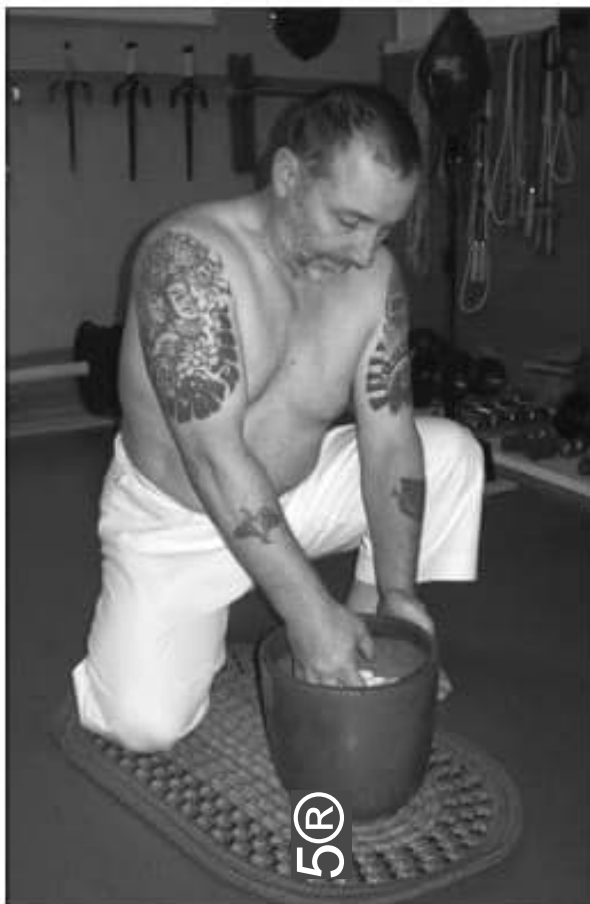


Jari Bako — Sand Box



Jan bako and a small number of the weights and tools used at the author's Shinseidokan dojo in Tasmania.



The author uses both the *thejir? buxo* and the *tou* to condition his fingers and afford him an effective *nukite* (spear hand) strike.



These *off bako*, sometimes called "*sumr baJco*" or "*kon sbti*", from times gone by are on display at the Okinawa Karate Museum.



Ancient *isAisosbr* and *jar? boko* on display at the Okinawa Karate Museum in Nishihara,



As with the nnttfAranj, both hands are conditioned, but not equally. The Least prominent hand, the Left if you are right handed, should be used more until it begins to feel as strong as the prominent hand.



Thrusting the fingers into gravel conditions them to the impact encountered when thrusting into a soft target on a body



A photograph of Mario Higaonna training with the jtrri óofco at the Yoyogi cfojoin Tokyo during the 1970s.

A very simple training aid to construct, but make no mistake about it, it will test your resolve. Basically made from a box, a bucket, or a container of almost any kind, and filled with either sand or small stones, this is what Gichin Funakoshi, the founder of the *Shotokan karate* tradition had to say about it:

While there is no escaping the brutal makiwara, there are numerous other ways karate jutsu uses to condition the body For example, training the fingers so that one is capable of piercing or pressing them into the weak parts of the body requires filling a container with sand so that repeated thrusting into it helps develop and harden the tips of your fingers, (p. 26)

However, this is what another famous Okinawan *karate sensei* (teacher), Kinjo Hiroshi, a student of Chojo Oshiro and later, Chomo Hanashiro, had to say on the subject of hand conditioning in a conversation with Charles Radi:

I don't believe karate anywhere in the world today is the same as it was during the old days in Okinawa. There are several reasons why I believe this and one of them is simply because so much has been handed down incorrectly. One example is hand conditioning; some believe that by thrusting your hand into a box filled with sand, or into a bundle of bamboo, your fingertips will be hardened and better prepared to use as a weapon. This is not true and people who employ such training methods are liable to irreparably injure

*themselves and not continue with karate. Makiwara (of which there are several kinds) has long been the accepted apparatus for developing your hands and impact-related skills.*²⁰

While both of these great teachers of *karate* come from a similar background and *karate* tradition (*Shuri-te*), they are a few generations apart, with Mr. Funakoshi (now deceased) being the older. Clearly, they hold different opinions about the value of certain pieces of equipment used in *hojo undo*. This raises an interesting point: do we need to use all the tools and methods that fall under the banner of *hojo undo* or simply utilize those tools and training drills that we find of benefit to us? The purpose of this book is to introduce a variety of tools and training drills and to allow you, the reader, to form your own opinion about whether such training will enhance your *karate*, or not.

Within the *Naha-te* tradition of *karate* on Okinawa (*Goju ryu*, *Uechi ryu*, etc.), conditioning has always played a more dominant role in the overall training undergone by students than in those schools of *karate* that evolved from *Shuri-te* and *Tomari-te*. Nevertheless, this should not be interpreted as being either better or worse; it is merely a difference of approach to answering the same age-old question: “How do I best prepare to defend myself?”¹ For me, training with these tools over the years has provided an opportunity to test my mental resolve and my physical endurance, and to gain an understanding of where my limits lie in each. Because of this, I know for sure my weak points and my strengths, and for me this provides a great advantage over people who think they know theirs. *Hojo undo* training is not about how many tools we use or how good we look using them; it is about being honest in our efforts and honest with ourselves, and reaping the rewards inherent in both.

At first, the container being used as a *jari bako* should be filled some way to the top with rough sand. Later on, this can be replaced with small pebbles. Discretion is required here and your ability to continue using this tool should be at the forefront of your mind when choosing the kind of material with which to fill the container. For example, rough sand or beads can be used, or it may be that you might begin training with softer (builders) sand before replacing it with gravel or moving on to small stones.



Exercise 1

By placing the container on a low table or ledge, it is possible to drop into *shiko dachi* and thrust the fingertips into the contents using *nukite* (spear hand). If this is not possible, simply place the container on the floor, position yourself comfortably, and do the exercises from there. Effort should be focused on making the tips of the fingers acclimatized to impact, so ease up on the idea of penetrating as deeply as you can. Over time, you will feel you can go a little deeper, and this is the time to make an effort. You can also try bending the middle finger slightly to allow the tip of it, and those of the fingers on either side, to become level. Squeeze the tips of all three fingers tightly together and use this hand formation in the same way as *nukite*.



Exercise 2

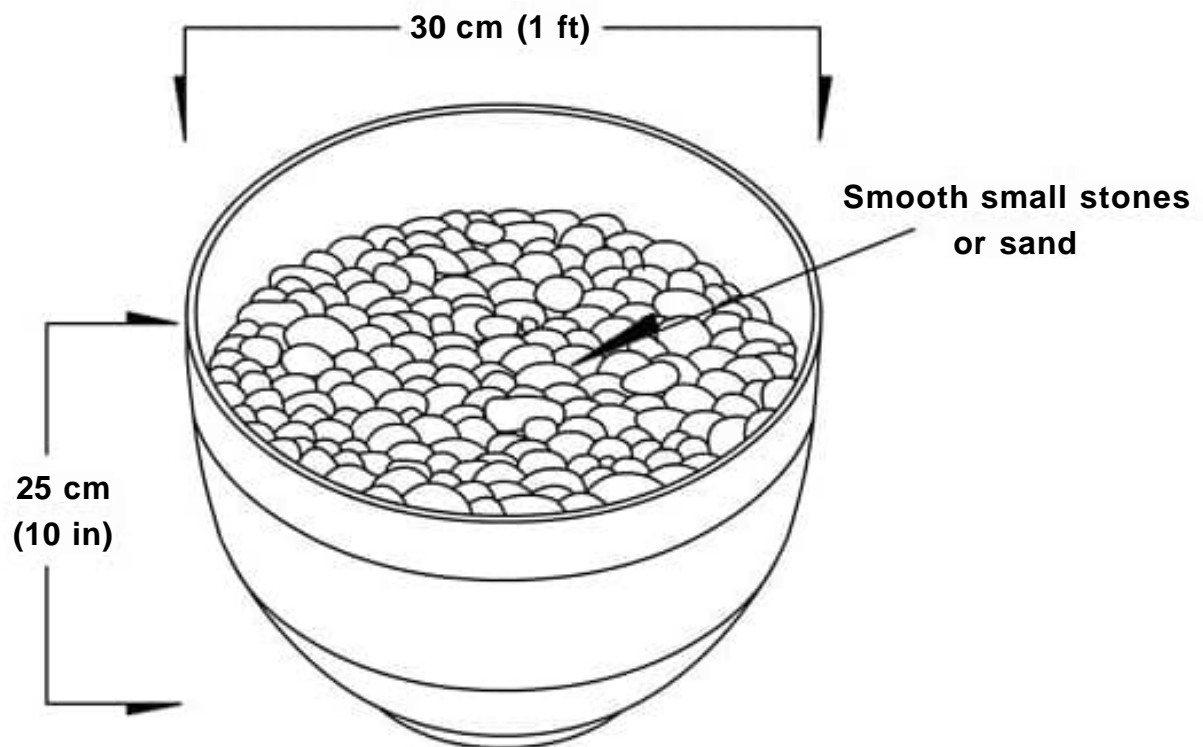
As with the *tou*, the practice can be changed to introduce a grabbing action, although it is not necessary to pull here. Just open the hand and thrusting the fingers into the container, make a grabbing action before withdrawing the hand. Whatever method is used, it is important to train in accordance with your abilities and slowly try to **push the boundaries of those abilities**. Remember to inhale and then make a powerful exhalation with each thrust of the hand. Patience is required to make progress with *hojo undo*: patience and perseverance. It is not important to do **fifty strikes on your first attempt**. As always in *karate* training, we are aspiring for quality over quantity. It is the quality of the blows that are important, and not necessarily the number.

Perhaps this is also an opportune time to dispel some of the well-established myths and legends surrounding the use of your bare hands. As mentioned at the beginning of this book, Okinawa is a treasure trove of stories and folklore surrounding the exploits of martial artists of long ago. Again, I have to say that many of these stories have to be taken with a large pinch of salt. Nevertheless, they serve an important function, in my opinion, and that is the feeling of inspiration they can offer us, the present generation of *karateka*.

For as long as I can remember I have heard stories about the founder of *Goju ryu karate*. Chojun Miyagi, and how he could, and did, tear strips of meat off a side of beef with nothing but his fingers. Another tale tells of how he could clench a bamboo shaft and crush it with his grip. Well, he is no longer alive to say, one way or the other, and I am not suggesting for a moment that the strength of his grip was not indeed tremendous; in fact, I have met and trained with six of Chojun Miyagi's direct students¹ and received first-hand accounts to confirm that he did possess a very powerful grip. However, everything I know about the man leads me to believe that he would have avoided such public displays of strength. I am left thinking that perhaps such exploits arose from the minds of his followers and admirers who, innocently enough, bestowed upon Mr. Miyagi abilities he may not have had. Alternatively, perhaps they just exaggerated things a little? Almost identical tales have been told about other past *karate* masters, such as Gichin Funakoshi's teachers, Itosu and Azato for example. Both men were considered among the finest karate men of their time in Okinawa. Of Itosu he said: "Renowned for his grip strength, my own teacher, Itosu Anko, once broke a 15 cm length of bamboo into three or four pieces as requested." And of Azato, his other teacher, he said: "A master of *nukite* (spear hand) Azato *sensei* was well known for his strength and powerful fingers. Once, as an adolescent, he went to the local slaughterhouse and drove his fingers into the lifeless body of a pig using this technique." (p. 64)

It all sounds very familiar, does it not? But no matter, for as I have previously pointed out, such tales abound on Okinawa, and whether there may be some reality'-based truth to these stories or not, their value today lies in their ability to inspire and enthuse the imagination of others, a gift left to us from long ago that many leave unused and unvalued. How short-sighted!

Jan Bako Construction Notes



Round stones or rough sand help develop strong fingertips.

Almost any container can serve to make this tool, as long as it is made of material sufficient to take the punishment of frequent use and is wide enough to allow movement of the sand or stones when the fingers penetrate the contents. Smooth, marble-sized stones or, indeed, marbles themselves can be used though some people prefer to use rough sand or gravel to thrust their fingers into. Whatever material is used, anything with sharp edges should always be avoided.