

CUTTING EDGE CONDITIONING : SHADOW KICKBOXING

By Chris Kent

What would you do if:

- a) There were no training partners available for you to work out with?
- b) You didn't have access to any type of training equipment to use?
- c) Your training time was limited to 10 minutes per day?

I know what I'd do. I'd spend those ten minutes shadow kickboxing. Shadow boxing (or kickboxing) is one of the best training exercises you can use to develop such things as ease of movement, good form, and economy of motion. It can also help develop your cardiovascular capacity, increase your speed and agility, give you ideas and help your mind and body fix moves ready for use when they are most wanted. It also helps you loosen up before engaging in more strenuous activity.

Other than actual sparring, shadow boxing is probably the most important technique in the acquisition of a martial artist's fighting skills. But the best thing about shadow boxing or shadow kickboxing is that you don't need training partners or any type of equipment in order to be able to do it. You don't even need a lot of space in which to do it. The only thing you really need is your imagination.

The options available for you to use when shadow boxing are endless. For example, you could work on your footwork, your punching and striking skills, your kicking skills, your kneeing or elbowing skills, even your trapping or grappling skills. You can train your attacking, counterattacking, or defensive skills, choosing to either isolate and concentrate on one particular facet, or combining all of them. You can shadowbox long-range motions or work in-tight, close-quarter motions. You can concentrate on single actions, or work compound actions. You can fight against multiple opponents. You can even get suddenly overwhelmed by an opponent, and have to evade, cover up or defend yourself against the opponent's barrage of blows.

An important thing to remember about shadow boxing is that it is as much mental as physical. You literally use your mind to create the most dangerous opponents, then you go out and fight him and beat him. This requires that you use your imagination and your visualization skills to the utmost. For example, how does the opponent react to your attacks and counters? Does he retreat and cover up, or try to evade while continually advancing on you? You must see his reactions as clearly as if a real opponent were in front of you.

Most beginners have difficulty visualizing for extended periods of time, so when you first start shadow boxing I suggest to begin with shorter periods of work (30 seconds to 1 minute) and gradually increase the time. It's also very important to rest adequately between rounds. Also, if you need to, you can use something static to function as your

imaginary opponent and serve as a focus point for yourself. This could be anything you like, a chair, a heavy bag, even a simple piece of hanging string will do. Another training method is to list particular things you want to shadowbox on a sheet of paper and stick it on the wall so you can see it while you're working out. Be sure the writing is large enough so you don't have to keep stopping to go over and look at it.

Many people like to use a mirror when shadow boxing, and that's fine. However, this has both advantages and disadvantages. Mirrors can be a definite aid when you want to refine very specific actions or correct flaws in your movements, as they give you immediate feedback. The downside to using mirrors is that sometimes a person can get so caught up in watching how good they look that they forget what they're really there for.

You can combine different types of music with your shadowboxing workout, too. I personally like upbeat jazz and rock music, preferably without any lyrics because I find them distracting. For you it might be hip-hop, rap, or something else. The following are two examples of Bruce Lee's notes on shadowboxing. The first describes how three rounds of shadow boxing can build upon each other in a workout.

EXAMPLE 1

- Rd. 1 Loosen up, work on good economical form, all types.
- Rd. 2 Work harder (speed and more speed)
- Rd. 3 Push yourself (the fastest, but economical)

The second describes how any particular round of shadow boxing can be broken down.

EXAMPLE 2

Round ()

- a) loosen up
- b) fast
- c) thoroughbred

Round ()

- a) loosen up
- b) thoroughbred
- c) unwind

(continued)

Finally, here are some training aids concerning using shadow boxing in your workout:

- Learn to use your imagination and visualization skills to the utmost.
- Begin with shorter periods of time (30 seconds to one minute) and gradually increase the time.
- Start shadow boxing easy and gradually increase speed and intensity as your muscles warm up.
- Be 'unrhythmic' in your movements – breaking the rhythm, adjusting speed, etc.
- If you're working on a particular fine skill, work on it while you're fresh, not when you're tired.
- Use something static as a focus point if needed.
- Rest adequately between rounds.

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