

Circle Stabbing

For Fast Improvement

by
Keith Pascal



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If expert counseling of any kind, including legal, is required, the services of competent professional people should be sought for each specific area in question.

And you should do a lot of your own research too.

Remember, in the eyes of the law, it's often hard to determine who is the victim and who is the aggressor.

By responding to an attack with a cut of your own, you could be moving out of the realm of *self defense*.

Readers are urged not to engage in any sort of illegal fighting activity.

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Introduction

Martial arts is a lot of hard work, but it can be a lot of fun too. I consider it a bonus, when you find an exercise, drill, or game that is both fun and helps you to make some incredible improvements.

Do you find it difficult making sizable improvements?

Are you at the point where the Law of Diminishing Returns has started asserting itself? The better I get, the harder it is to see noticeable improvements at each session. I have to work a lot harder to see any sort of result.

Are you at this point?

Whether you are a beginner or a seasoned martial artist, this exercise is both fun and it will help you develop some quick and accurate responses to knife attacks.

Roots of The Exercise

In 2002, I wrote an article for the martial arts newsletter, **Martial Arts Mastery: A Tell-All of Tips, Tactics, and Techniques**.

The article, *A Martial Arts Exercise: More Fun Than A Video Game*, described a method for improving reaction time with your punches and other hand strikes. It appeared in Issue #84. Within a week, my e-mail box was flooded (OK, I received more than two dozen letters) with positive responses concerning the article.

The original game employed focus gloves — mitts that you wear on the hand as targets. Your partner punches at them, as you move them around.

What follows is an adaptation of the exercise, with a few variations, for knife fighting.

(My students commented that modifying this exercise for knife practice was one of my better creative efforts.)

Not only are you about to learn three or four variations on a great exercise for ‘target practice,’ but in this article, you’ll read about the development of the exercise to its final, arcade-like stage.

I hope you have the opportunity, and the available bodies to try them.

Static Circle Stabbing

Originally, my wife picked up six new focus mitts for our students to use. We had always had a few lying around, but not enough for everyone to use at the same time. So, she bought more.

Our old gloves resembled a baseball catcher's mitt, minus the indentation in the center, to better catch the ball.

The focus gloves she bought had big cores of vinyl-covered foam, with elastic and vinyl loops in the back for your hand and fingers.

It might not be a bad idea sometime to practice slashing a moving focus glove with a practice knife, but for this game, you will slice for hands holding practice knives.

After you are finished doing some standard knife drills, gather as a group for Circle Stabs. If you have a big martial arts class, break into groups of five or six people per group.

Each of the five or six students wears eye protection. They each wield a practice knife. One stands in the center and the rest form a circle around the *victim*.

Each attacker around the perimeter holds his or her knife slightly forward ready to attack.

For about 30 seconds, the defender in the center lets loose. If you are the defender, slash at every target as fast as possible. The others just stand there, with the knives held firmly, unmoving.

When my wife, Kate, and I learned this exercise with empty hands and focus gloves at the **Third Annual Bruce Lee Memorial Seminar**, we immediately thought of adding target movement to spice things up. At random, we had the students move the mitts to new positions.

Each person gets a turn in the center of the circle. At this point, it's not a big deal. The knives aren't moving. The center defender just slices for any wrist holding a knife.

The First Variation After each person has 'done time' in the center, change the game. As soon as a perimeter knife holders feel the slash against the wrist, they immediately change the position of the blade.

For example, if I were holding the blade for a stomach-level attack in the beginning, the second I felt the defender's blade slice my wrist, hand, or arm, I might change my knife to high, wide attack position.

After another slice, my position might then change to a throat stab along the center line.

Each time, I position my knife for the next attack, but I don't actually move.

There are three reasons for not moving:

1. It makes it an easier exercise for the person in the middle.
2. It teaches the person in the middle to look for specific targets and precisely slash.
3. This exercise trains the person in the middle to attack the 'early positions.' The defender actually slashes before the blade is fully extended. You can learn to catch the stabs at the beginning of the motion — if you have the proper range.

Another Variation

Now, the attacker positioned immediately behind the person in the center is allowed to slowly move his or her practice knife in towards the center. Call it a super slow stab to the back of the neck.

Emphasis on super slow. The stabber could still hurt with a poke to the back of the head. Be careful. You are training a response, not trying to score on someone who isn't looking.

The minute the center person slices that one moving target (knife stab from behind), the the aggressor has to retract the knife hand.

The other people on the circle still hold static knives. The center person strikes at all of them. But anytime he or she has a back to a knife, that knife can slowly head in on a straight line for the back of the neck.

Only one person at a time moves a knife, from behind. All the other knives remain frozen.

The center defender continuously slashes and thrusts. Static target, moving target — slice!

Always be aware of the target moving in behind you.

Do you see where this is going? Can you imagine the next variation?

The Final Variation

Put someone in the center. Give him or her one round of slicing static wrists. I know it's boring to hold the knives in one place, but this is just the warm-up.

After the round, allow the person in the center to catch his or her breath.

Then have this defender do another round in the center.

This time, each perimeter attacker moves the knife in very slowly toward the "victim's" head.

This is where it feels like a video game ...

To gain time, slice each hand.

They are coming at the center from all directions.

Once you slice the knife-wielding hand, the person holding the knife, pulls it back to the perimeter of the circle — and then starts advancing it inward again.

It's never ending.

You gain time by quickly slicing each and every advancing hand.

Obviously, go for the targets about to reach you first.

Make sure the students move the targets in slowly — you'll see why after you try it a few times.

It's a great activity. Do you see all of the benefits?

You can still make this exercise work with as little as three participants total. Put one in the front, with two knives, and one to the rear with two knives.

The third person defends from the center. You can easily make a circle around the center person with four knives. Try it.

Creative Extras

After each person gains proficiency in the circle, it's time to vary the thrusts from the perimeter of the circle.

Instead of only stabbing on a straight line for the back of the neck, change the level and the angle of the attacks.

All the knives move in very slowly, but not all are at head level. Each time the center person slices a knife hand, it resets that hand back to the outside of the circle.

Are you ready for an advanced variation?

Have the center defender slice the empty hand. The attackers still attack with the knife hands — but now, the defender slices the empty hand, in order to *push the reset button*.

You could also call either hand fair game for a slice. The center defender slices anything to cause a knife to withdraw.

Good luck inventing your own variations.

Have you ever thought about stabbing kicking legs in a circle?

What about holding knives in both hands? — Attackers only.

End Note

Remember, this drill feels like a game, but you don't have a winner or a loser. You are helping the person in the center to improve. You aren't out to 'get' the defender. You move in slowly.

Only speed up the advances, when the center person can handle them.

Wear eye protection, use practice knives, be careful, and stay safe,

Keith Pascal

Contact Information:

Do you need to contact the author?

Write to him c/o Kerwin Benson Publishing:

authors@kerwinbenson.com

Kerwin Benson Publishing
Attn: Keith Pascal
2749 Friendly St, Suite 333
Eugene, OR 97405

You may email him directly:

pascal@punchharder.com

Do you need to contact the publishers?

Write to either Jim Kerwin or Alice Benson:

**Kerwin Benson Publishing
2749 Friendly St, Suite 333
Eugene, OR 97405**