

Competition Power Breaking

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Power breaking is the captivation of all the elements of Power;

Reaction force, Concentration, Equilibrium, Breath Control, Speed and the movement of Mass into one split second of explosive energy to result in the Destruction of the target.

We are fortunate in New Zealand to have **the** best power breakers in the World. Over the last 10years New Zealand has consistently been at the top in both Men's and Woman's Individual and Team Event at World Championships.

Being a good Power Breaker is something that only comes from experience and knowledge, it has the potential to cause injuries. Tools must be conditioned, mind focused and technique practiced over and over again.

There is a lot written about Breaking and it looks to most relatively easy, hit the board as hard as you can then run for the ice bucket. But to those at the top of World in this event there are a few secrets that aren't known to most students so I'll attempt to put them into words with the aid of a few photos.

Preparation - Materials

Firstly we need to look at the materials we are going to use, are we breaking wood, re-breakable Fuji Mae boards or the no longer popular peg type?

Wood

As a rule in New Zealand we use Pine Boards (Pinus Radiata) dressed on both sides 28x28x18cm stacked one on top of another to increase the degree of difficulty either hand held or in a board holder.

When stacking multiple boards ensure that the grain of the wood is all going in the same direction. If you cut a tree down look at the growth rings, when the tree is cut into lengths the circular pattern of these rings is retained, it's important that when breaking we need to position the circular pattern so that they are all shaped in a cup like fashion with you breaking "into the cup". Look that the edges of the boards to confirm the pattern direction, the ends of the rings need to be facing towards you.



Correct



incorrect(middle board wrong)

Wood can be unpredictable in terms of its strength depending on how dry it is, where it has been grown, whether there are imperfections such as knots, cracks or warping.

New Zealand Pine is the softest in the world due to the speed in which our trees reach maturity for harvest (25years) making the distance between growth rings greater than other countries like Canada (50years) and the United Kingdom (75years). The closer the rings are the greater the density of the wood resulting in a harder break. NZ Team members who attended the Russian and Italian World Champs certainly experienced very “firm” boards.

For the true breaker nothing beats the romance of breaking wood.

Fuji Mae Re-breakable boards

These boards are made from injection moulded plastic with a laser cut through the centre, the width of the cut denotes the strength of the board, white is equivalent to a single pine board with a reasonable gap to allow less pressure to “pop” the boards apart. Red is 1.75-2 pine boards and Black 2.5-3boards. The more boards to place together the harder the break, i.e. three white boards to harder to break than a single black.

When breaking more than one of these make special note that the boards are lined up correctly, unlike wood they will only break in one place. But like wood there they are also directional so again look to the edge of the board and ensure the cut is either facing up or down for all of the boards.

This type of board has now replaced wood at International level as it provides predictable performance allowing every competitor to have the same break every time making for a fair competition.

These will sting like hell if hit wrong and are quick to punish those that aren't completely committed.



Correct



Incorrect(middle board facing wrong direction)

Peg-Boards

These have lost favour over the years as they provide a completely different break to both the wood and Re-breakable boards, the gap between them when placed in a stack is too great, they bend substantially before they break and after a while the teeth break off creating a weaker board. Unlike Wood and injection moulded plastic you can push your way through a board with no speed at all. A good board for the beginner and kids as they don't hurt the attacking tool at all except maybe a bit of skin off the knuckles.



Big Gap Between Boards



Big Bend before they break

Preparation – Conditioning (Dallyon)

Conditioning is a vital part of power breaking, without strong tools we run the risk of injury which can mean a halt of our training for a long period of time. Injuries will occur with any contact sport but we can reduce the likelihood by ensuring that we are well prepared for breaking.

There are two types of conditioning

1) Physical

2) Mental

Both are no good without the other.

Physical

Depending on the break we are wanting to achieve will depend on the nature of the conditioning that we perform to strengthen our attacking tool. It's a fine line between damaging yourself and achieving a positive result hence the need to start off slowly and gradually work your way up.

The idea of conditioning is to toughen the attacking tool area by striking soft then gradually harder and courser targets to cause abrasion to the skin, damaging it to be replaced with a harder surface, when healed the process starts all over again. The body recognises stress to a particular area and acts to build up and strengthen that area.

Basic conditioning exercises;

Fore-fist Punch – knuckle press ups on progressively harder surfaces, grass, sand, wood, concrete. Punching progressively harder surfaces increasing the force exerted over time use sand, wood, rope conditioning post, concrete



Knife Hand - striking door jams, press ups on the knifehand, hitting opposing hands together.

Turning Kick – kneeling and tucking the toes under to expose the ball of the foot, sitting and stretching, reaching towards the toes and pulling them back this stretches both the calf and trains the toes back. Striking the ball of the foot against the floor or wall and going bare foot.

Use a soft TKD shoes for practice when performing the break to take the sting out the blow and to offer a little protection.

Side Kick – training the ankle over so that foot sword is exposed, striking against a hard flat surface and going barefoot to toughen the skin.

Mental

This is probably the most under utilized tool in power breaking yet the most powerful. One must *believe* that they can achieve the break before they step up to the mark and make the attempt.

There is NO room in breaking for uncertainty, self doubt or weakness, the confident, assertive, aggressive breaker will always be rewarded with a successful break if their technique is correct.

Start your preparation by visualising you successfully achieving the break, do this driving to work going for a run or in the bath, the smallest Do-Jang we have is in our minds.

If you are afraid that you will hurt yourself then it's very likely you will, if you say you can't then you won't.

Your Power breaking starts weeks or months before your event, prepare yourself mentally. Half and hour prior you should be able to feel the power begin to well up inside you like a volcano about to erupt. Everyone has their own techniques for preparing for the last few minutes prior to the break, some close their eyes and go through their breaks a few more times, others watch the others ahead of them to get their anticipation flowing, this is something that is personal to each student and what works for some may not work for others. At this point I'm eager but completely relaxed, first break – *fore fist punch*, I step up to the mark do the heights, line ups etc, still completely relaxed, guarding block, then from that point all my focus is on the boards, I hear nothing and see nothing, I load power by breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth once, then a second time more deeply this time pushing the breath out of my pursed lips till there is nothing left feeling the power/*Chi* build up in the my lower belly. Then the moment is right to go. I'm mentally 100% going to achieve this break.

The Technique

Ok so we are now conditioned physically and mentally we know about the boards we are going to break all we need to do know is perform the break.

For each break there are many small things to be considered that go into the basket of a successful break let's go through four techniques;

Fore-fist Punch

Turning Kick

Knifehand

Side Kick

Fore-fist Punch

Always the first technique of the Power Breaking Event and one students often cringe at.

Reason why ? In Martial Arts we use soft on hard and hard on soft i.e. we use a hard tool to attack a soft area eg. fist to abdominals, or a soft tool to attack a hard target eg. Palm to the Point of Chin.

Unfortunately with this break we are putting two things hard together with something having to give at the end, if done correctly it will be the boards that break.

1) Bow to the head official.

2) Step up to the boards and indicate the height you wish the board holder to be at – DON'T TOUCH THE BOARDS! In some tournaments such as the World Champs this can disqualify you immediately. The middle of the board should be in at your shoulder height and on your shoulder line.

3) Measure the correct distance, remember you aren't aiming to hit the board but actually go *through* it. The correct distance is a *nearly* fully extended arm length away with shoulders square.

4) Target – Wood boards are slightly different to the re-breakable type in that if we aim slightly off centre (left to right), the force when we connect has less distance to travel to the edge of the board to create a crack/split which will move though the complete length of the board resulting in a break. This principle can be seen when splitting logs for firewood, if you have a big diameter log you won't split it by going for the middle, but by working your way around the outside of the log where there is less distance for the split to travel you can easily take chunks from the log.

So we measure exactly in the middle of the board (top to bottom) where the wood is most likely to break but once in the middle move slightly to the right if left handed or to the left if right handed Re-breakable boards are different in that you MUST hit them fair and square in the middle to make them 'pop' so accuracy is paramount.

Remember your attacking tool is your two knuckles with focus of your power coming from the crook between the two.

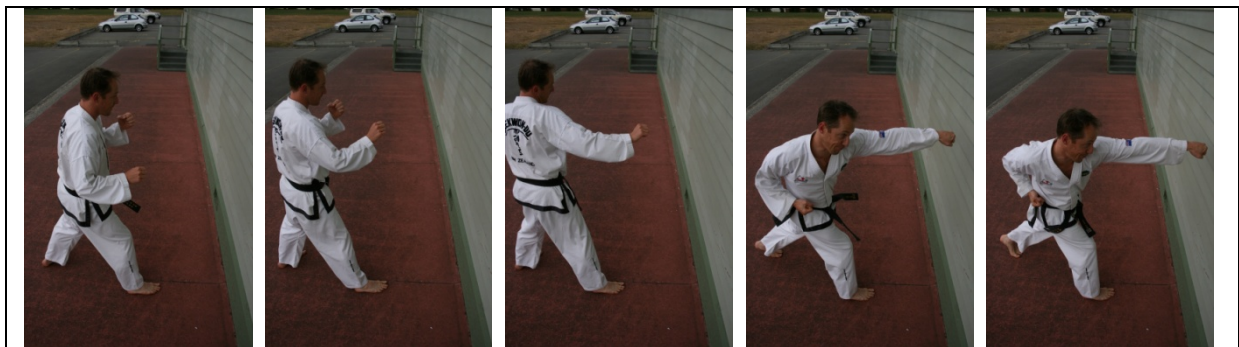
5) Stance – always a reverse punch, right walking stance if left handed or left walking stance if right handed

6) Forearm Guarding block

7) Breathing , load power by breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth once ,then a second time more deeply this time pushing the breath out of my pursed lips till there is nothing left feeling the power/*Chi* build up in the your lower belly.

8) Technique: extend the opposite hand towards the boards and draw your semi clenched hand back like an archer would draw back the string of a bow, fist is on a 45 degree angle whilst breathing in, eyes completely focused on the boards. When drawing your fist back you body weight transfers onto your back leg in a rocking motion this is the important backward motion which is one of the training secrets of TaeKwon-Do this valuable movement mobilizes your body mass , then in a forward motion at the same time as your punching fist accelerates from your shoulder past your head to the target twisting and clenching firmly just before hitting the boards, your two big knuckles completely in line with your wrist, forearm and shoulder, the opposite hand moves back to the waist for reaction force and you over extend your punch so that far from being square shouldered like in patterns your hyper extend so that your fist goes through the boards with your opposite shoulder of your reaction force hands now in line with your attacking tool as you would with a side punch bringing your hips into play, the back heel comes off the ground.

At the moment of contact you must emit a loud **KIHAP!** This realises the energy from your body at precisely the right moment and steels your body for the impact.



DO NOT '*kihap*' before you do the technique to get confirmation that the board holders are ready this is a pointless activity that diverts your focus and releases your energy before the break and will only have a negative impact.

9) Punch is complete, perform forearm guarding block and bow to Head Official.

Turning Kick

Students tend to be a little squeamish with this kick due to the potential to cause nasty injuries to the toes when they aren't pulled back properly to expose the ball of the foot.

It's a smashing kick and must be delivered with speed and the flicking out of the lower leg using the knee as the pivot.

1) Bow to Head Official

2) Line up the boards they should be at your belt height, no higher otherwise you will be kicking upwards, this is the centre of your balance and where your core strength is held.

3) Stand off on a 45degree angle from the boards

4) Measure up so that your foot isn't completely extended but ball of foot rests just off the middle of the boards.

5) Guarding Block

6) Breathing , load power by breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth once ,then a second time more deeply this time pushing the breath out of my pursed lips till there is nothing left feeling the power/*Chi* build up in the your lower belly.

7) Technique; rock forward slightly then backward drawing your body mass and getting your big muscles moving, lifting the heel on the front foot as you rotate the top half of your body away from the boards, breathing in, then transferring your weight back onto your front leg and moving forwards twisting the top half of your body followed by the hips, driving them forwards slightly in front of the leg to create tork. It's important that in all these techniques that we mobilize the big muscles first leading down to the smaller muscles. Turn the hips over, your foot on the ground turns at the same time, the knee is high and more advanced than the foot at this stage. The end result sees the foot extend past the knee and completing the break as you emit a loud **kihapi!!**



Note how the foot has gained all that momentum by rocking the body, twisting it and getting all that velocity moving from the hips to thighs, knees to the attacking tool just like cracking a whip. This is the same way we execute a W-Shape Block our body dynamic is like a coiled spring.
8) Forearm Guarding Block then bow to Head Official.

Side Kick

By far the most powerful technique with the most amount of boards stacked up against us, the dynamic of the kick allows us to put our full mass behind our kick moving in a straight line.

- 1) Bow to Head Official
- 2) Again measure up the middle of the boards with your belt
- 3) Line up your foot sword, control is very important, if you can't balance whilst holding up one leg then you aren't ready for this technique, with the knee bent on a 25 degree angle so that when fully extended it will finish behind the boards. The foot sword is below the knee with the knee held high so that the thigh is parallel with the floor.

4) Step away from the boards crossing the attacking tool in front of the other and past it by a foot length, like an x-stance, then take your other foot and move it to form a sitting stance but only one shoulder width wide.

5) You are now standing side on directly in front of the boards focused on them, hands and legs bent.

With this technique there is no sine wave, the body needs to move flat and fast, by adding sine wave our head bobs up and down we and loose our focus as well as speed getting to our target.

6) Guarding Block

7) Technique; Sway back onto your rear leg with 90% of your weight leaving just your toes on the ground of your advanced foot, move forward toward the boards crossing the rear foot behind the front (opposite of what you just did) however your heel is now facing directly at the boards (toes pointing away from boards) this aligns your hips so that everything will move in a straight line towards the target. Your eyes remain fixed on the target, hips are now facing in a 45degree angle away from the boards but are straightened out at the moment of impact, this allows for the hip twist, knee is lifted high and driving forwards at great speed towards the target concentrating all your power through the narrow foot sword into the middle of the board. Emitting a loud **KIHAPI!!**



From the time you start to advance you need to move swiftly particular for the smaller breakers(less than 85kg) who have to rely on speed instead of mass.

Knife Hand Side Strike The Knife Hand extends from the base of little finger to the top of the wrist; this is the only area that must contact the boards, the power of this technique comes from the velocity that you can swing your arm towards the target.

1) Bow to Head Official.

2) Stand to the side of the boards with your knife hand extended in to the middle of the board if a re-breakable board or if wood so that the middle knuckle of your little finger is in the middle of the board meaning your knife hand is covering the first 1/3 of the board. (See Punch for position rational)

Your heels should be in line with the front of the boards so that your forearm doesn't contact the edge of the board first giving that deep bruise that is so well known. The hand should the same

height if not very slightly lower than the shoulder and parallel to the crack in the boards. Reaction force hand is resting on your hip.

3) Guarding Block

4) Breathing , load power by breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth once ,then a second time more deeply this time pushing the breath out of my pursed lips till there is nothing left feeling the power/*Chi* build up in the your lower belly.

5) Focus on the boards and block out everything else

6) Technique; Sway your body weight onto your back foot drawing your knife hand all the way back so that your bent elbow is in line with the centre of your face but still at shoulder height, crossing at the shoulder line of the opposite hand, hips rotate facing 45degrees in the opposite direction and front foot has only the toes touching the ground, this is done at half speed. Breathing in at same time.

Eyes fixed on target, hands, feet and breath are then released in one explosive moment with the loud **KIHAP!!** And tightening of the attacking tool just before impact. The hand passes through board break complete.

7) Guarding Block and bow to head Official

In Summary

Develop your speed as it's the biggest contributing factor to power.

Always aim to completely destroy the target.

Repetition is the key to OWNING each technique.

Through reading and studying how the body moves dynamically it's possible for the body can be trained to naturally flow from start to finish resulting in a successful break.

Never make a half attempt in breaking it always badly.

In the amusing words of Mr.Graham Patterson 5th Dan during a TV interview after being crown Grand World Champion at the Polish World Champs 2003, "I guess there's a Mongrel in all of us". And that is exactly what you need to find within **YOU** to be a Champion Power Breaker.