

6 SECRETS of SPARRING

John Fonseca Teaches His Favorite Ways to Score Under the World Karate Federation's New Rules!
by Floyd Burk

It's pure thunder and lightning these days at sport-karate tournaments. If you've attended one lately, you've probably wondered if you were in the right place. The sport has changed so drastically because the World Karate Federation recently scrapped its entire point-fighting rule book in favor of one that encourages a broader spectrum of dynamic tactics and techniques.

The most shocking change is that a single punching technique—the mainstay of traditional karate—is now awarded the lowest possible score: one point. Meanwhile, a kick to the body now nets a competitor two points. The biggest surprise has been the inception of the "superpoint": three points doled out for each and every head kick. And that's not all: Fighters who successfully throw or sweep their opponent to the mat and follow up with a punch or kick also earn the triple.

While some critics claim the new rules have turned traditional point fighting upside-down, most of the top welcome the changes and view them as long overdue. John Fonseca, *Black Belt's* 2001 Competitor of the Year, is a big proponent of the new rules, and he spent an entire season developing the most of test and won Puerto Rico and National Karate-do. He recently agreed and tactics with *Black Belt* so you'll be ready to rock at your

tradition athletes due. John is a big proponent of the new rules, and he spent an entire season developing the most of test and won Puerto Rico and National Karate-do. He recently agreed and tactics with *Black Belt* so you'll be ready to rock at your

SUPERPOINT: **Hook Kick to the Head**

The hook kick to the noggin is a great choice for competition because it's a



PHOTOS BY SARA FOGAN

quick and powerful technique. The move, which is used a lot on the European circuits, is most effective when you set it up with a fake or sweep, Fonseca says.

To execute the kick, face your opponent in a same-side-forward fighting stance. Move around until you catch him with too much weight on his lead leg, then use a rear-leg check to strike

Hook kick to the head: John Fonseca (right) faces Alberto Lopez (1). Fonseca sets up his scoring technique by off-balancing his opponent with a leg check to the calf (2), then wallops him with the hook kick (3).



the calf muscle of his lead leg. Don't try to sweep him to the mat; just distract him and break his balance. Then raise the knee of the leg you just used and whack him on the head with a hook kick. Congratulations! You've been awarded your first superpoint.

SUPERPOINT: Scoop Throw

Fonseca likes to be able to score with counters to attacks he uses—such as the hook kick. He can do that easily because he's familiar with the right way to execute those moves and can therefore pick out his opponent's mistakes and weaknesses when one is attempted.

To successfully defend against and counter a hook kick to the head, you must wait for your opponent to make one of two possible mistakes, he says. The first is executing the kick straight-legged as though he were doing a wheel kick, and the second is failing to set up

Scoop throw: From a same-side-forward stance, John Fonseca (left) awaits his opponent's attack (1). When the other man attempts a hook kick, Fonseca jams it by moving forward and blocking and grabbing the leg (2). He then executes the scoop throw (3) and lands a reverse punch to the face (4).



Punch draw and throw: John Fonseca (right) moves forward at an angle and exposes his ribs to draw his opponent into attacking (1). When the opponent executes a reverse punch, Fonseca deflects it with his rear hand (2). He then performs an inner-reap throw (3), sending the other man face-first into the mat (4). He finishes him with a punch to the head (5).

the kick with a fake or draw. Both will give you ample time to get inside the kick and then behind the kicker, where you can counter while you avoid getting hit.

To execute Fonseca's hook-kick defense, assume a same-side-forward fighting stance near your opponent. As soon as he begins his rear-leg kick, jam it by moving forward and simultaneously performing a grasping block,

trapping his kicking leg with both hands. To execute the scoop throw, lift that leg and use your lead foot to knock his supporting leg out from under him. That will send him crashing onto his back, after which you can drop into a low horse stance and strike his face or body with a reverse punch. You've just scored another three-pointer.

Note: According to WKA rules, takedowns must be executed while you

are defending against attacks or as follow-ups to your own attacks using punches or kicks. This requirement is aimed at keeping the match from turning into a grappling contest.

SUPERPOINT: **Punch Draw and Throw**

The best time to execute a takedown is when your opponent is finishing an unsuccessful attack and attempting to

Overview of the New WKF Rules

- Advanced adult matches last for three minutes, during which points are accumulated.
- Slaughter rule: A match is concluded if there is an eight-point difference between the competitors' point totals.
- A "superpoint" results when a kick is delivered to the head, or when a throw or sweep takes a competitor to the ground and a legal hand or foot technique is landed on a designated target on the body or head.
- A two-pointer results when a kick is delivered to the body, or when a competitor is off-balanced and a punch is delivered to the body or head.
- A one-pointer results when a punch is delivered to the body or head.

For a complete list of sparring rules and regulations, visit <http://www.wkf.net> or <http://www.usankf.org>.

—F.B.



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regain his balance. The next-best time is when you’ve lured him into attacking you with a specific technique you are ready to defend against. Fonseca likes to use feints and angular footwork to draw the other guy into reacting a specific way—such as attacking with a reverse punch. He often studies his opponents’ fighting style to determine how they are likely to respond.

The punch draw and throw is one of his favorite applications of this strategy. To do it, assume that you have predetermined that your opponent likes to launch a reverse punch in response to angular movement. Square off with him in a same-side-forward fighting stance. (For the sake of simplicity, you and your opponent will start from a left-side-forward stance.) Move forward and to the left with your lead foot while raising your right elbow to expose your right side. As he pivots toward you and fires the reverse punch, slide your right leg slightly to the inside of his lead leg and deflect the punch with your rear (left) hand. Immediately pivot counterclockwise and

perform a reverse inner-reap throw by raising your right leg against his left thigh. That movement should send him crashing forward onto his stomach, but if additional force is needed, you can place your hand on the back of his neck and push forward as you reap upward. Follow up with a punch to the head or body to complete the three-point play.

In-and-out turning back kick: John Fonseca (left) sets up his scoring technique by offering his opponent a lead punch (1) and immediately retreating to draw him into attacking with his own punch (2). Overextended, the opponent is now in a perfect position to get nailed by a turning back kick (3).

SUPERPOINT: Round-Kick Counter and Throw

To execute Fonseca’s next tried-and-true superpointer, begin by assuming a left fighting stance and having your partner do the same. Wait for him to use his left leg to throw a roundhouse kick at your head or the front side of your body. As soon as he launches it, avoid his foot by leaning away and simultaneously executing a lead-hand

Angular Stealth Assault

One of John Fonseca’s preferred tactics involves attacking from different angles. When you strike from an angle, he says, your opponent is forced to adjust to your movement. That disrupts his timing and gives you an opportunity to score, and it can be a key strategy when you are facing someone with a substantial reach advantage.

When combined with changing rhythm, angular movement can also help you disguise your action and intent. It can enable you to close the distance with stealth-like effectiveness and empower you to strike from a superior position, the *Black Belt* Hall of Fame member claims. —F.B.

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scooping block to trap his kicking leg. Then close the distance and get behind him as he attempts to place his kicking leg back on the ground, and reach around him until you can grab his lapel with your left hand. Pivot clockwise and execute a major outer reap by using your left leg to lift against the back of his left thigh while you push forward and down with the hand that is gripping his lapel. After he falls, follow up



with a punch or kick to the body or face—and add three more points to your score.

TWO-POINTER: **In-and-Out** **Turning Back Kick**

To score with the turning back kick, you should first perform a set-up maneuver to make your opponent more vulnerable and keep him from punching you or grabbing your leg and tossing you to the ground. Fonseca advises you to start by using in-and-out footwork combined with a feinting lead-hand punch to draw your opponent into attacking with an overextended reverse punch. Because you retreat precisely at the same time your opponent punches, he will find himself in a deep and defenseless forward stance. From there, all you need to do is spin and blast him in the gut with the back kick. Collect two points.

TWO-POINTER: **Check and Reverse Punch**

Fonseca favors tactics that ruin his opponent's balance. He says that when you off-balance the other guy with a hand or leg check, you disrupt his timing, confuse him and negate his ability to counterattack effectively. To use this strategy, square off with your opponent and raise your lead hand so it is slightly higher than his. Without warning, strike his lead hand with yours and kick

Under the new WKA rules, a punch to the head delivered after the execution of an off-balancing maneuver receives two points.

the lower part of his lead leg sideways with your lead leg. This combo will knock him down to one knee; that's when you smack him in the head with a reverse punch. Using an off-balancing move in concert with a scoring punch earns you a pair of points.

Future of Competition

For more than 40 years, the staples of traditional point fighting have been the reverse punch and front thrust kick, which were used with mostly linear footwork. It's only natural that martial artists who have spent the greater part of their career perfecting those techniques are resisting the new ways.

However, even the staunchest critics will eventually admit that sport karate has been revitalized in a manner that preserves the *budo* (martial way) ideology while making it fun and exciting for the next generation of practitioners. The makeover might be just what traditional karate needs to return to the level of prominence it enjoyed decades ago. And if you want to be part of that resurrection, there's no better place to start than the fighting methods of John Fonseca. ✕

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10 Tested Tournament Tips

- Always study your opponent's matches.
- Always observe the officials and note the characteristics of their point calls.
- Always fight one technique at a time and one match at a time.
- Always be the dominant fighter and attack according to your game plan.
- Always visualize yourself as the champion.
- Never underestimate your opponent.
- Never underestimate yourself.
- Never lose confidence in your skills or training.
- Never start a match without warming up first.
- Never allow your opponent to perform at 100 percent of his ability.

—John Fonseca