

# ONE STEP

## ***Traditional Tang Soo Do Sparring Drills Are More Challenging—and Beneficial—Than They Appear!*** **by Zak Szabo and Robert W. Young • Photography by Rick Husted**

“**M**any martial artists have no idea that one-step sparring can help them learn distance for free sparring. In fact, one-step sparring is harder than free sparring or tournament sparring. It’s more challenging, and it makes you understand self-defense better.”

So says Chun Sik Kim, *Black Belt’s* 1995 Man of the Year and president of the Pittsburgh-based International Tang Soo Do Federation. He founded the organization in 1984 with one goal: to preserve and propagate the traditional Korean art so that future generations can benefit physically and mentally from its wisdom, a major component of which is one-step sparring.

In the drills he’s referring to, two students face each other. One assumes the role of the attacker and punches at the other person. The defender uses a predetermined sequence of techniques to ward off the blow and deliver a counterattack—often moving off the centerline at a 45-degree angle while doing so and sometimes taking the opponent to the ground. They sound simple, but they

### **A Star Is Born**

Chun Sik Kim began his martial arts education nearly 60 years ago in a small *dojang* in Sang Tan, South Korea. No one knew it at the time, but the 8-year-old would become one of the foremost *tang soo do* authorities in the United States.

Before crossing the Pacific, Kim taught the Korean army’s famed Tiger Division, as well as U.S. troops stationed at Osan Air Force Base. A two-time Korean champion and undefeated world champion, Kim moved to the United States in 1972. Shortly thereafter, he set up shop in Pittsburgh, where he now oversees the International Tang Soo Do Federation.

Kim’s book, *Authentic Tang Soo Do*, is available from <http://www.internationaltangsoodofederation.com>. His instructional DVD sets, *Tang Soo Do Basics* and *Tang Soo Do: Black Belt Forms*, can be ordered by calling (800) 581-5222 or by visiting <http://www.blackbeltmag.com/store>. —Z.S., RWY

involve much more than meets the eye.

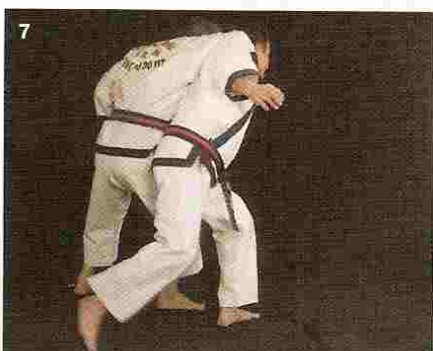
### ***The Physical***

Kim has always treasured *tang soo do’s* ancient training methods, but he believes the ones taught by the ITF, which boasts more than 125,000 members in the United States and Europe, are a cut above the rest because they emphasize the basics. When students practice fundamental punches and kicks in one-step

sparring, he says, they quickly discover how far their arms and legs will reach in relation to their opponent’s body. That enables them to gain a sense of distance, or whether their hand and foot techniques will make contact with sufficient force to do damage.

One-steps also encourage practitioners to rely on their whole body for maximum impact. “You learn to use natural power, which comes from your

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waist and body weight,” Kim says. “That allows you to produce more energy—specifically, snap and speed. When I was a child in Korea, I watched my seniors hit a heavy bag with full force, but the bag didn’t swing much. I later learned it was because they snapped their techniques. One-step sparring teaches you how to do that.”

Once you’re able to use your whole body to generate power, you can transform the cliché into reality: You’ll really be able to defeat a larger opponent should the need arise, Kim says. A fringe benefit comes in the form of boosted cardiovascular conditioning, the customary result of engaging in exercise that taxes all the major muscle groups.

Chun Sik Kim attacks Joe Bruno with a face punch, and Bruno blocks it at the wrist (1). Kim follows with a left punch, but his opponent blocks it with his left palm (2). Bruno then traps Kim’s left fist (3) and executes an uppercut to the chin (4). When Bruno follows with a left punch, Kim shifts his feet and uses his left palm to negate the attack (5). After grabbing the man’s wrist, the tang soo do master scoots behind him and grabs his lapel (6). To finish, Kim spins his foe 360 degrees (7) and takes him down for the choke (8).

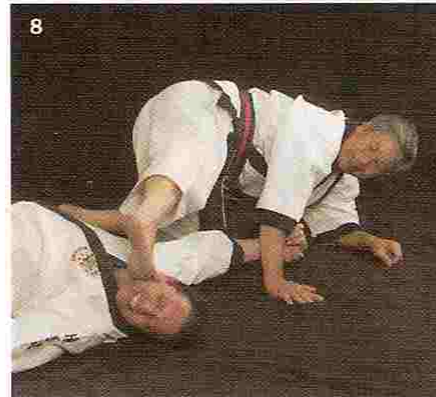
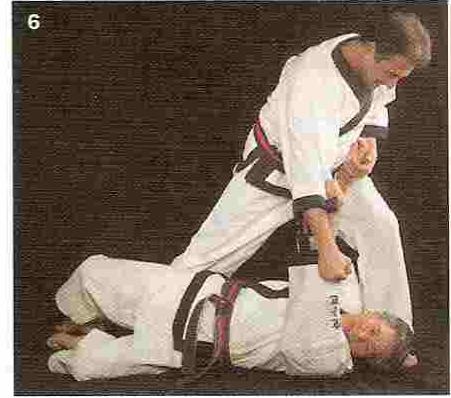
## Distance in Sparring and in Life

In today’s society, people have lost many of the values and traditions that made the world a better place in the past, Chun Sik Kim says. “For example, when young people grow up, their relationship with their parents often changes for the worse. As youngsters, they hold their parents in high esteem. As they become older, they become too friendly with their parents. They lose their respect and admiration for them because they believe they’ve become smarter than their parents. It’s disrespectful.

“The same holds true for the martial arts instructor and his students. As the students gain experience, they may put themselves on the same level as the instructor. This is also disrespectful.

“It’s the responsibility of the parents and the instructor to maintain the proper distance from their child and their students to make sure this doesn’t happen. That doesn’t mean you shouldn’t love and care for them, but you should maintain the proper relationship with them to keep the level of respect that’s needed.”

—Z.S.



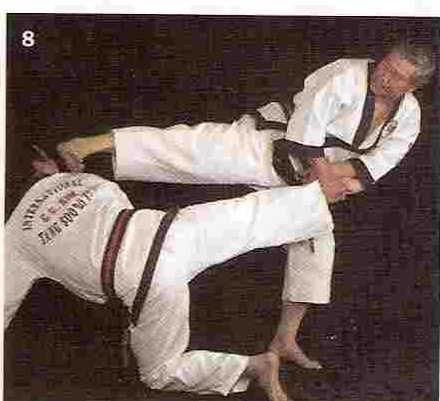
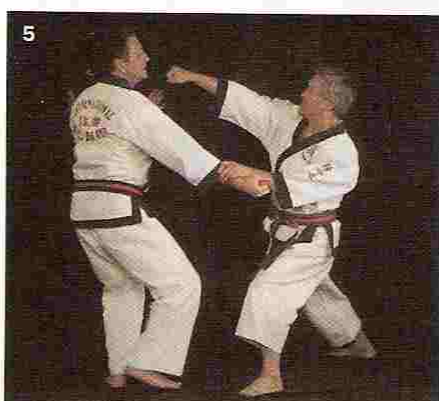
Chun Sik Kim (left) faces his partner (1). When he punches, the partner moves to the side and blocks with a knifehand technique (2). He then grasps the punching hand and launches a front kick to the ribs (3) and a punch to the face (4). The opponent sweeps Kim to the floor (5). When the man chambers his fist for the finishing blow, Kim blocks with his left arm and grabs a fistful of uniform with both hands (6). The tang soo do master twists his body to throw the man (7) and, once he lands, finishes with a round kick (8).

## The Mental

An intangible result of practicing one-steps is an enhanced sense of safety. It stems primarily from your improved understanding of distance: When you're on the offensive, you know when to halt your technique before it breaks bones; and when you're on the defensive, you can concentrate on blocking and evading without worrying about getting bashed.

"You can go to any tournament organized by the International Tang Soo Do Federation and discover how safe competition can be," Kim says. "That comes from learning proper distance through one-step sparring."

Particularly beneficial to martial artists is an advanced set of tang soo do drills called *pyong ahn* one-step sparring. The techniques, four of which are shown in the accompanying photos, are part of



the ITF's requirements for black belt. The pyong ahn one-steps are derived from the pyong ahn forms, whose name implies safety, calm, peace and balance. Interestingly, those traits can all be developed through repetition of the one-steps, Kim says.

"For us to have such a successful organization and 15 branch schools in the Pittsburgh area alone [shows] that there's more to traditional tang soo do than just kicking and punching," he adds. "Something internal is taking place for people to be so hungry to learn these traditional values and philosophies."

The essence of that "something internal" is conveyed in large part through one-step sparring. Listed below are 13 tips that will set you on the path to success.

Tang soo do expert Chun Sik Kim (right) and his opponent square off (1). The opponent opens with a groin kick, which Kim stops using an X-block (2). The man continues his assault with a hammerfist, causing Kim to counter it with another X-block (3). Kim then seizes the initiative and grabs the man's hand (4) before delivering a punch to the face (5). The opponent steps back and deflects the blow (6), then drops to launch a side kick (7). Kim intercepts the technique, traps the leg and counters with a side kick of his own (8).

## One Step to the Ring

The first one-step sparring technique *tang soo do* white belts learn teaches a crucial lesson of combat: the effectiveness of sidestepping. As the attacker throws a right punch at the defender's head, the defender abandons his ready stance and moves to the right and slightly forward into a horse-riding stance oriented at a 45-degree angle. The movement allows him to evade the blow, but for safety's sake he also deflects it with a left knife-hand block. At the same time, he punches the attacker's temple with his right hand.

—RWY



Joe Bruno attacks Chun Sik Kim with a reverse punch, but Kim stops it with a block aimed at the wrist (1). Bruno throws a left punch, but Kim stops it with the same block (2). While holding the sleeve of his opponent's punching arm, Kim unleashes a side kick to the face (3). Kim drapes his right arm across the man's shoulder and grasps his lapel, then throws him over his hip (4-5, note the different camera angle). During the throw, Kim maintains his grip on the lapel for a possible choke (6).

of the grunting sound you make when muster your energy to push a car.”

**Contact:** “In one-step sparring, many of the strikes target the opponent’s wrist because in real self-defense, hitting an attacker’s wrist can make him drop his weapon.”

**Control:** “Tang soo do is all about control. We stop our techniques close to the target. Then if we’re in a real fight and we decide to hit the target, we can do it easily. The theory is that if you constantly make contact, you’ll have a hard time controlling your techniques when you need to. But if you always practice control, you can easily choose to hit when you need to.”

“If your opponent lacks control and makes contact, you should lead by example and maintain control of yourself. Don’t yell at him or retaliate. He’ll see his mistake and apologize. That’s the

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## The Technical

Kim drew from his almost six decades in the arts to come up with the following morsels of advice for sampling all that one-step sparring, tang soo do-style, has to offer:

**Distance:** “Because beginners tend to be sloppy in their techniques, they should start farther away from their opponent and stop their strikes father away—for safety. As they gain experience, they can close the gap. After a year or two, they can get very close with their positioning and their techniques.”

**Posture:** “We mostly use the horse-

riding stance because it develops balance and teaches you how to move properly. Any deep stance will provide good conditioning for the legs, making your muscles strong and tight.”

**Eye contact:** “You should always look at your opponent’s eyes. They will tell you what he’s planning and whether he’s shy or scared of you.”

**Voice:** “We *kihap* (shout) when we punch or sweep. It’s good training for street defense—for times when you have to face a bigger opponent. Make sure your *kihap* doesn’t just come from your voice. It has to come from your *dancheon*, the point just below your navel. Think

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tang soo do way—and the way of all true martial arts. Control actually goes beyond the *dojang*. In life, it's essential for healthy relationships, education and business. Virtually everything is affected by control or lack of control."

**Thoughts:** "During one-step sparring, think about your position and your posture. Try to examine the feeling that accompanies executing a perfect technique. Think about your success in the exchange of blows."

**Repetitions:** "Practicing one-step sparring about 20 minutes a day is enough."

**Endurance:** "Remember that it's not going to happen immediately. It usually takes two or three months to build."

**Breathing:** "You have to breathe at the right time when you punch and block. If you hold your breath when you do a technique, you can still do the technique, but you'll get more and more tired as time

goes on. Eventually, you'll lose your ability to continue. If you inhale and exhale correctly, you'll extend the amount of time you can fight."

**Sidestepping:** "When I began training, I didn't pay much attention when my instructor told me to practice one-step sparring, which includes a lot of sidestepping. But after going to tournaments and watching how people won, I saw that an attack delivered from the side was often the winning technique. That's one of the most important things you can learn."

**Applications:** "One-step sparring teaches control, which plays an important role in free sparring. If you get hit by your opponent, you won't let it upset you. You'll accept it and actually think it's your fault for not blocking or evading it. There are no bad feelings."

**Self-Defense:** "One of the most important benefits is improved self-confidence. When standing in front of a

person, many people are nervous. They know their basic blocks, attacks and movements, but they've never had to use them on an opponent in an unrehearsed exchange. One-step sparring allows them to build their experience without getting hurt."

One-step sparring is just one facet of the art to which Kim has dedicated his life. "Traditional tang soo do is all I need, all I have time for and all I think about," he says. "It's important to preserve its traditional practices—exercises such as one-step sparring—for future martial artists." ❧

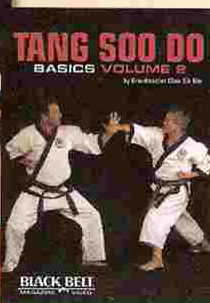
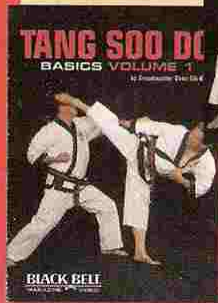
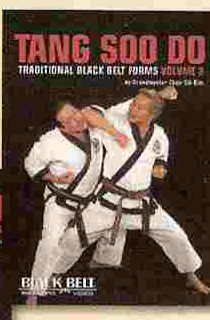
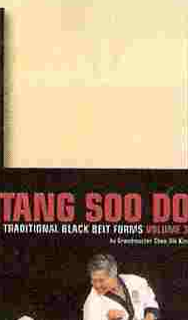
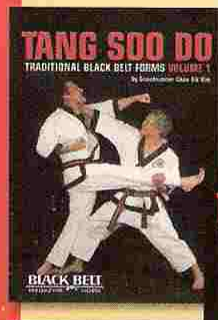
*About the authors: Zak Szabo is a freelance writer and radio personality based in Pittsburgh. He's a student of Chun Sik Kim and a member of the International Tang Soo Do Federation Technical Advisory Committee. Robert W. Young is the executive editor of Black Belt. Roberta Burkhart contributed to this article. For more information about Kim, visit <http://www.blackbeltmag.com> and click on Community, then Black Belt Authors.*

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Chun Sik Kim is president and founder of the International Tang Soo Do Federation and a member of the *Black Belt* Hall of Fame (1995, Man of the Year). He is also a two-time Korean *tang soo do* champion, the former chairman of the U.S. Tang Soo Do Federation Moo Duk Kwan and the U.S. team coach at the first World Championships. Also sold under separate covers by Kim.



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