

# Tang Soo Do's Dynamic Kicks

## The Subtleties That Make These Korean Kicks Powerful

Story by Nicky DeMatteo/Photos by Doug Churchill

**W**hen someone says "Lauriel," you think of Hardy. When someone says "Abbott," you think of Costello. When someone says "Marilyn," you think of Monroe. When someone says *tang soo do*, you think of kicks. It's a natural connection.

There are two primary reasons why kicking is such an integral aspect of tang soo do, the 2,000-year-old Korean martial art. The first reason is topography. Korea is a mountainous country. Throughout the centuries, Koreans naturally developed strong legs while traversing their homeland. Consequently, it became natural to incorporate and emphasize the legs in their martial arts. The second reason is cultural. Koreans have always excelled at handcrafts. To protect their hands, they minimized the use of them in their martial arts.

Translated, tang soo do means "the way of the Chinese hand." As depicted

by illustrations on the walls of tombs, the origin of tang soo do has been traced to the Kokuryo Dynasty in Korea (37-668 A.D.). Initially, tang soo do was developed as a means of fighting. It gradually developed into an art form when modern weaponry rendered its military effectiveness obsolete. Nevertheless, it is still an effective art for street self-defense.

One of the people who has mastered this art is Dominick A. Giacobbe. With Giacobbe's help, let's take a closer look at this intriguing art and find out why its kicks are so dynamic, effective and powerful. In a related story, we'll also discuss the effectiveness of tang soo do's kicks for self-defense.

### Giacobbe, Shin, Norris and Kim

Giacobbe has been practicing this ancient art since 1968. He has trained with several traditional

masters, including C.S. Kim and J.C. Shin, who trained Chuck Giacobbe into a top competitor. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Giacobbe won a string of 75 first-place trophies in black belt competitions.

In 1974, Giacobbe opened the first Tang Soo Karate Academy in Blackwood, New Jersey. Today, it is one of the largest and most successful karate academies in the United States. He is also the driving force behind many Tang Soo Karate Academies across the country, including such diverse locations as Pleasantville, New Jersey; Rocky Mount, North Carolina; Las Vegas, Nevada; and Hollywood, California. Giacobbe has also traveled to Korea to fine-tune his art and to begin learning techniques of *chi* (internal energy) power. His experience and reputation have placed him among the top tang soo do masters in the world.



武 So, what makes tang soo do's kicks so unusual? First, tang soo do has a variety of versatile, effective kicks. Second, tang soo do stylists emphasize their hips in all of their kicks. In the above sequence, Dominick Giacobbe (right) demonstrates tang soo do's front kick.



**Stan Smith**

## 2 Reasons Why They're Different

So, what makes tang soo do's kicks unusual? Two things.

To begin, tang soo do has a wide array of versatile, effective kicks, says Giacobbe.

"Most martial arts include the four standard kicks—front, round, side and back," says Giacobbe. "However, besides these four basic kicks, tang soo do also has a whole array of spinning, circular and ax kicks. Not only that, but there is also a complete arsenal of jump kicks, including, of course, the basic front, round, side and back kicks."

Next, tang soo do stylists emphasize their hips in all of their kicks, he says. Depending on what type of kick you're throwing, the hip action is either a thrusting or a twisting, semi-circular type of movement.

"We throw the power of our hip into each kick," he says. "Studies have shown that the power of the kick does not depend primarily on your leg muscles. The strength of your hip movement is also important. Just look at a horse. It has

Now let's look at some kicks, and I'll explain how to throw these properly, efficiently and effectively.

### Front Kick

Assume a fighting stance. Your back leg will be the kicking leg. When you execute the basic front kick, lift the knee of your kicking leg to about waist-level, point your foot, pull your toes back so that the ball of your foot will strike your target and fully extend your leg. Now your hip comes into the formula. As you extend your leg, thrust your hip forward. Fully extending your leg will actually help get your hip into the kick.

There are a couple of tips that will make your kick even better, says Giacobbe. When you throw this kick, lean your upper body back slightly.

"This will help push your hip into the kick," he says.

If you want to make this kick even more effective, perform the thrusting hip movement without kicking, says Giacobbe.

### Round Kick

From a fighting stance, your

kicking hip makes a 180-degree twisting semi-circular movement.

"Your hip actually leads as your leg follows with a whipping, snapping action," says Giacobbe.

### Side Kick

From a fighting stance or from a side stance, your front leg will be the kicking leg. Slide your back leg in front of (or behind) your front leg, throw the kick (extend your leg) and strike the target with your heel or blade of your foot. Meanwhile, you should pivot your foot on the floor 180 degrees in the opposite direction of your kick as you thrust the hip of your kicking leg into the kick.

"The combination of the 180-degree pivot and the thrusting action of the hip increases the power and effectiveness of the kick tremendously," says Giacobbe.

### Back Kick

From a fighting stance, your back leg will be the kicking leg and your heel or blade will strike the target. Twist your waist so you can look over your shoulder at the target as



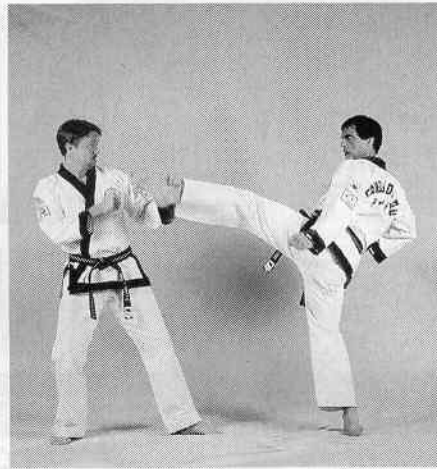
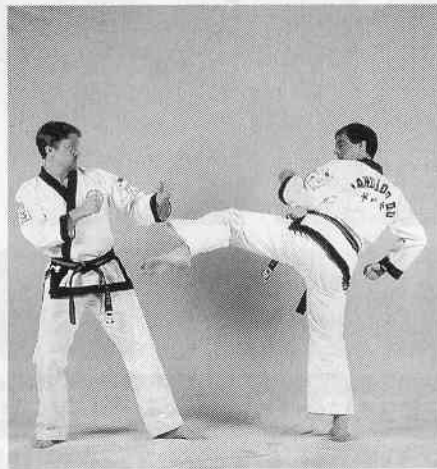
**武** In the above sequence, Dominick Giacobbe (right) throws a side kick at Stan Smith. The combination of the 180-degree pivot and the thrusting action of your hip increases the power and effectiveness of the kick, says Giacobbe.

thick ankles and legs, but it's able to run and jump effectively because its hips are so strong. The power of your kick originates in your hip. Of course, strong legs help. However, your kick will never be as powerful as it can be without the proper hip action."

back leg will again be the kicking leg. When you throw this kick, pull your toes back again so you strike your target with the ball of your foot. That is, of course, unless it's an instep kick. As you fully extend your kicking leg, pivot your planted foot 90 degrees while your

you pivot your front foot 180 degrees. Next, lift your back leg, extend your kick and thrust your hip into the technique.

"When performing a back kick, make sure your hips are squared off," says Giacobbe. "Your hips are the base of a triangle, with



武 In a self-defense situation, use a round kick when your opponent is in front of but slightly turned away from you, says Dominick Giacobbe (right). When you throw the kick, pull your toes back so you strike the target with the ball of your foot.

the extended kicking leg being the high-point angle of the triangle.”

### Jump Kicks

In all jump kicks—front, round, side and back—it’s important to incorporate the same thrusting, twisting, circular movements that you use when you throw these kicks from the floor.

“When others throw jump-side kicks, they keep their hips sideways,” says Giacobbe. “In tang soo do, however, we twist our hips while we’re in the air performing the kick. This greatly increases the power of our kicks because the hip action is a simultaneous twist and thrust, pushing the fully-extended leg into the target.”

Tang soo do also incorporates circular kicks into their arsenal, including spinning wheel kicks, hook kicks, ax kicks and crescent kicks. All of these kicks depend on hip action for their power and effectiveness. In each case, your hip spins like the handle of a whip, and your leg follows. The speed of the spin increases the power of the kick, says Giacobbe.

“As an old master once said, ‘Dragon spins and the tail follows,’” says Giacobbe.

One way to develop the full potential of your kicks is to increase your speed, hip movement and muscle strength, he says.

Enhancing your leg strength also enhances your self-defense skills, he says.

“According to tang soo do philosophy, if your legs are properly

developed (because they are longer and stronger than arms), they will be much more effective in self-defense,” he says.

### Enhance Your Accuracy And Self-Defense Skills

Once you learn how to properly incorporate hip movement into your techniques, you should focus on accuracy. After all, what good is strength without accuracy? To improve your accuracy, tape a target at head-level on your heavy bag. When throwing your kicks, make sure you don’t stop when you make contact with the bag, he says.

“Push through the contact from your hip,” he says. “This will increase the power and accuracy of your kick,” he says.

While tang soo do stresses high kicks, you can kick lower. However, you should practice high kicks as

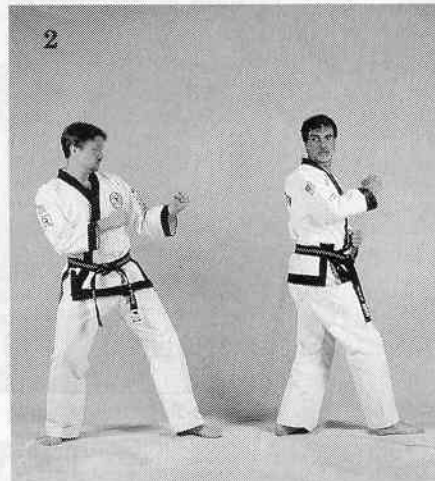
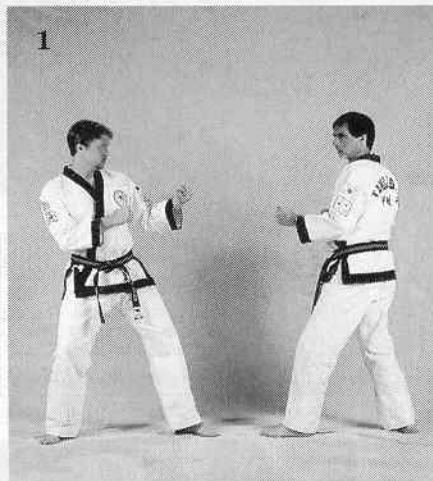
much as possible because this will help you develop and perfect your hip motion.

Finally, what about self-defense? Are these kicks practical for street survival?

“Some martial arts stress grappling and close-in fighting,” says Giacobbe. “Whereas tang soo do philosophy stresses keeping the opponent away before he gets close. If your kicks are fast enough and powerful enough, this is not that hard to do.”

And that’s where your hips come into play. Your hips are what make tang soo do kicks powerful and effective. Try it. You’ll see for yourself. **TK**

*About the author: Nicky DeMatteo, who lives in Clementon, New Jersey, is a free-lance writer who has been training with Dominick Giacobbe for more than 20 years.*



武 In this sequence, Dominick Giacobbe (right) throws a back kick at Stan Smith. To begin, Giacobbe and Smith assume fighting stances (1). Giacobbe then twists his waist so he can look at Smith and pivots his front foot 180 degrees (2).

# It Works On the Street

## The Practical Application of Tang Soo Do Kicks for Self-Defense

by Nicky DeMatteo

The best defense is a good offense. Dominick A. Giacobbe has always felt this way, and that is what he teaches. And in *tang soo do*, you know what that means. Kicks. Lots of them.

The typical tang soo do student spends 70 percent of his training working on kicks. When you combine his kicking expertise with his knowledge of how, where and when to throw the kicks, he will be extremely competent in a self-defense situation.

Following are some tips on when and how to use tang soo do's front, round, side, back and jump kicks in self-defense situations.

### Front Kick

When your opponent is facing you, you should use a front kick, says Giacobbe. Direct your kick at any one of the following vital areas: his shin, knee, thigh, groin, abdomen, solar plexus, neck or head. Pull your toes back so you can strike the target with the ball of your foot. To ensure your safety, pull your foot away from the target as quickly as possible, he says.

"When you snap your kick back,

it prevents your opponent from grabbing your leg," he says.

### Round Kick

When your opponent is in front of you but slightly turned away from you, use a round kick. When you throw the kick, pull your toes back so you strike the target with the ball of your foot. Aim for the same targets: the shin, knee, thigh, groin, abdomen, solar plexus, neck and head.

### Side Kick

The side kick is one of the most powerful kicks you can throw, and you should use it when your opponent is too far away to make any of the other kicks feasible. To close the gap and increase the power of your kick, slide your back leg in front of or behind your kicking leg. Strike your target with the heel or the blade of your foot.

### Back Kick

You can use a back kick if your opponent is in front of or behind you. To begin, let's say he's behind you and you're in a fighting stance with your right leg back. You'd kick your

opponent by thrusting your left leg back. If your opponent is in front of you, you'd spin around and kick him with your right leg. In each case, you are using the element of surprise.

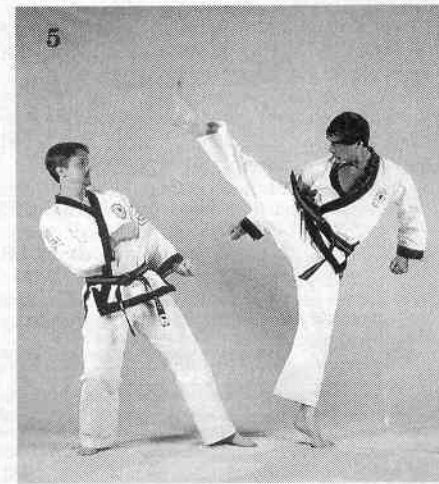
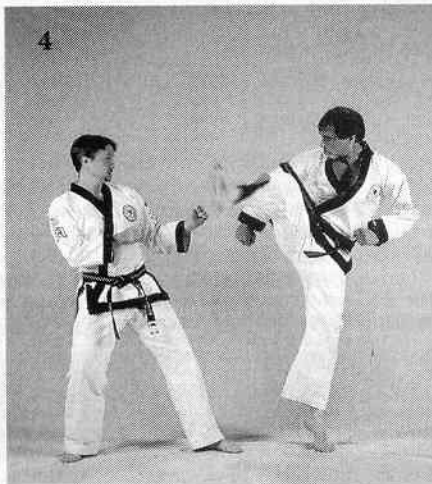
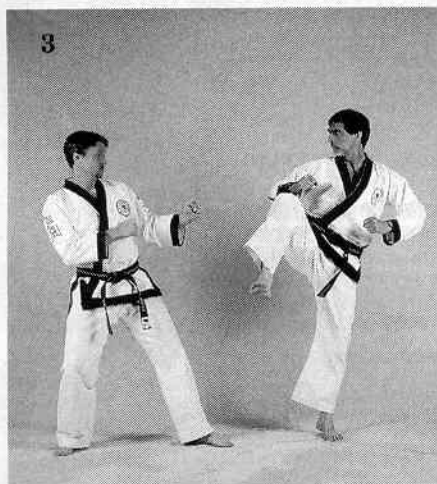
### Jump Kicks

The nice thing about jump kicks is that you can use your body weight when you throw the kicks. Combined with the momentum of your body, you can throw a powerful kick. Jump kicks—when properly executed—are also extremely effective against larger opponents.

### The Tigers

As you can see, tang soo do's arsenal of kicks is varied and formidable. Of course, you have to know when to use a specific kick; that comes with experience, hard work and training. As you progress toward this path, however, you will develop confidence and competence. And this makes the effort completely worthwhile.

"In life, there will always be 'tigers' for us to fight," says Giacobbe. "Whether we win or lose depends on how well we have developed all of the weapons at our disposal."



武 In this continuation of the back kick, Giacobbe lifts his back leg (3), extends his kick (4) and thrusts his hip into the technique (5). When you throw the back kick, make sure your hips are squared off, he says. Your hips are the base of a triangle, with the extended kicking leg being the high-point of the triangle.