

Makiwara and Striking Pads

Makiwara

- History

Makiwara means literally, “rolled straw”, which refers to the traditional practice of wrapping a straw rope around the top of the makiwara post to create a flexible striking surface. It is a traditional karate training tool indigenous to Okinawa.

- Overview

Makiwara is a form of resistance training that provides feedback on striking a physical object instead of air. Correct form, distance and accuracy are essential, with speed and power increasing gradually over months. A main benefit is learning to optimize speed and power entirely through *centrifugal force generated by the hips*. Start off light but always maintain a full range of motion. The makiwara will tell you in no uncertain terms if you are using it correctly!

- Purpose

Makiwara training conditions the bones – primarily in the hands and forearms – as well as the skin (to develop calluses) and peripheral muscles (knife hand, palm heel, etc.). It is practiced in conjunction with knuckle pushups and three-point arm training. Hanshi notes: "Internal strengths are also developed from this practice of body conditioning." Master Nagamine states: “Unless the parts of the body used for atemi [striking with concentrated destructive power] are thoroughly toughened, the force of the atemi will not be powerful enough to produce a lethal blow.”

- Scientific Underpinning

Wolff’s Law states that a healthy bone will adapt to the loads under which it is placed. If the loading on a particular bone increases, the bone will remodel itself over time to become stronger and perhaps even thicker as a result. The inverse is true as well: like muscles, bone strength will deteriorate over a lifetime if not properly maintained.

- Getting Started!

Ask a black belt to introduce you to makiwara training for the first time. Make sure you’re warmed up. Bow to the makiwara before and after each practice. Start light and slowly build up speed and power - avoid injury! Stick to basic Shorin-Ryu techniques. Maintain proper form before, during and after each strike; arm slightly bent on impact (not straight) and strike through the pad. Develop eye-hand coordination by hitting different parts of the pad, *not* the same spot each time. Do not distort the body and do not let the technique bounce backwards (unless practicing back fist or front snap kick). Observe how the body absorbs the force of the strike, then release it. Shake out or massage the hands after use to restore circulation.

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- Moving Forward

In *Building Warrior Spirit*, Hanshi states that 30 repetitions of each hand, foot, or elbow are sufficient several times a week. Start each session with 10 light strikes (right side, then left) as a preliminary warmup, followed by 10 medium power strikes (each side) and ending with 2 to 10 all-out full power strikes, loud kiai final count. Work on your “go-to” techniques as well as those that are giving you trouble in kata. Research the many striking surfaces described in *The Essence of Okinawan Karate-Do* and “study the use of makiwara from every possible angle” (pg. 29). Observe how senior students utilize the makiwara and ask for assistance in exploring its uses. Advanced training includes adding a step or turn from a move in kata.

- Safety!

- “The trainee should be very careful not to give into the youthful enthusiasm to strike the [makiwara] board either without plan or with too much strength. Overtraining can not only injure the knuckles, sometimes permanently, but it may occasionally be the cause of diseases of the internal organs.” – Master Gichin Funakoshi
- Children are NOT to use the makiwara since it may damage developing bone growth plates or tendons.
- In the Midtown Dojo students wait until they have started Fukyugata Ni before beginning makiwara training.

- Additional Considerations

Makiwara is a long-term investment; it can't be rushed. It is essential when preparing for a break at a test or demonstration. Above all, kata is the top priority in traditional karate training! Makiwara (and striking pads) are meant to *supplement* the core kata practice.

Striking Pads and Heavy Bag

- Getting Started!

As with the makiwara, ask a black belt for assistance. Start light and build up speed and power. Use sound and physical sensation for feedback on solid vs. glancing contact with the target. *Penetrate* the bag. Pad/bag training is not a part of the traditional karate curriculum.

- Speed and Power

Smaller striking pads are typically used to develop speed and accuracy, while heavier bags create an opportunity to test foundation and raw power. As this equipment is more forgiving than the makiwara, students may use it to try new striking methods with reduced risk of injury. The greatest risks of using padded equipment is developing false confidence and mimicking non-Shorin-Ryu techniques.

- Partner Exercise

Proper placement and stabilization of a pad or bag is crucial, and your training partner will only acquire this skill through proper supervision and practice. Start off light and communicate! Alternate between holding and hitting the bag. Never kick a moving heavy bag. Children should avoid heavy bags altogether and only work lightly with pads under strict supervision.