



# Kicks

## on the Defense

by Preston Shah

Photos courtesy of Preston Shah

**7** here's a tornado blowing through Dayton, Ohio: a twister made of kicks and punches named Aisha Thornton. A fourth dan in *tang soo do* and a third dan in *tae kwon do*, Thornton delivers her damage with gale-force power. According to the latest bulletin, she has won three AAU Tae Kwon Do Junior Olympic gold medals—in forms, fighting and point fighting. One of her secrets? Strong defensive kicks

"I never go into a fight thinking about fighting on the defense, but when the situation comes up, I have to react as soon as I can," said Thornton. She keeps winning by not only delivering a stunning attack, but knowing how to block and counter—working the defense to get back on the offense. Following are several kicks that can not only inflict damage on the opponent, but can act as a defensive measure as well.

### Front Leg Sloop Kicks

Thornton's coach, Master Roger Haines, an eighth dan in *tang soo do* and a fourth dan in *tae kwon do*, explains the front leg sloop kick. "It wraps around the opponent's leg—you are kicking to the inside of the body. This kick wraps around your opponent's guards in circular motion. You have to kick at the same exact time they attack you, launching your attack simultaneously. That way, you catch them off-guard. Otherwise, it's just an ordinary hook kick. You use the element of surprise, and if a person doesn't kick with his guard up, he *will* get caught."

### Counter Reverse Wheel Kick

The counter reverse wheel kick covers the distance over a long range. Use it to kick over the opponent's guards toward the top of the head. "As soon as your opponent picks up his knee, you pick up your knee simultaneously," explains Haines. "Then, extending your leg, locking the knee and keeping the leg straight, throw the technique over their technique as they kick. Timing is crucial: as soon as the opponent brings his leg up, you bring your leg up, closing the technique."

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### Defensive Front Kick to Body



1-4. Assume a fighting stance. As your opponent kicks, block and side step, moving to the left. Throw a front kick to the body of your opponent.



what throws them off-guard." This technique can be executed by bouncing or by stepping to the side and throwing it. Both ways are effective and you should practice the technique with both legs.

match off like that to set the pace right out of the gate. They establish something really strong to get the other person's attention and take away from their fight game."

### Spinning Hook Round Kick

To execute the spinning hook round kick, says Haines, wait until the opponent is "throwing a front or back leg kick. Then you spin and throw the hook kick. As your hook kick goes past his face, you take it right back into a round kick. It catches them off-guard.

A spinning hook kick is for a shorter distance. If your opponent is farther away, throw a spinning wheel kick. The spinning wheel kick has a motion like a whip; it requires your leg to be stiff all the way through the technique. The spinning hook kick is more comfortable to the practitioner than the spinning wheel kick, which can be awkward, but the one you should throw depends on you and your opponent."

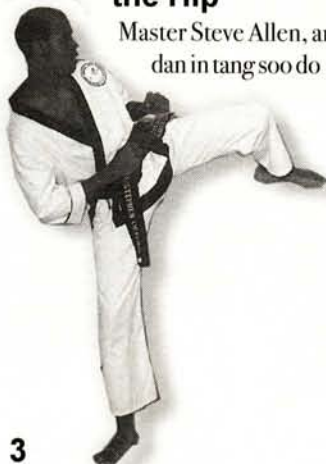
### Swoop Lock Leg Kick

The swoop lock leg kick is most effective when you are being attacked. The beauty of this technique is that if the swoop doesn't catch the opponent, the lock leg round kick will, because it goes past his guard. While your opponent has his hand up, thinking the kick has completed its motion, the kick turns into the swoop lock leg kick and catches him totally off guard. Haines comments that "As the swoop kick passes the opponent, if it misses, you can take it right back into a lock leg round kick."

### Defensive Side Kick to the Hip

Master Steve Allen, an eight dan in tang soo do

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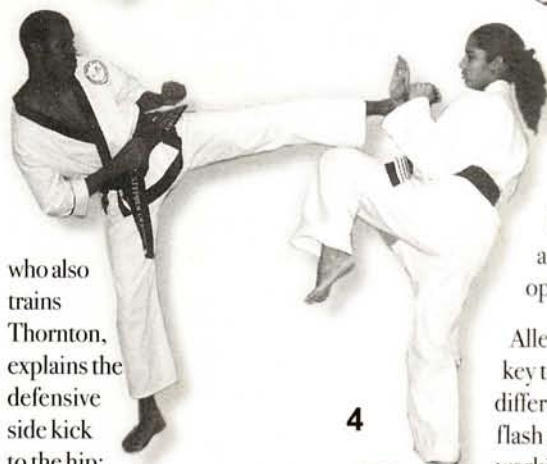


### Angular Front Kick to the Abdomen

The angular front kick to the abdomen can be used in two different motions, but you have to combine your rhythm and footwork to make it effective. As the opponent is kicking you off the front or back leg, you block his kick, take an off-angle step to the side as in a side step and then throw an angular front kick off the back leg.

"The defensive side kick is used primarily as the opponent moves in to punch you," says Haines. "As they move in, in the middle of their technique, you throw a side kick. Also, if they launch a series of kicks at you, opponents tend to kick and then move in for the punch. The minute that they set the foot down to throw the punch, that's time for you throw a defensive side kick and catch them in the middle of the technique. Your timing and skill are very important. Done right, you're catching them in the middle of their attack, before it reaches the maximum power—that is

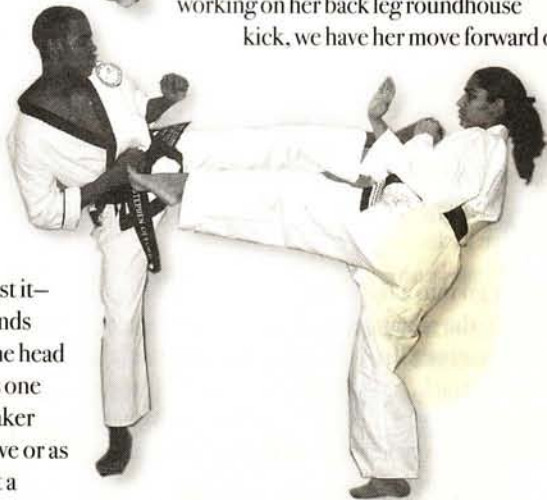
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who also trains Thornton, explains the defensive side kick to the hip:

"Often, especially when you are against someone who can kick really good and fast, we try to slow them down by kicking at the hip—right on the beltline, not the thigh area. Throwing a stiff side kick distracts opponents. It makes them want to bring their hands to defend against it—and as soon as they bring their hands down, you can either kick up at the head or attack with your hands. This is one way that we train some of our weaker students who are not as aggressive or as fast as Aisha. We have them start a

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### No Look Back Kick

The no look back kick is based on timing and your opponent's rhythm. Time your opponent's kick and throw your technique when he has already committed his knees to the attack. As you spin around, look to the place where the opponent was last standing.

Allen comments that since rhythm is a key to Thornton's strategy, "we work different drills with the focus pads and flash them at her real quick. If we are working on her back leg roundhouse kick, we have her move forward or

backwards, and she will be able to counter or throw it offensively. Wherever we place the pad, whether high or low, she has to kick it—we use that for timing. When she is working with sparring partners, we have them throw attacks at her and she has to try and beat them with her technique.”

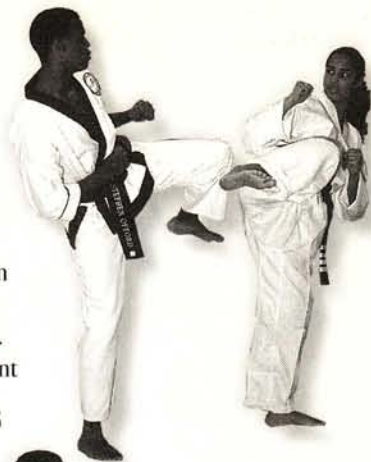


## Defensive Spinning Hook Round Kick 2

1-4. Assume a fighting stance. As your opponent throws a kick, throw a spinning hook kick round kick to your opponent's head.

wheel kick both have to be thrown while you are in motion—in other words, while you are on your toes. “Try to train your lateral movement and angles as a part of your defensive counters,”

advises Haines, “because with lateral movement you side step your opponent and leave him open for just about any counter that you wish to attack him with. You practice side stepping and lateral movement so that you can kick while balancing on your toes like a boxer—without stopping.”



## Defensive Axe Kick

“We focus on footwork, having Aisha move on her toes like a boxer,” comments Haines. Since Allen and Haines both have boxing experience, they incorporate some of the tactics from the “sweet science” into Thornton’s game plan—training her to watch the solar plexus, and working out with a medicine ball to help her withstand the punishment of the ring.

“A defensive axe kick is thrown while balancing on your toes. An opponent might move in with a hand technique, such as a front punch, while you are on your toes. You side step out of the way and throw an axe kick over their guard, sidestepping their initial step. As soon as they move in, you side step—off angle—and drop that axe kick.

“You can also use the defensive axe kick when you are standing on your toes and your opponent throws a kick at you,” Haines continues. “At the same time that you block the kick, you move in and side step, off angle. Then, using the angle, you throw the axe kick off angle at them.

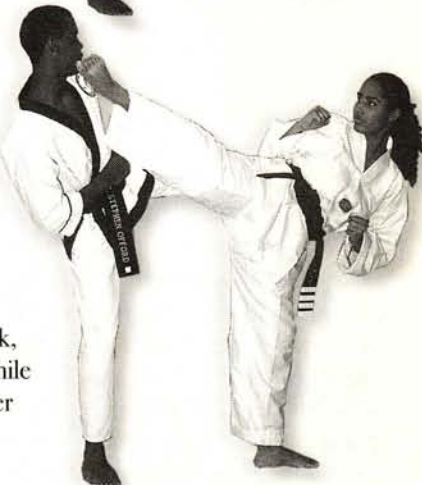
“You throw the axe kick while standing in front of the opponent. Point your knee at an angle, where it is not easy to block the axe kick. As you go off your bounce, point your kick towards a vulnerable area. While on your toes, time your technique and launch it while your opponent is kicking. The knees have to be at a 45-degree angle so the kick will chop at your opponent—not get stuck on his shoulder.”

## Reverse Wheel Kick

The defensive axe kick and the reverse

## Defensive Lock Leg Round Kick

In order to practice the defensive lock leg round kick, Haines uses punching pads designed for boxing. While Thornton balances on her toes, Haines slashes at her with the pad. “We practice this two ways,” he notes. “While she is balancing, I advance towards her and she will move laterally on her toes, in a circle. Also, I will attack her with a blocker, she will move out of the way, block the blocker and throw a lock leg round kick off angle and hit the other blocker in my hand,” says Haines.



## Defensive Jump Back Kick

There are two ways to practice the defensive jump back kick. “The first way,” says Haines “we have the airbag in front of Aisha as she starts her technique. My front foot is on her front foot and in a horse stance. From that close distance she does a jump back kick to the body.

“The other way we practice this technique is to throw a blocker at Aisha while she is balancing. She blocks with a jump back kick to the body. You can also move laterally. The trainer will ‘attack’ you with two different kicks. You block both kicks and do a defensive jump back kick to the body.”



## The Set-Up

Sometimes the best defense is a good offense. Allen explains how they train against other fighters’ strengths: “We might have Aisha throw a side kick to the opponent’s body to have them bring their hand down. Let’s say they have a good sloop kick, which is like a hook kick counter. A lot of people will try to counter that off of a roundhouse kick. If we know that, we will have Aisha throw a lot of side kicks to the body. That takes the person’s technique away from them. If a person likes to spin and throw a wheel kick or a spin hook kick, we will throw that side kick to the body. Again, that takes it away from them. So if we do that two or three times, we are setting them up for a roundhouse kick or a hook round kick to the head.”

## Defensive Front Leg Wheel Kick

1-4. Assume a fighting stance. As your opponent throws a kick, block his technique. Side step to the left, throw a front leg wheel kick to your opponent's head.



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## Types of Opponents

According to Thornton, ring-savvy fighters never move straight back. Instead, move in a circular motion, switching sides frequently. Many fighters try to use angles and movement against Thornton. To counter this dilemma, she inches forward to cut the ring off on them. Thornton also faces opponents who explode off the line.

"That is when you have to use your angles," she

says. "If you move straight back, they will run you right out of the ring and you will get warnings."

An equally dangerous situation is the opponent who remains rooted. Thornton explains how to draw this type of opponent out: "I always expect that they are up to something. I never let anyone intimidate me. If they are just sitting there, I go after them, but I make sure that I have my hands up, because I know they are going to try something or counter my techniques."

Allen stresses that "you don't know what the person is throwing. If you are in a defensive posture, you have to be ready for anything. The

average person throws maybe a side kick followed by a backhanded punch. But one person may throw a backhanded punch and then a backhanded punch again. So, if you have your hand down, anticipating just one

block, you are leaving yourself open. Make sure that you have your hands up at all times, and be ready for anything."

"Some people—before they get ready to kick—lean back a little bit and stand on the balls of their feet, on their front foot," explains Thornton. "So you know that they are going to lift their foot up. Other people telegraph their backhand instead of just throwing it from where it is in a blocking position. They will cock it back a little bit and then throw it." Still other people have a tendency to slide their back leg, clearly telegraphing their intentions as they try to shift their weight to the front.

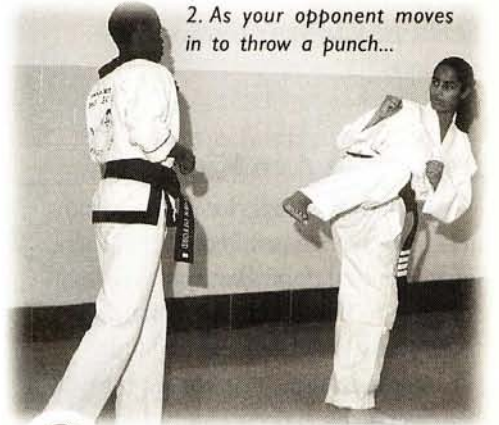
## Feints, Fakes and Blocks

Other competitors are looking for telegraphs too, of course, so Thornton puts that to work by using solid feints and fakes. Allen notes, "We try to use foot movement, as well as head and shoulder feints. We tell

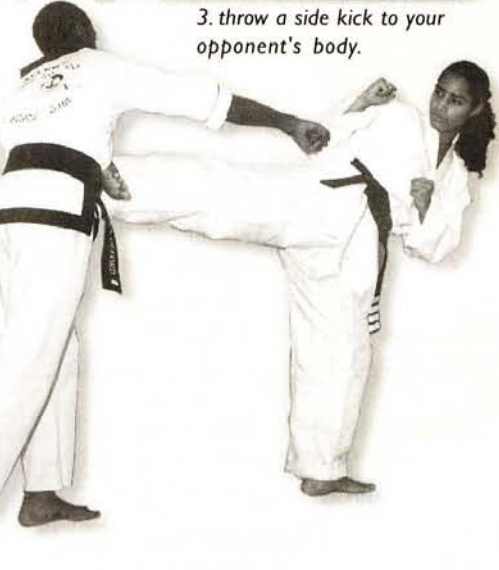
## Defensive Side Kick



1. Assume a fighting stance.



2. As your opponent moves in to throw a punch...



3. throw a side kick to your opponent's body.

Aisha to lift her leg or make a quick motion with her feet as though she were getting ready to kick or make a charging attack, but she throws a hand technique. Or she might fake like she is going to throw a front leg roundhouse kick, but she spins and throws a wheel kick or a no look back kick.

"Most people will go for any little feint, especially if they are on their toes and moving. If you quickly jerk your head or shoulders, like you are coming in with an attack, the person goes into a defense, which is what you want. You feint quick. As soon as they react, you kick them," Allen says.

## Defensive Swoop Hook Kick

1-3. Assume a fighting stance. As your opponent kicks, side step to the left on an angle throwing a swoop hook kick to your opponent's head.

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"When you are fighting a person who kicks really good, you have to block. Parrying doesn't work in that situation, because a good kicker will kick three, four or five times, and a little parry will not stop them," explains Allen. "Parrying comes in when you are against a less accomplished kicker. One of our best parries is used when you are sparring a person who throws an angle front kick counter. If they try to throw a roundhouse or side kick off of the front leg, we don't block the kick; we just move it over to the side with the left hand and then we throw the kick.

"We can also parry off some of the punches," says Allen. "A lot of times, we'll let a person throw a backhand at Aisha, and instead of blocking it, we will parry it off to the side and counter it with a ridge hand...or we may counter with a punch to the body. 'Slipping' does not work against every opponent. It depends on the speed of the opponent and various other things. One of our main strategies for Aisha is that we want to end this fight as fast as we can without being scored on, so the essence is this: If we are throwing so much at them, they don't have time to throw something back at us."

Allen points out that it is best to adopt a stance that feels comfortable in both an offensive or defensive position. On the average, the person's stance doesn't change, though they may move backwards or on the lateral. In addition to countering, you may have to go on the offense and you don't want to have to change the stance to be offensively ready.

## On the Distaff Side

While fighters commonly focus on their offensive skills, clearly it's just as important to work on the defensive drive. Giving equal attention to kicks that can keep your opponents from scoring while you set them up for defeat takes time, but it's worth it, as attested to by Aisha Thornton's whirlwind record. As Haines puts it: "No matter how long it takes, preparation creates the opportunity to be successful." **W**

Preston Shah is a free-lance writer based in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

## Defensive Swoop Hook Round Kick

1-3. Assume a fighting stance. As your opponent kicks, side step to the left on an angle throwing a swoop hook and round kick to your opponent's head.

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