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# SHOTOKAN SUCCESS

## A Champion Teaches You How to Blend Techniques Into More Efficient Fighting Combinations | by Floyd Burk

**T**o do your best in karate, you need to train with the best. Now, if you live in Chicago and are within driving distance of shotokan stylist John Fonseca, who was named *Black Belt's* 2001 Competitor of the Year for his exploits on the tournament circuit, you're all set. Unfortunately, most of the martial arts world doesn't have easy access to the Fonseca Martial Arts acad-

emies—which is precisely why we tracked him down and pried loose five of his best fighting combinations.

For the record: About five years ago, the World Karate Federation revamped its rule book to make point fighting more dynamic. Under the new regs, a reverse punch is worth one point, while a kick to the body counts as two. The big surprise

was the inception of the superpoint, which awards three points for a head kick or a takedown that's followed by a punch or kick. The techniques explained in this article take full advantage of the new rules to maximize your scoring opportunities.

One more thing before you begin: Success in competition hinges on how you string together techniques to form combinations.

### Guiding Principles for Sparring

**Match Energy:** Conditioning is one of the most important ways to guarantee success in competition. By having a high aerobic and anaerobic threshold, you'll have a greater chance of overcoming fatigue, stress, anxiety, pressure and the adrenaline rush that occurs during tournaments. Superior conditioning also allows you to bring the intensity of a match to a level that your opponent cannot handle. If your energy is much higher than his, you can shut him out from the start of the match before his confidence grows.

However, you can experience highs and lows despite your conditioning. If you don't feel in the zone at the beginning of the bout, try to bring his energy down by keeping your distance, being defensive and setting a slow rhythm. As he becomes more relaxed, raise your energy during the middle and end of the fight, taking it to him and closing out the match.

**Opposite Action of Intention:** When you want to attack, sometimes it's best to appear defensive to draw your opponent in close. When he bridges the gap, nail him. Conversely, if you want to be defensive or protect your lead while a match is winding down, convey an intent to attack. Use feints and pressure to create an impression of aggression. That will keep him away and disrupt his timing.

**Proper Analysis:** To execute the correct strategy against a particular opponent, you need to analyze your strengths and weaknesses as well as his. Furthermore, you must continually update your analysis as the match progresses. I remember competing at a Pan-American championship and getting frustrated because I was unable to counter my opponent's technique. I'd trained against the move he was using at least 1,000 times, but I didn't know why the counter wasn't working. Halfway through the match, I realized something: He was just faster than me. So I changed my strategy to one of pure offense and defense—I just threw my attacks and covered when he threw his, all without trying to time and counter his movements. I won the match.

—John Fonseca



It's essential to choose moves that you can perform well, that flow smoothly and that are consistent with your strategies. If you need to combine techniques that don't seem to work together, you might need to use subtle movements or actions—for example, leaving your arm extended after a punch so you can use that hand for grabbing. Fonseca identifies these movements in the Key Points section that follows each combination description.

## 1 PUNCH-KICK-TAKEDOWN

**The Blend:** Reverse punch, fake roundhouse kick, hook kick, reaping-throw takedown, reverse punch

**The Sequence:** From a left fighting stance, square off with your opponent, who's in a right stance. Execute a reverse punch to the face and follow up with a fake roundhouse kick to the body. Using the same leg, smack him in the head with a hook kick. As soon as you drop your kicking leg, take him down using an *osoto gari* (outer reaping throw). Finish with a reverse punch to the face for the superpoint.



## 2 PUNCH-TRAP-SWEEP

**The Blend:** Reverse punch, hand trap, reverse punch, double-leg sweep, reverse punch

**The Sequence:** You and your adversary are in left-side-forward stances. Unleash a reverse punch to the body, which he'll probably deflect with his lead hand.



When he does, trap his hand while you drill him in the head with another reverse punch. Move behind him so you're close to his lead leg, then lift that leg with your right knee and sweep both legs, dropping him on his butt. Finish with a reverse punch to the head.

**Key Points:** "When throwing the initial reverse punch, keep your lead hand up so you can use it to trap his front hand," Fonseca says. "Shift forward as you throw the second reverse punch, and keep your momentum moving continuously forward during the combination."

## 3 PUNCH-KICK-SWEEP

**The Blend:** Jab, reverse punch, rear-leg roundhouse kick, front-leg sweep, heel kick

**The Sequence:** The combination has two parts, the first of which consists of three techniques designed to help you achieve one of the following: You'll score, or you'll draw your opponent in, setting him up for the second part, which is the takedown. Start by facing him with opposite legs for-





ward (your left, his right). Throw a left jab and right reverse punch, followed by a right roundhouse kick to the head. Drop your kicking leg near the inside of his lead foot to use for an *ashi harai* (leg sweep). That puts you in a right stance. Your opponent will probably counter with a reverse punch to the chest. As it comes, protect yourself with your right arm and execute the sweep by pulling his foot/ankle to the outside. The action takes away his balance, leaving him

on his stomach and in perfect position for a heel kick to the kidney or a reverse punch.

**Key Points:** "As you launch the jab, punch and kick set, move at a slight angle to the outside of the opponent's front leg," Fonseca says. "This will force him to open slightly for the kick to score. Also, vary the target levels: high jab, low reverse punch, high kick. Whether you score with the kick or not, the target variation will help you sneak your foot down behind his front

#### **PUNCH-KICK-TAKEDOWN:**

John Fonseca (right) faces Joseph Claycomb (1). Fonseca throws a reverse punch (2) and takes a roundhouse kick (3). The opponent attempts to block the technique, which leaves his head open to Fonseca's hook kick (4). The shotokan champ then places his kicking leg behind his opponent's lead leg (5) and executes a sweep (6). He finishes with a reverse punch to the head (7).

#### **Judgment Day**

When you execute a punch or kick to certain parts of your opponent's body, John Fonseca says, the judges may not get a good view of the technique because their position prevents it. Or you may do a move that doesn't meet a particular judge's criteria for power. Either way, you're out of luck.

To avoid that, he says, make yourself visible. "When you kick your opponent in the head, or take him down and follow up with a legal strike, everyone can see it," he says. "This strategy can increase your scoring, and it's viable for self-defense outside of competition." —FB



#### **PUNCH-TRAP-SWEEP:**

John Fonseca (right) advances with a reverse punch, which the opponent deflects (1-2). The shotokan stylist traps the man's hand while unleashing a second reverse punch (3). Next, he takes out his legs, knocking the opponent to the mat (4), where he finishes him with a reverse punch to the face (5).



#### **PUNCH-KICK-SWEEP:**

Facing his foe (right), John Fonseca assumes a defensive posture (1). He executes a rapid-fire jab (2), reverse punch (3) and roundhouse kick (4) to draw his opponent into position for the follow-up attack (5). After positioning his foot near the man's lead leg (6), Fonseca sweeps, dumping him on the mat. He finishes with a heel kick to the kidney (7-8).



#### **DOUBLE PUNCH-SWEEP:**

Facing his adversary (right), John Fonseca shuffles forward with a double reverse-punch combination (1-3). He then steps behind him (4) and sweeps him off his feet (5). Holding the man's arm while he falls, Fonseca drives a punch into his body (6).



leg. Because you'll be so close, he'll be drawn into counterattacking [because] his positioning will seem superior and you'll appear open. As the attack comes, simultaneously do the sweep. That allows you to use his momentum against him, which helps make the takedown work."

## **4 DOUBLE PUNCH-SWEEP**

**The Blend:** Reverse punch, step-through reverse punch, sweep, reverse punch.

**The Sequence:** Your left foot is forward to match his right-foot lead. From just out of range, close the gap with a right reverse punch, then step forward with a left reverse punch. Move behind



#### BLITZ-TRAP-SWEEP:

John Fonseca (right) repositions his lead hand slightly, exposing the back of his head to attack (1). The opponent takes the bait and executes a hook kick, but Fonseca intercepts it by moving to the inside (2), after which he counters with a reverse punch (3). He continues his onslaught with a knee-sweep takedown (4) and a body punch (5).

him with your left leg while you grab his lead arm and shoulder with both hands. Sweep his front (right) leg, knocking him to the mat so you can finish with a body or head punch.

**Key Points:** "Keep low—don't rise up when attacking," Fonseca says. "Com-

pletely extend your punches, and finish your second punch before you step behind him. Also, don't retract the second punch [because] you'll use it to aid in the takedown. Finally, when you prepare to sweep, if the distance is short, use your knee to achieve the takedown."

### Combinations Are the Key to Victory

"We use combinations that have a lot of continuity, which helps us carry out one of our strategies: Fight continuously to score the superpoint," John Fonseca says. "They're worth three points, which merits going for them." —F.B.



## 5 BLITZ-TRAP-SWEEP

**The Blend:** Blitzing reverse punch, leg trap, knee sweep, reverse punch.

**The Sequence:** You and your opponent have your left sides forward. Drop your lead hand, exposing your head, which is a three-point opportunity for him. He takes the bait and advances with a hook kick. Immediately launch a blitzing reverse punch as you move inside his kicking leg. Trap his leg with your left hand while you grab anything that's available on the rear side of his body, then perform a knee-sweep takedown. Follow up with a reverse punch to earn a superpoint.

**Key Points:** "To keep from getting hit by the kick as you blitz, make sure you're moving slightly to his left," Fonseca says. "Also, as you advance, drop your lead hand to trap his kicking leg for use in executing the takedown." ❗

#### About the author:

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