

Traditionally, American martial artists have concentrated on training in the various Oriental systems of self-defense in their search for the most effective skills and techniques. Perhaps they're intrigued by the seemingly flashy, fast and exotic looking maneuvers performed by practitioners who have invested years of training in these arts. What many fail to see, however, is that there's a much faster method of achieving proficiency in self-defense, and it's right here in our own backyard, so to speak. It's through boxing.

"We have our own martial art right here in America," says Dr. Jerry Beasley, a university professor. "A lot of us grew up with it. When we were kids, we didn't take karate or kung-fu. When we had to fight somebody, we boxed. A lot of people call it fist fighting."

Beasley contends Western boxing may well be the most functional system for fighting at medium range. "When you box, you're getting as close to an actual fist fight as possible. You're hitting and you're getting hit," he states. "It's spontaneous and unrehearsed, so you learn to deal with an actual situation."

This is not to say that Beasley's "empty-hand boxing" concept is the ultimate art or the answer to every self-defense situation, but with proper conditioning and sufficient development of supplemental skills, he says it would be hard to beat.

Since empty-hand boxing implies fist fighting (boxing without gloves), Beasley stresses the importance of conditioning the hands to a certain extent. "A moderate form of makiwara type training or some of the iron palm training methods used in the Chinese arts can be adapted to empty-hand boxing."

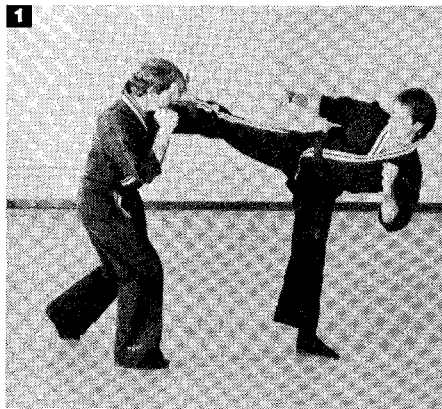
Since boxing with gloves does provide some protection, the empty-hand boxing system requires the development of additional skills necessary in actual self-defense. Beasley cites as examples trapping techniques, such as those used in wing chun or kali, and *koppo jutsu* ("bone breaking") techniques, popularized through ninjutsu, whereby one uses his fists in striking the opponent's weak areas. All of this in combination with kicking techniques and the ability to enter from a long-range distance to achieve medium-range distance makes for an effective self-defense system.

Beasley gave three essential components necessary for the empty-hand boxing system to work. First, leg immobilization techniques for defense against kicks must be learned. Trapping the leg as it's chambered to deliver a kick (or as the kick is actually delivered) can be completed with a stopping kick. Catching the opponent's leg (or trapping it) between one's fists and knee may also be utilized as a leg-destroying technique. Or one may simply punch into his opponent's leg, especially to the knee as the kick is being delivered. The last two methods immobilize the fighter and neutralize his offenses.

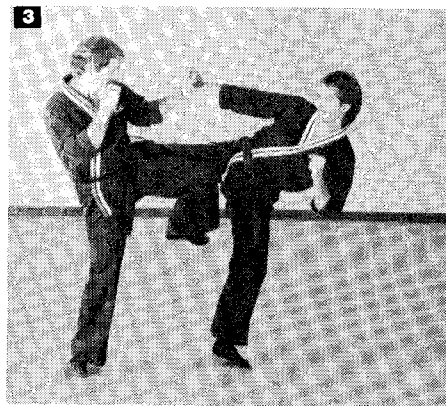
Secondly, a kicking method must be developed to parallel one's punching method. Beasley explained that there are four basic techniques used in boxing — the jab, cross, hook and uppercut punches. Kicks paralleling these respective punches might include the front snapping kick, front thrust kick (with the reverse leg) and the hooking kick (similar to the round kick, following the same direction as the punch from the upper body). Beasley used his "wing-tip kicking method" analogy to further explain: "I developed the name from the wing-tipped shoe. If you can imagine kick-

On Empty-Hand Boxing As a Martial Art

By L.R. Ferolino



1 For boxing to be a complete martial art, kicking skills must be acquired and the fist needs to be conditioned. This sequence demonstrates countering a kick by angling (1), punching above the knee (2) and following with a kick to the base of the leg (3).



ing someone with these hard-soled shoes, you'd use a cutting type of motion with the bottom of the heel or the point of the toe."

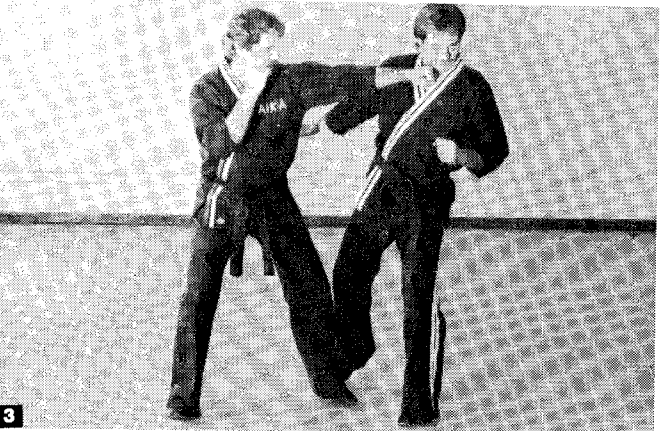
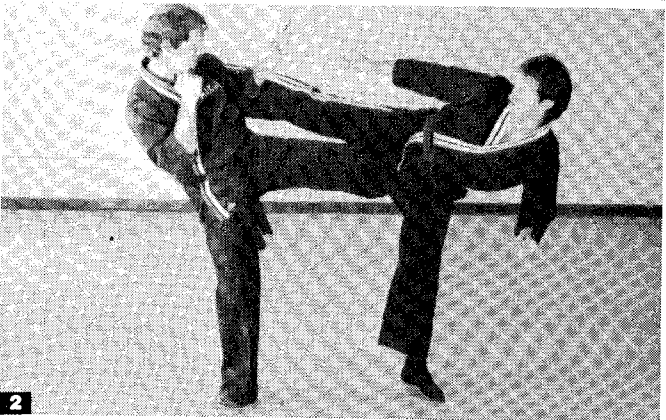
Kicking is an essential part of any self-defense system, Beasley maintains. "We've learned so from the Oriental methods. To leave kicking out of your system would greatly diminish your potential in total self-defense."

The third essential component, according to Beasley, is footwork — the ability to move in and out effectively. "Most experts agree that Western boxers — in particular, American boxers — have the most technically advanced footwork systems of any martial art," Beasley notes. "Boxers are paid millions of dollars more for fighting than any other martial artists. It goes without saying that, with all this money for research and development, a highly advanced method would be developed."

He cited Bruce Lee and Joe Lewis as two prominent martial artists who integrated boxing techniques into their fighting methods. "When Bruce Lee reportedly fought another instructor, he said his own footwork and his wing chun basics did not allow him to defeat the opponent in an efficient manner. He was too mechanical, some said, and too conditioned by technique to be free in moving about. He turned to boxing for some of the answers," Beasley states.

The legendary karate fighter Joe Lewis, according to Beasley, "is probably the most technically advanced boxer in the martial arts." Lewis introduced boxing methods to the martial arts community in the 1970s. "When kickboxing was popularized, all the trainers agreed that, to become efficient in contact karate, knowledge of Western or American boxing was mandatory," Beasley says. "Recently, it's been re-





ported that, in Korea, martial artists are using boxing footwork and hand skills to improve their abilities in tae kwon do sparring."

Beasley feels the more realistic the sparring skills used in an art, the more functional the art proves to be in actual self-defense. That's why experts have said Thai boxing may be the most devastating martial art. However, these same experts agree that when Thai boxers are beaten, it's almost exclusively at the hands of Western boxing specialists.

Boxing is relatively simple to learn. Beasley quotes Joe Lewis as saying, "Boxing is an orthodox art. The skills in boxing are natural for Americans, and therefore, can be mastered with reasonable effort." In his own system of empty hand boxing, Beasley has supplemented the boxing skills with other arts without changing the structure of the boxing method. Says Beasley, "The relaxed nature of empty-hand boxing allows us to easily flow from a karate or kali style technique to a wing chun trap or grappling technique, all within the boxing format."

If boxing is indeed effective, then why hasn't it caught on as a martial art? Beasley gives a couple of reasons: "First of all, since boxing is an American sport, everyone thinks he knows how to box. But if these people are willing to spend two or three years learning karate, how

Here, the fist fighter on the left uses boxing's concept of countering on the same line of attack. As the fighter on the right throws a roundhouse kick (1), the fist fighter counters with a cut kick under the other fighter's leg (like a right cross over a left jab) as he slips away from the power of the blow (2). The fist fighter regains his stance and follows up with a hand combination at intermediate range (3).

Empty-Hand Boxing...

did they learn to box without ever getting into the ring or working with a trainer? Second, when we see professional boxers in the ring going at it for up to 15 rounds, getting hit and knocked down, it's easy to reason that if they don't immediately get knocked out, then boxing must be a pretty inefficient way of defending yourself. Wrong! The problem with this type of reasoning is that these are highly trained athletes. Mental and physical conditioning is said to be 80 percent of the boxer's basic training. The same punch a professional boxer can deliver (or take and recover from) would easily knock out the average person. Finally, there seems to be a common misconception that boxing practice destroys brain cells (the punch drunk effect). But with proper equipment, even the most rigorous sparring sessions are entirely safe."

The point, Beasley says, is that "the things we assume everybody knows are often the things we actually know the least about."

There are two theories associated with empty-hand boxing which, Beasley states, is distinguished from sport boxing in that empty-hand boxing is designed for self-defense and emphasizes trapping and weapon destruction along with a greater choice of potential targets. The first concept is the "target relocation" theory, which Beasley says is premised on an assumption that the opponent is most likely to retaliate the split second after he's struck, and that the retaliation will occur in the same direction from which the strike came. "Realizing these two things — time and line of fire — you have to be prepared to move, Beasley says. "Boxing footwork is designed around target

relocation. You hit and move, hit and move."

Target relocation becomes easily visualized when paired with Beasley's "hornet's nest theory." Says Beasley, "Imagine walking up to a hornet's nest with a stick and striking the nest. Do you wait in a fixed stance to see what effect your strike had, or do you move? Realizing that the hornets will counterattack in the same direction that they were attacked from, you move (you being the target) to a safe area. It's the same in sparring. If you are attacked from the rear, you automatically respond with a counter to the rear. The wise fighter strikes at one point and then relocates his target so as not to be hit by the counter. As simple as this concept is to understand, few martial arts apply it. Traditional martial artists typically prefer the 'one shot kill' theory in which you assume that your single blow is sufficient to drop the opponent. Thus, there is no need to prepare for a counter. Apply this to the hornet's nest theory and you can imagine how hard it would be to pull off a one shot kill. Target relocation is a better choice. However, utilization of the target relocation theory requires a mobile system."

The second theory, "stem snapping," is premised on the fact that leaving a stem (an arm or a leg) extended for any length of time after the punch or kick is delivered allows the opponent to attempt to destroy the weapon or to trap it, resulting in immobilization. Therefore, after a technique is delivered, one must "snap" the arm or leg back to its original position or to a different position as soon as possible.

Beasley stresses the term "snap," in this sense, means pulling back rather than thrusting out a technique, the latter being the term most martial artists would identify with.

An advocate of all martial arts, Beasley was the first American to legitimately earn both a master's degree and a doctorate in part of his research in martial arts education. He earned both degrees from Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. Beasley now heads a martial arts "option" (area of concentration) for physical education majors at Radford University in Radford, Virginia. The Radford University curriculum is unique in that it's the only one in the U.S. offering a multi-cultural focus, offering introductory level course work in Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Filipino and American martial arts.

Beasley, a 6th degree black belt, has trained with several prominent martial artists, including Joe Lewis, Dan Inosanto and Larry Hartsell. He's the author of numerous articles and a book, *The Development of American Karate: History and Skills*. He's currently completing a second book. In addition, Beasley is the founder of several martial arts organizations, including the American Independent Karate Instructors Association (AIKAI). He operates each organization in conjunction with his national directors. Among them are Joe Lewis and Steve "Nasty" Anderson.

With the extensive martial arts background he had, one might wonder why Beasley would concentrate on a fighting method as seemingly mundane as boxing. "Empty-hand boxing is not the ultimate martial art, but it's very functional and relatively easy to learn. A good athlete could potentially master empty-hand boxing in three to five years," he says.



About the author: Gina Ferolino is a professional free-lance writer who has held positions in the newspaper reporting and marketing/public relations fields. A former martial arts student as well, she resides in Christiansburg, VA.