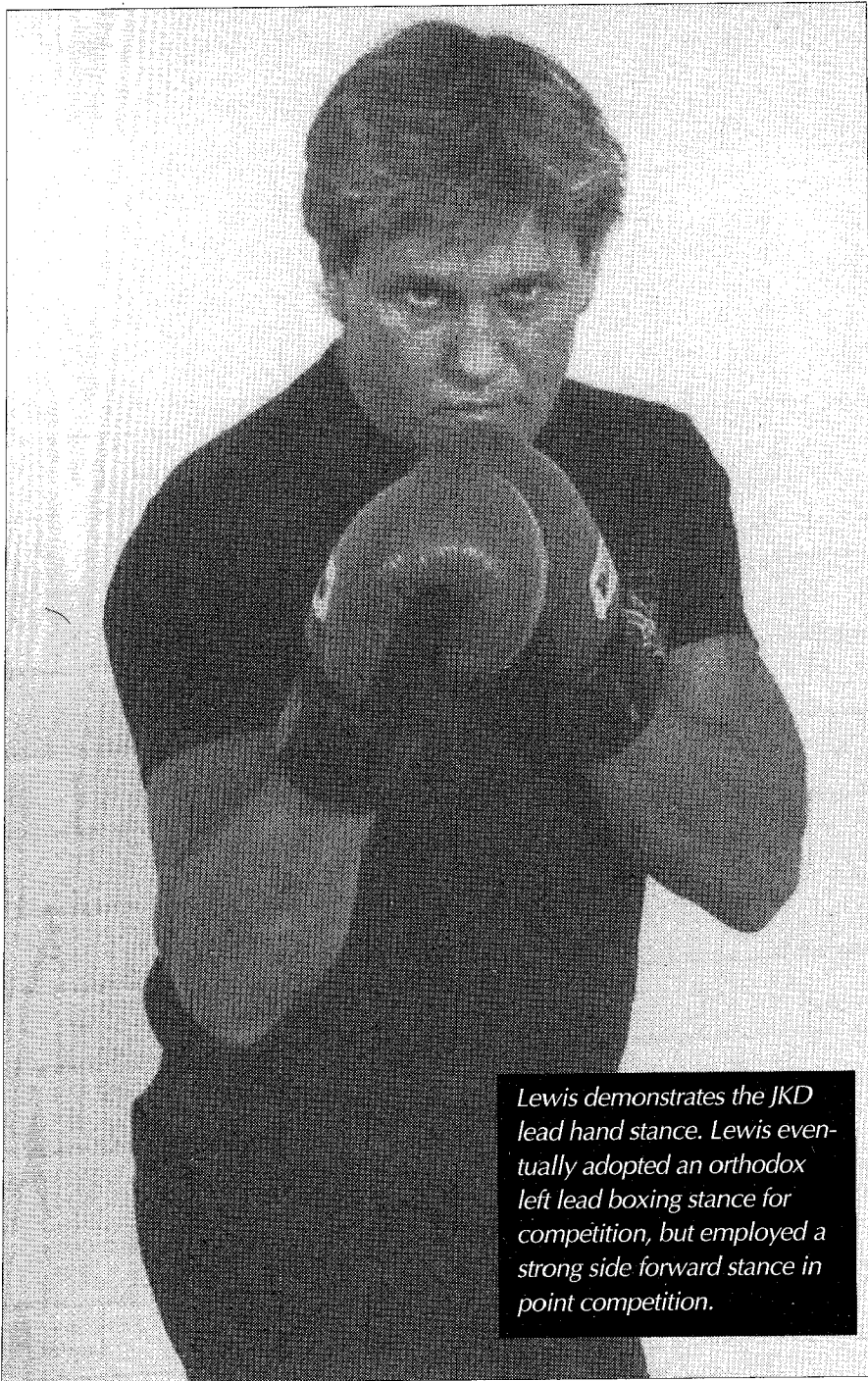


Joe Lewis' JKD: The Ultimate Expression?

Joe Lewis was Bruce Lee's personal test pilot: What Lewis learned by experimenting with Lee he then put to use in the ring.

By Jerry Beasley, Ed.D.



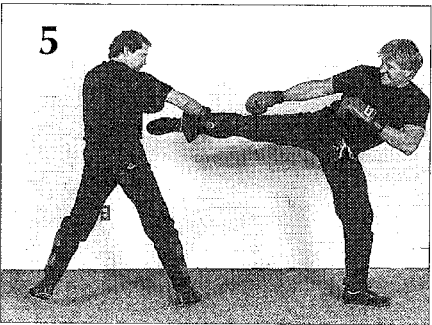
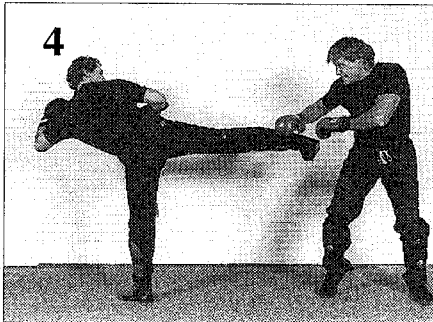
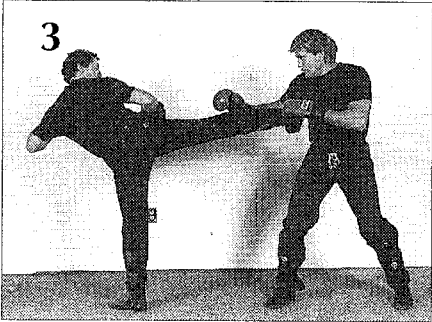
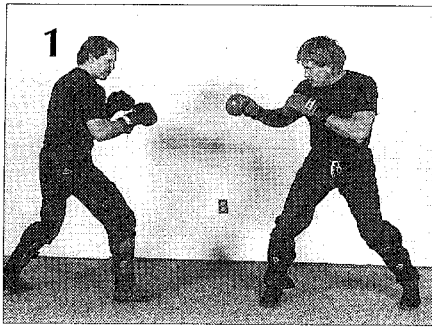
Lewis demonstrates the JKD lead hand stance. Lewis eventually adopted an orthodox left lead boxing stance for competition, but employed a strong side forward stance in point competition.

It was the spring of 1968. Joe Lewis could lay claim to the top slot in the world of martial arts competition. Mike Stone, the first superstar, had retired. Chuck Norris, a middleweight, was in contention, but Lewis had the size and strength to be unmatched in his category. As a competitor, Lewis was king—magazine covers, expenses-paid trips to tournaments, dates with the tournament queens. Lewis was beginning to assume his role as the new superstar of karate.

For the next few years Lewis produced a string of wins unmatched in tournament history. He introduced the sport of kickboxing in 1970 and won his first 12 fights by knockout. In 1974 the sport of kickboxing was re-invented as full-contact karate. Lewis became the first heavyweight full-contact champion. Approaching age 30, Lewis invited the opportunity to retire from competition and to consider movie deals and seminar circuits.

For most of the martial arts world, Lewis was the undisputed king of karate. But for an athlete so superior to others that his name has become synonymous with power fighting worldwide, there has to be more. Behind every champion athlete there is a coach, a trainer who inspires and motivates. In Lewis' case, it was Bruce Lee.

In a 1974 issue of *Professional Karate* magazine Lewis gave credit to his teacher, Bruce Lee. Lewis claimed



Beasley (left) and Lewis (right) demonstrate jeet kune do speed drills (1). As Beasley slides up for a side kick (2-3), Lewis avoids, repositions, and fires his own counter (4-5). Lewis notes that emphasis was placed on hard contact and quick initial moves.

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Your style must complement your attributes as well as your psychological nature, not restrict them.”

that it was (more) Lee who originally developed the strategies for fighting that had assisted Lewis in becoming a better fighter. At the time, however, the karate groups wanted no connection with kung-fu (or gung-fu, as Lee called his art). Moreover, Bruce Lee was, in the early '70s, thought of by and large as a movie fighter and not as a martial artist worthy of their praise. As a result, Lewis' connection with Bruce Lee was laid to rest.

The Power of Knowledge

This article seeks to address several questions. What effect did Lee have on Joe Lewis, America's greatest martial arts fighter? And why now, 21 years after Lee's death, are so many people becoming interested in Lee's connection to martial arts competition?

“Bruce Lee gave me the power of knowledge,” says Lewis. “He gave me a philosophy which is the highest form of knowledge in the martial arts. He helped me to acquire skills to be able to conceptualize what I was doing. I was no longer just an abstract fighter. I was able to begin to turn around and explain to others exactly what I had been doing to become a champion.”

Lewis' theories on competition were originally published in the early



Professional Karate magazines and co-authored by well-known martial arts journalist John Corcoran. The 26 principles of fighting, strategies on defense and offensive attacks, the famous five angles of attack (an advancement of Lee's five ways of attack), and conditioning concepts were all addressed. Lewis gives Lee credit for helping him develop the ability to conceptualize the principles and for helping motivate him to go beyond simple technique to understand principles.

"When Bruce and I got together (1968) we trained together once a week (for close to two years)." The sessions, says Lewis, "would usually last anywhere from two hours to four hours. My lessons were scheduled for only one hour, but when Bruce liked you and when you came prepared, and that meant always being in top shape and always practicing what he had shown the week before, the lesson would last longer.

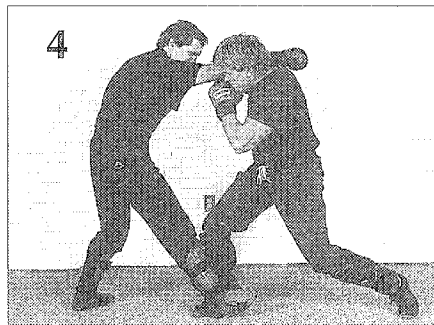
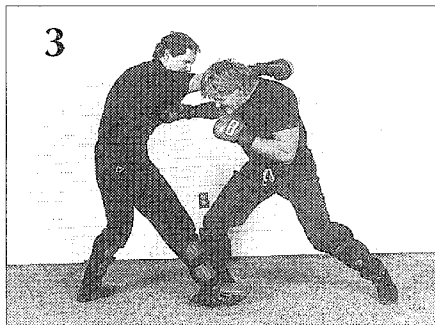
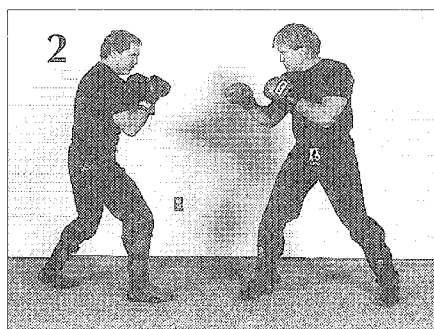
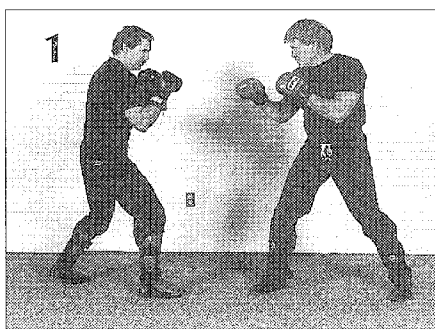
"Bruce always had some new kick or strike he was working on," Lewis adds. "There was always some new movement each week that he wanted to throw at me to get my reaction." It's evident that Lee enjoyed trying out his skills against the then-national/world karate champ. If he could perform against the best American heavyweight fighter he would have no problem disposing of lesser-caliber opponents.

A Dedicated Pupil

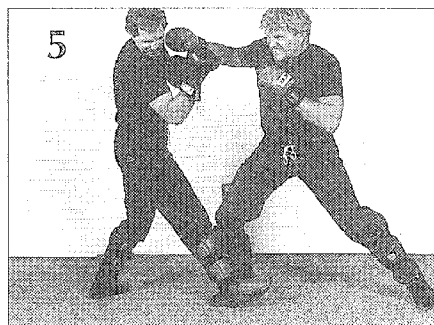
Lewis, who at first shunned Lee because of his size and lack of competitive background, quickly became a dedicated pupil of Lee's philosophy of jujitsu and jujitokune do. Of particular interest was Lee's knowledge and expertise in the concept of bridging the gap.

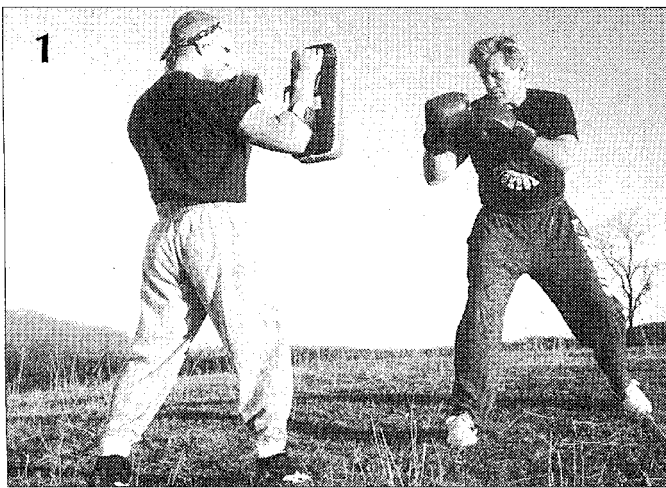
"We would emulate Jack Dempsey, Muhammad Ali, and Sugar Ray Robinson," Lewis remembers. "Bruce could motivate me to develop the incredible explosiveness and crushing power of Dempsey." Later, when Lewis introduced kickboxing, he used the jeet kune do double hook to knock out Greg Baines in the first title match.

"Bruce would teach me about main-



Bruce Lee was very interested in boxing as a fighting art. Here, Lewis demonstrates the JKD double hook combination that Lee taught and Lewis used to win his first kickboxing title. (1) On guard. (2) Lewis parries Beasley's jab and slips in for a body hook (3) and a knockout blow to the head (4-5).





Lewis credits his mentor, Bruce Lee, with the introduction of training equipment drills to martial arts. Here, Lewis demonstrates the JKD lead side punch.

taining distance, moving backward, but at the same time keeping constant forward pressure against your opponent, slipping the head side to side, and the weapon-first principle.

"These principles," relates Lewis, "had come from fencing as well as from the old tai chi system and wing chun."

Contrary to much of the current speculation about Lee's jeet kune do, the system was founded on wing chun, northern shaolin, boxing, fencing, and tai chi. Bruce believed a great deal in target practice. He turned me on to boxing and using the double-end bag, speed bag, heavy bag, and focus pads."

Equipment training was a standard for all of Lee's students.

"I never hung around Bruce's other students," he explains. "Ted Wong was present at some of my training sessions. I think Bruce kind of preferred it that way. It kind of made me feel in a way I was his private property. I kind of liked that. He knew I was a fighter at heart and any time somebody walked on our turf the first thing I wanted to do was lock horns. Bruce didn't want to see his other students get their heads bashed in. In other words, he didn't want to see their confidence destroyed."

Historically, Lee had three types of students. He had his Hollywood types who learned conditioning. He had his group students. Historians claim that Dan Inosanto taught the majority (90 percent) of all group lessons. And,

since Lee himself had little responsibility in the group classes, he had ample time to train and coach his personal students. According to one magazine article, Ted Wong, who many claim is the authority on what's being called the "original art" of JKD, was Lee's favorite student.

His Test Pilot

Joe Lewis was taught the fighting principles of jeet kune do and coached in trying out the principles in competi-

tion.

"I was like his test pilot," says Lewis. "I tried it out in the ring. I am not talking about some bum in the street who can only last about 15-to-20 seconds what we call streetfighters. I am talking about real fighters. The guy that's in shape, that can go in the ring and hang with you for ten punishing rounds. That's fighting! Nothing else counts."

Lee very much wanted Lewis to acknowledge his style of jeet kune do. Perhaps the only real controversy between the two was generated because Lewis, a young and rebellious fighter, seemed to get some pleasure from refusing to name jeet kune do as his chosen style on tourney entry blanks. As a disciple of the Lee philosophy (JKD), he sweated blood in the rigorous training, never questioning Lee's authority in the classroom.

But as a fighter, he naturally questioned the fact that Bruce would never strap on the gear and glove up. Lewis responded simply to what some psychologists call dominant male syndrome. In his own world, Lewis was the king. But in his teacher/student relationship with Lee, he was no longer the dominant male. To fight back, Lewis would not acknowledge the style of jeet kune do. It was not until Lee's death that Lewis realized the personal loss of his mentor.

Bruce Lee had, for the most part, given up classroom teaching by 1971. And Lewis did not work with L

"Bruce Lee gave me the power of knowledge. He gave me a philosophy which is the highest form of knowledge in the martial arts. He helped me to acquire skills to be able to conceptualize what I was doing."

again. But he maintained the knowledge of jeet kune do. In 1970 he put JKD to work in the ring. In several publications Lewis credits his teacher, Bruce Lee, with being the true father of American kickboxing.

To those who would ask why Lewis is just now taking the time to teach jeet kune do, the answer is simple. Lewis has never *not* credited his teacher, Bruce Lee. Hundreds, if not thousands, of seminar attendees across the world can support the fact that Lewis for many years had spoken of Lee in his seminars and given credit to Lee for teaching him a principle or a concept. But did he teach jeet kune do?

Dan Inosanto once said in an interview, "We are talking about a superior individual. In my opinion, Joe Lewis would have been good whether he was a shotokan man, whether in shorin-ryu, or in kenpo karate—or in a

Korean system. He would have been good because he himself is good. He trained hard. That would be my opinion."

Lewis has always taught the fighting strategy of jeet kune do. Some people would hear his message and interpret it as karate, some as tournament training, and some would recognize the theory of jeet kune do.

What is Joe Lewis' Jeet Kune Do?

Remember that jeet kune do was constantly in a state of evolution. JKD was never a fixed system. Lee as a teacher played off his students' interests and abilities. For Inosanto, the spokesman and instructor for the Chinatown school, JKD became a way of conceptualizing martial arts and systems to find a common thread or flow from art to art.

For Ted Wong, selected from the Chinatown school to be Lee's personal student, JKD became an art unto itself. Ted was schooled in Bruce Lee's personal expression of JKD.

And for Joe Lewis, Lee's top fighter and the only person to make JKD work in competition, JKD became a strategy for fighting. For anyone to claim that only one person controls JKD, or that there is only one interpretation of JKD, is ridiculous.

According to Lewis, "As a fighting art form, Bruce Lee told me that JKD was the ultimate expression of self." Lewis further adds, "Your style must complement your attributes as well as your psychological nature, not restrict them. One's fighting style will always be determined by three factors. A first consideration is attributes (speed, power, confidence, etc.). Second, one must recognize one's own psychologi-

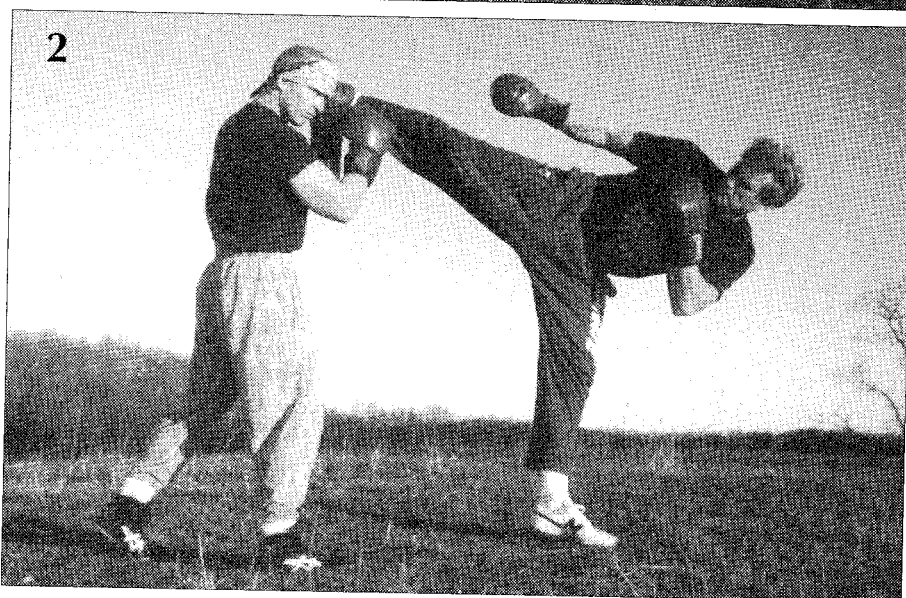
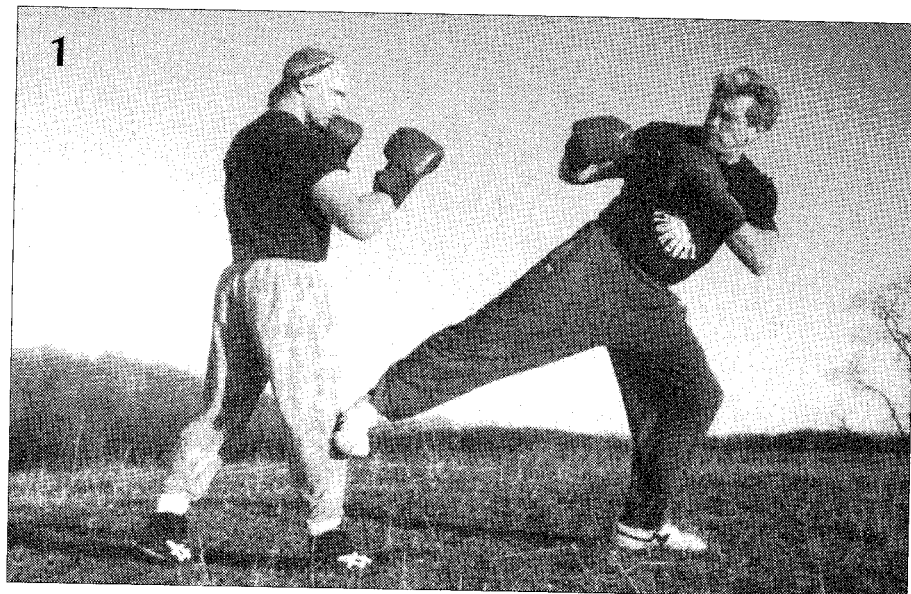


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cal nature. Are you a counterfighter, aggressor, or are you simply trigger happy? Third, determine your strategy based on the first two characteristics. If you understand and employ this formula, integrating each of these three factors with the principle during execution in combat, then you are totally expressing yourself. Regardless of your choice of techniques, this is jeet kune do."

In the preceding statement, Lewis has effectively explained the reasons for three entirely different expressions of jeet kune do. In comparing the attributes and psychological makeup of Ted Wong (original art), Dan Inosanto (concepts method), and Joe Lewis (jeet kune do strategies), it becomes evident that Lee successfully assisted each in totally expressing themselves as martial artists. The three systems are very different in terms of viewer interpretation. Yet each reflects Lee's brilliance as a teacher.

Dr. Jerry Beasley is the only person certified as a full instructor of jeet kune do strategies by Bruce Lee student and legendary fighter Joe Lewis.



Lee was fond of the leg check to set up hook kicks and speed jabs. Here, Lewis demonstrates a combination against a partner J. B. Heslip.