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JOURNAL ARTICLES

Kicking

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Anyone who watches modern mixed martial arts is bound to have a love for kicks. A well executed kick catches an opponent off guard and can be debilitating. Kicking is powerful and effective, whether as a series of low kicks to the leg that slowly chop down the opponent or as one swift kick to the head that ends the fight.

While most people are familiar with traditional boxing, the popularity of mixed martial arts over the past couple of years has brought more attention and interest in kickboxing and other similar arts as well. The fourth and

final installment of this series on boxing and kickboxing techniques focuses on two different types of kick—the push kick and the roundhouse kick.

Once again, as I describe the techniques, Bridgett “Baby Doll” Riley demonstrates proper form in the photographs. Bridgett is a former world champion boxer and a five-time world champion kickboxer. She trains and works at the world-famous Wild Card Boxing Gym in Hollywood, California, and also works as a stuntwoman and actress.

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Push kick

The push kick is known by many names, depending on the discipline being studied. It can be called a front kick, a tip kick, or a jab. Like a jab with the hands (see [CFJ issue 54](#)), the push kick can be used as a measuring stick to gauge the space between you and your opponent. The primary intention of the push kick is to keep the opponent away. You can “jab” a greater distance with your foot than you can with your arm, which lets you keep your opponent farther away.

In the process of preventing an opponent from moving in, the push kick is also a great distraction tool. A push kick used repeatedly and successfully will frustrate an opponent. It can cause them to stop and think about how they are going to avoid the kick. This may give you the needed time to mount your offense and, at the very least, can prevent them from mounting theirs.

Before beginning the kick, you must first assume your fighter’s stance (see [CFJ issue 54](#)). To execute a push kick with your left leg, lift your left knee up high and then extend your leg straight out. Fully extend and strike your opponent with the ball of your left foot. Some schools teach to strike with the ball of the foot, some to strike with the heel. Neither is wrong and both can be useful. Striking closer to the toe, however, will provide you with a little more reach.

To add power to the strike, thrust your hips forward while leaning back slightly. Think about pushing hard on the ground with your right foot and generating forward energy with the hips. Like punches, and so many functional athletic movements, the power for kicks comes from the hips.

A great place to aim your kick is directly into the opponent’s stomach. Fighters learn to be good at blocking their faces and their ribs but will sometimes leave a hole in the center of the body where you can strike straight in with your push kick. If the opponent’s chest is open, you can also land powerful strikes that can knock an opponent off balance by hitting directly to the chest.

Also, note that Bridgett continues to protect her own face and body while delivering the push kick to her opponent.

One of Bridgett’s favorite uses for the push kick is as a fake. She will begin as if she is throwing the kick, but then drop the leg quickly and move in on her opponent to deliver strikes with her hands.



Roundhouse kick

The roundhouse kick is one of the most commonly used kicks. You will see it thrown to the legs, body, or head in many fights. Here, we look at how to execute the back-leg roundhouse kick at various levels on the opponent.

Begin in the conventional fighter's stance, with your left foot forward and your right foot behind. Bridgett will be throwing a kick with her back leg, which is her right leg.

An important element of the roundhouse kick to have in mind is the need to keep the hips open. Just as you open your hips vertically through full extension during Olympic lifts, or more horizontally during kipping pull-ups, you can also keep your hips open in the twisting pattern necessary for kicking. This extension of the hips gives you full access to your potential power.

In kicking, the openness of the hips is often lost when a fighter keeps the supporting leg locked to the ground while throwing the kicking leg forward. As the leg arcs into the target, it therefore automatically closes off the hips. To counteract this and deliver a more powerful kick, it is essential that you pivot on the support leg. When throwing a right-leg roundhouse kick, the left foot will turn all the way around on the ground. This maintains the integrity of the open hips and allows the full power of the kick to continue into

the target, rather than be muted by the striker's own body.

The two photographs of Bridgett's feet below were taken from the same point. The first was taken before Bridgett threw her roundhouse kick and the second at the moment of impact. The first photograph shows her feet in her conventional fighter's stance. In the second, her right foot is now airborne and out of range of the camera, while her left has pivoted outward to maintain her open hips.

When throwing the kick, keep your leg slightly bent and aim to strike the opponent with your shin. If you are kicking to the opponent's leg, aim directly for the thigh. Do not throw the kick straight across, but angle your leg downward, continuing the arc of your kick. After a few consecutive strikes to the thigh, they will find it difficult to keep weight on that leg.

When aiming for the body, do the opposite: angle your kick up into the opponent's body. Just as you angle your punches to the body upward (see [CFJ issue 56](#)), angling your kicks up will help you get under your opponent's rib and hit on the correct trajectory to affect their spleen or liver, depending on which side you strike.

When kicking to the head, aim directly for the temple. To set up a head shot, Bridgett will usually throw a



Roundhouse kick (cont'd)

few kicks to the leg and/or body, building up an expectation of those kicks again for her opponent. She then uses that expectation to surprise them with the head kick.

And, as always, Bridgett still maintains her hands up in defensive position, even while executing a high roundhouse kick.



To see good roundhouse kicks in action, check out UFC fighter Mirko Cro-Cop. Cro-Cop has won many fights over his career, both in K-1 (international kickboxing) and in Pride Fighting Championships, utilizing his long legs and powerful roundhouse kicks.

Other infamous roundhouse kicks:

- Chuck Liddell's knockout win over Renato Sobral, UFC 40
- Pete Williams's knockout win over Mark Coleman, UFC 17

[Bridgett Riley](#) is a former world champion boxer and a five-time world champion kickboxer. She trains and works at the world-famous Wild Card Boxing Gym in Hollywood, California, and also works as a stuntwoman and actress. To see Bridgett in action, watch a clip online from her [World Kickboxing Association championship fight](#)

Becca Borawski teaches and trains at [Petranek Fitness/CrossFit Los Angeles](#) in Santa Monica. She has a master's degree in film from the University of Southern California and a background in martial arts training. She has blended these skills together to produce DVDs and build websites for professional fighters. Her main job is as the music editor on the TV show *Scrubs* and she currently trains jiu-jitsu under Eddie Bravo at 10th Planet Jiu-Jitsu in Hollywood.

