
HAPKIDO

AGAINST THE ROUNDHOUSE

A GUIDE TO COUNTERING ONE OF THE **MOST COMMON KICKS**
IN THE MARTIAL ARTS

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THE PREMISE:

The roundhouse kick is one of the pillars of the martial arts. New students generally learn to execute it within their first month of lessons. “Everyone who knows martial arts and even many who have never trained can do it because it’s so natural and instinctive,” says Han Woong Kim, a sixth-degree black belt in Jang Mu Won *hapkido*, the version of the Korean art that was founded by his father, *Black Belt Hall of Famer Chong S. Kim*. “Because it’s so common, it’s a very important kick to know how to defend against, whether you’re training for tournaments or self-defense.”

THE CHALLENGE:

The hallmark of the roundhouse kick is versatility. Don’t believe it? Name another kick that can function at long range (by striking with the instep or the ball of the foot), at medium range (by striking with the lower shin) and at close range (by striking with the upper shin). That’s great for offense, but it makes defense difficult.

“Because it works at so many different ranges, your defense has to match the distance between you and your opponent,” Kim says. “In Jang Mu Won hapkido, we teach a different defense for long range, medium range and close range, and we have an option for very close range—so close the kick might not even work properly. But just because the kicker is so close he can’t generate a lot of power—as in the last case—you shouldn’t ignore it because it can become a knee strike. You can still use his energy and position against him.”

THE LONG-RANGE SOLUTION:

Your opponent launches his kick. Chances are it will target your upper body or head. You move or lean backward to avoid the impact, then watch the foot sail past you. “Just let his energy go right by,” Kim says. “You can help it along by using your lead hand to push his leg a little. The strategy is to take his energy and use it to off-balance him.”

Having missed his target, the attacker will eventually put his foot back on the ground, probably after it’s swung past your body. That means his back will be turned slightly toward you. “Now you move forward to close the gap and



The opponent kicks, and Han Woong Kim shifts his upper body backward slightly before using his right hand to make sure the foot continues its motion (1-3). When the opponent recovers, his back is toward Kim (4). The hapkido master closes the distance and positions his feet and right arm for the sweep (5). Kim maintains control as the man falls (6), then attempts an armbar (7). The opponent sits up to escape, causing Kim to help him up and turn him around (8). He drops his weight on the man’s shoulder and has the option of holding him there or breaking the arm (9). Reverse view of the final position (10).

1.



2.



6.



9.



LONG RANGE



sweep his right leg with your right leg,” Kim says. “At the same time, use your right arm to push against his right shoulder to ‘help’ him down.”

Of course the fall might incapacitate the assailant, but you shouldn’t count on that. Therefore, Kim recommends following the attacker down so you can control him. The natural follow-up is to maneuver his arm, which you’ve probably been holding since the sweep, into an armbar using your knee as the fulcrum.

“If he just lies there, you can break the arm,” Kim says. “If he raises his upper body to escape when you apply pressure on his elbow, that’s when you can ‘help’ him up by lifting his shoulder and then turn him around and put him on the ground facedown. Drop your right knee on his shoulder while using your arms to lift the trapped arm to control him or break it.”

THE MEDIUM-RANGE SOLUTION:

The attacker initiates the roundhouse kick from slightly closer—maybe he’s planning to make contact with his shin. “You don’t want to move away from the attack because if you don’t retreat enough, he can still hit you with his foot,” Kim says. “Instead, you should move into the attack, which means you’ll be dealing defensively with the knee area of his kicking leg. When you move forward, make sure it’s at a 45-degree angle to the inside of the kick.”

Once you’re at the inside position, block the kick at the knee using your forearm, which is held vertical. Immediately afterward, underhook his lower leg with your other arm. Then clasp the fingers of your underhooking arm onto your other wrist. “Step backward at a 45-degree angle with your right foot and press down with your right arm while lifting with your left—it should be almost a twisting motion,” Kim says. “He’ll fall face-first, and his kicking leg will be under your control.”

Use your arms to pull his lower leg close to your chest and your shoulder to push against his foot, thus hyperextending the ankle. “There’s also a pressure point on his Achilles tendon that you can use in this defense,” Kim says. “Press against it with the bone of your forearm for extra pain.”



Han Woong Kim (left) and the assailant begin from slightly closer positions (1). The assailant starts his roundhouse kick, and Kim advances at a 45-degree angle, blocks the knee with his right forearm (2) and underhooks the leg with his left arm (3). Kim wraps the fingers of his left hand over his right wrist (4), then steps backward at 45 degrees and pulls as he pushes down with his right arm and up with his left (5-6). The hapkido stylist secures his hold on the man’s lower leg (7) and uses his shoulder to apply pressure on the foot (8).



MEDIUM RANGE



CLOSE RANGE



As soon as the opponent kicks, Han Woong Kim darts forward at a 45-degree angle and uses his right forearm to block the man's thigh (1-2). Next, he circles under the limb with his left arm and grabs the knee of the opponent's support leg with his right hand (3). To break his balance, Kim rises (4). Unable to restore his balance, the opponent is lifted into the air and dropped face-first (5). The last thing he sees is Kim's ax kick to the head (6-7).

THE CLOSE-RANGE SOLUTION:

Whether intentionally or unintentionally, the assailant starts the kick from close range. “You want to get even closer to him by moving forward at a 45-degree angle,” Kim says. “Use your right forearm to block his thigh as your left arm circles under his leg. When the kick fails, his leg will drop onto your underhooking arm or your shoulder—it doesn’t matter which one. What matters is that you lower your body in front of his torso. Grab the knee of his support leg with your right arm and stand up to break his balance. He can’t jump away because you’re stopping his support leg from moving backward.”

As you stand, be prepared to lift with your left arm—especially if he’s tall. “Keep lifting until you throw him to the ground,” Kim says. “Then move in and finish with an ax kick or a punch to the head.”

Warning: “In practice, be very careful if your partner doesn’t know how to fall,” Kim advises. “If that’s the case, he may end up falling straight into the ground face-first. He can knock himself unconscious or even break his neck.”

THE BAD-BREATH-RANGE SOLUTION:

In a conflict, you might find yourself facing a roundhouse kick at such close range because your opponent miscalculated or because you moved in too close while trying to execute one of the aforementioned defenses. Either way, Kim says, you should focus your energy and attention on his thigh. “The kick might become a knee strike because you’re so close to him, so it’s better if you don’t even think about the lower leg,” he says.

To start the defense, move forward at a 45-degree angle and intercept his incoming leg with your right forearm or elbow, Kim says. “Your block should make contact with his upper thigh. Before he puts down his foot, grab his knee area with your left hand and move your right elbow to hit him in the chest.” If positioned correctly, your forearm will momentarily keep him from using his right arm to punch.

“Immediately use your right leg to sweep his left leg as you push with your left arm,” Kim says. “He’ll fall to the ground, where you can finish him with a shin kick to the groin or an open-hand strike to the neck.” ✂



Han Woong Kim (left) and Cornell Taylor face each other (1). The opponent kicks, and Kim closes the distance by moving forward at a 45-degree angle, after which he blocks with his right forearm (2). Although he’s stopped the attack, Kim is too close to use his preferred roundhouse defense, so he transitions to his backup plan. Before the opponent can place his foot on the floor, Kim grabs his leg with his left hand and elbows him in the chest (3). He then threads his right leg around the opponent’s left leg to effect the sweep (4), which is facilitated by a push with his right arm (5). Once the attacker is down, Kim finishes him with a kick to the groin (6-7).

1.



5.



BAD-BREATH RANGE

2.



3.



4.



6.



7.



HKD ON DVD

Practitioners of Jang Mu Won *hapkido* know it's one of the most comprehensive self-defense arts on the planet. They also know that many martial artists outside Southern California have never heard of it. To help spread the wealth a bit, Han Woong Kim and his late father, Jang Mu Won founder Chong S. Kim, created a set of 20 instructional DVDs. For more information, visit jangmuwonhapkido.com.