with turning hook kick, then you should stick with the turning back kick. You will be more likely to score if you use a technique with which you are very comfortable.
- You and your partner's differing physical attributes. These will greatly define the way in which you spar your partner. Here is a table of examples, and (in my opinion) the best strategies to use these differences to your advantage:

The Remedies

You're taller	Keep a far distance from your partner and jam them with push kick and back kick.
You're shorter	Get in close enough that you're too far in range for your partner to kick. Get in, stay in, and rack up the points.
You're heavier	You've got a power advantage, so use it wisely. Think "tank".
You're lighter	You've got a speed advantage, so use it wisely. Think "butterfly".
You're faster	Get in range, throw a few techniques, and get out A.S.A.P.
You're slower	Don't get fancy -- stay simple. Make your partner come to you instead of chasing after him or her.

Micro Strategy

Micro strategy is the strategy that we use for dealing with each of the tiny exchanges that make up a sparring match. The rest of this page deals with micro strategy.

Open Stance and Closed Stance:

When two people spar each other, each person is in a particular sparring stance: either left foot lead or right foot lead. When both competitors have the same lead (i.e.: if they both have their left foot forward), this is known as **closed stance**. If both competitors have different leads (i.e.: if one has left foot forward and the other has right foot forward), this is known as **open stance**.

Why does this matter? It determines which techniques that you can use against your partner to get a clear shot. The whole idea of sparring is to strike your partner where he or she is open. For example, if you are in open stance, then you are both open to back leg roundhouse kick -- you can do a back leg roundhouse kick and strike your partner clear in the stomach. If you are in closed stance, however, your partner is not open to back leg roundhouse kick. If you try back leg roundhouse anyway, you will end up kicking your partner's elbow. When attacking or counter-attacking, you must be aware of the stance in which you are fighting. If you ignore the stance, then your attack or counter-attack will be ineffective. For example, a turning side kick counter-attack to your partner's rear end does you no good.

The Attack

If you have seen or sparred in Olympic-style Tae Kwon Do sparring lately, you will have noticed that the competitors' average sparring distance from each other is well out of range for any technique to successfully land on either partner. The whole idea of attacking is to close the distance between you and your partner so that you can become close enough to land a technique.

The attack is a very important part of the sparring match for two reasons: **(1)** It closes the distance between the competitors in order for some actual exchanges may occur; and **(2)**

When the score is tied at the end of the match, the referee decides the winner on the basis of aggressiveness and most techniques thrown. If you attacked and threw more techniques than your partner did during the match, then you won -- even though the score was technically tied. So, attacking has its advantages.

Attacking, however, also has its disadvantages. When you attack, you leave yourself open and off balance for your partner's counter-attack -- if you kick your partner they will kick back from a closer and more effective range. But this can be easily overcome by simply countering the counter-attack. Sparring is almost like an argument: Each exchange builds up from the former exchanges, each one better than the last, and the best one wins. There is no reason to be afraid to attack if you know how to counter-attack.

Another way to avoid this entire issue of vulnerability is to refrain from an actual attack and throw what your partner perceives to be an actual attack (i.e.: In other words, to fake, or feint, an attack). He or she will react to this threat by beginning a counter-attack, which will give you time to close the distance and land several techniques.

Effective attacking relies heavily upon footwork and faking (feinting), not mere kicks. Here are a few rules to follow about attacking:

- Never throw just one technique. This is a big no-no.
- Never just walk (or run, you kids) into the correct distance and kick. Another major no-no.
- Never throw a technique when you know that you will not be able to land it.
- Always use footwork or faking to bring your partner closer to you.
- Always plan on your partner having a counter-attack.
- Always plan on countering your partner's counter-attack.

The Counter-Attack

Most of all points scored in Tae Kwon Do competition come from counter-attacks. The idea of the counter-attack is to overshadow your partner's attack. In other words, you want your counter-attack to be superior to and more devastating than your partner's attack. If your partner lands a technique on you, it is imperative that it is immediately counter-attacked with several more devastating techniques. In this way, you will be awarded the point.

Of course, you are in no way limited to the chart below -- you have a multitude of different options. This is just a basic idea of how to get started in a counter-attack. Remember that the most effective counter-attack consists of multiple techniques. Each one of the techniques listed in the chart is just an example of the first technique that can be solidly landed. So, practice these techniques with a partner or on a kicking bag, and remember to follow up with additional techniques.

	Attack	Counter-Attack
Open Stance	Back leg roundhouse	Turning back kick
Open Stance	Front leg/skipping roundhouse	Front leg in-to-out drop kick
Open Stance	Turning back kick	Side step, then back leg roundhouse
Open Stance	Double roundhouses	Turning back kick/ push kick
Open Stance	Drop kick	Side step, then turning back kick
Closed Stance	Back leg roundhouse	Out-to-in drop kick
Closed Stance	Front leg/skipping roundhouse	Turning back kick
Closed Stance	Turning back kick	Side step, then back leg roundhouse
Closed Stance	Double roundhouses	Turning back kick/push kick
Closed Stance	Drop kick	Side step, then turning back kick

Reference URL: <http://home.att.net/~taekwondo.junkie/Strategy.html>