

Discussion Topic: Sente (先手: initiative, first move, forestalling)

The following is intended as a discussion paper regarding the application of the three types of initiatives (Sen) as physical and psychological fighting strategies, both as a training tool and in application. It is intended for use by those who possess a Curious Mind as opposed to a Critical One.

The content of the following article was obtained via Google Search and AI Generation. Additional research was completed to verify the accuracy of the AI interpretation. While there were some minor differences it appears that those differences were based on individual perceptions which were not consistent with other individual interpretations. In summary, the AI information appears to be a balanced overview.

Understanding the meaning of each:

1. Go No Sen

In Japanese martial arts, **go no sen** (後の先), meaning "post-initiative," is a timing strategy where a defender responds and counterattacks **after** the opponent has already initiated an attack. Instead of blocking and countering simultaneously, the defender waits for the opponent to commit to their move, using the attacker's own energy and momentum to their advantage, creating an opening for a precise counterstrike. This requires patience, timing, and a deep understanding of the opponent's attack.

Here's how go no sen is used in reference to sparring:

1. **Waiting for the opponent's action:** The defender's primary action is to wait until the opponent has begun their offensive movement. This could be the start of a punch, a kick or any other offensive type attack.
2. **Utilizing the attacker's momentum:** Instead of a direct, forceful block, the defender uses the attacker's energy and commitment. This might involve stepping off the line of attack, deflecting the blow, or redirecting the opponent's force.
3. **Seizing the opportunity:** By waiting for the attacker to commit and then reacting, the defender creates a small window of opportunity. The opponent's attack has now committed them, leaving them momentarily vulnerable.
4. **Executing the counterattack:** The defender then uses this opening to deliver a counterattack. This counter is effective because it exploits the opponent's committed movement, making it more efficient.

Example:

Imagine an opponent throwing a punch toward your head. With go no sen, you don't block immediately. Instead, you wait for their punch to begin its forward thrust, then step off the line of attack to avoid the blow, and then, with their momentum carrying them forward, you counter.

Key elements of go no sen:

- **Patience:** A crucial mental state, as it requires the ability to remain calm and wait for the right moment.
- **Timing:** The ability to recognize the precise moment to act after the attack has begun is essential for go no sen.
- **Awareness:** A high level of concentration and awareness to understand the opponent's movements and intentions.
- **Efficiency:** By using the opponent's energy, the defender can end the confrontation more efficiently with less physical exertion.

2. Sen No Sen

In sparring, "Sen no Sen" refers to the strategy of intercepting an opponent's attack by initiating your own technique at the same moment they start their attack, essentially beating them to the punch with a simultaneous, preemptive counter. This timing requires heightened awareness, precise reading of the opponent's intentions, and accurate timing to avoid a gap or delay between the opponent's attack and your response.

Key aspects of Sen no Sen in sparring:

- **Simultaneous Action:** You and your opponent commit to an action at the same time, but your timing and positioning make your attack more effective.
- **Interception:** You don't wait for their attack to land or even fully develop; instead, you meet it as it's beginning.
- **Mental and Physical:** It involves a mental state of seizing the initiative and the physical action of a simultaneous strike or block-and-counter.
- **Timing and Awareness:** Mastery of Sen no Sen requires a high degree of awareness and the ability to read subtle cues from the opponent's movements.

Example in Sparring:

Imagine your opponent begins to move their arm for a strike. In Sen no Sen, instead of waiting for them to launch and then countering (which would be Go no Sen), you would step in and deliver your counter-attack at the exact moment they start their movement. This exploits the momentary opening and committed state of the opponent's attack before it fully develops.

3. Sen Sen No Sen

In martial arts sparring, **Sen Sen no Sen** refers to preemptive striking or attacking during an opponent's "wind-up" or preparatory phase before they fully commit to their attack. It involves perceiving the opponent's intent, or their mental preparation to strike, and initiating your attack or movement to beat them to the punch, essentially seizing the initiative before the action begins. This is the most difficult timing to achieve and requires exceptional perception and mental stillness.

How it works in sparring

- **Perceiving the intention:** The martial artist using Sen Sen no Sen needs to have the mental clarity and heightened awareness to recognize the opponent's intent to attack. This goes beyond seeing the physical movement; it's about understanding their mentality and commitment to strike.
- **Preempting the attack:** At the moment the opponent is committed to attacking but before their movement is complete or the strike is launched, the practitioner initiates their own technique.
- **Timing and Initiative:** The key is to time your action to coincide with the opponent's commitment, effectively "spoiling" their attack by striking first. It is not a reaction to a physical movement but rather a response to a perceived mental action.

Example:

- Your opponent begins to lift their leg in an attempt to deliver a Maegeri, however, before they can execute the kick you initiate a Tobikonagashizuki.
- Your opponent begins to execute a snap punch to your head, however, you slide low toward them and execute Gyakuzuki punch to their middle.

Key characteristics

- **Superior Initiative:** It's considered the highest form of initiative, demonstrating mastery over the opponent's intent.
- **Mental Preparedness:** It requires a calm, focused, and open mind.
- **Preemptive, not Reactive:** It is a proactive strategy to control the situation by forestalling the opponent's actions before they become concrete.

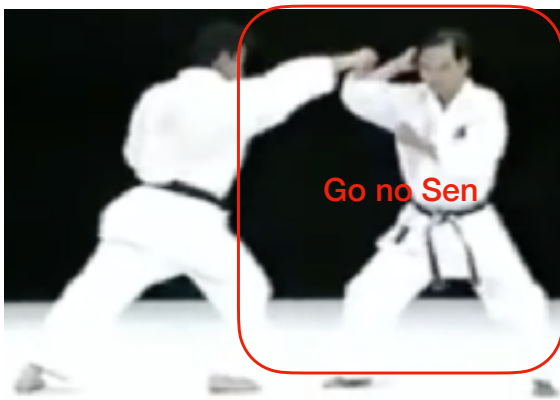
Understanding the Application of SEN as related to Kihon Kumite:

Kihon (基本, きほん) means “basics” or “fundamentals.” The term is used to refer to the basic techniques that are taught and practiced as the foundation of most martial arts, including Wado Ryu Karate. The practice and mastery of kihon is essential to all advanced training, and includes the practice of correct body form and breathing, while practicing basics such as stances, punches, kicks, blocks, and thrusts. Kihon techniques tend to be practiced often, in many cases during each practice session. They are considered fundamental to mastery and improvement of all movements of greater complexity.

For example purposes this discussion paper is using Kihon Kumite number 1 as a basis. The discussion will use the attacker and defender in various stages of execution and application of the SEN being utilized at that specific point.

The beginning:

As the attacker, on the left, is preparing to initiate his attack, sensing a attack from his opponent, he launches the attack. For discussion purposes, we will title this Sen Sen no Sen.



The Middle:

The defender, on the right, moves slightly back and to the side while guarding against the attackers Jodan Strike. Avoiding the attack and thus beginning the initial stage of Go no Sen

The End:

The attacker sees an opening to strike a chudan punch, the defender anticipates the punch and reacts simultaneously by avoiding the attackers strike and countering with his own strike. The defender is applying Sen no Sen.



Understanding the Application of Sen as related to Kumite:

Kumite (組手) is the sparring aspect of karate and it covers a vast range of activities and practices. Beginners will start by practicing the Kihon Kumite, which can be imagined as choreographed “fights.” The patterns and motions are set, and practitioners will train at their speed, accuracy, and timing as if they were in a real sparring match. As a karate student progresses they begin Jiyu Kumite (自由組手) or “free sparring.” These are the matches seen in high level competition between two karate practitioners that are scored. Jiyu Kumite looks more like a real “fight” as there is no set movement, each athlete is trying their best to score points on their opponent.

Go No Sen

To use *go no sen* (reactive initiative) as a training tool for *jiyu kumite* (free sparring), you must train yourself to receive an opponent's attack and immediately counter. This develops a calm, patient mindset, allowing you to use your opponent's momentum against them, rather than relying solely on your own attacks.

Intermediate to Advanced Drills		Repetition Number		
Go No Sen:				
Partner drills		Online front/back	Off Line to Right	Off Line to Left
Pre-determined block and counter: Practice a basic drill where your partner attacks with a specific technique, like a straight punch, and you execute a pre-determined block and counter, such as a high block followed by a reverse punch. Start slowly and then increase speed.				
Fluid counter-timing: Have your partner attack from a free-moving stance. You must wait until the last possible moment to react, simultaneously blocking and delivering your counter. Your response should be a natural extension of their attack.				
Vary the techniques: Work through different attack and counter pairings. For example, block a kick (mae-geri) and counter with a reverse punch, or block a head-level punch and counter with a stomach-level punch.				
Multiple-attacker drills: Practice against multiple opponents to develop situational awareness and learn to identify and capitalize on reactive opportunities from different angles.				

Go No Sen:	Repetition Number		
Solo Drills	Online front/back	Off Line to Right	Off Line to Left
Mirror practice: Perform blocks and counters in front of a mirror to correct your form and identify any wasted motion or "telegraphing" (unnecessary movement before a technique).			
Reaction speed exercises: Use a speed bag or hanging tennis ball for rapid-fire drills to sharpen your reaction speed. The unpredictable movement of the target helps train your reflexes for free sparring.			
Focus on explosive motion: Work on plyometric and "start strong" drills that train your muscles to generate a quick, powerful burst of energy when initiating your counter.			

Go No Sen:	Repetition Number		
Transitioning to <i>jiyu kumite</i> : As you integrate <i>go no sen</i> into free sparring, you will learn to apply these principles in a fluid, unpredictable context.	Online front/back	Off Line to Right	Off Line to Left
Read your opponent: Practice using <i>go no sen</i> against opponents of varying styles and skill levels. Start by noticing their rhythmic movements or subtle body language to predict their attack before it fully develops.			
Train with intent: Approach free sparring with the attitude of finishing each engagement decisively. This will encourage sharp, committed counter-attacks instead of hesitant or weak ones.			
Create openings: While <i>go no sen</i> is reactive, advanced practitioners can learn to create an opening in their opponent's attack by feinting or manipulating their timing. This makes your counter-attack even more effective.			
Stay relaxed and fluid: Avoid tensing up and over-committing to a defensive posture. By remaining relaxed and fluid, you can react more quickly and use your body's full power for the counter-attack.			

Sen no Sen

To use *sen no sen* as a training tool for jiyu, the principle of preemptively striking at the moment an opponent begins their attack, is a powerful way to train. Instead of waiting to react, practicing *sen no sen* develops the ability to anticipate and intercept an opponent's intentions, allowing you to dominate the exchange. The following drills can be used to apply this concept in your training.

Intermediate to Advanced Drills				
Sen No Sen:		Repetition Number		
Foundational training: Body language and timing drills The foundation of <i>sen no sen</i> is the ability to read an opponent's subtle preparatory movements, a concept related to <i>zanshin</i> (constant awareness).		Online front/back	Off Line to Right	Off Line to Left
Slow-motion sparring: Engage in free sparring at a very slow pace. Focus entirely on watching your partner for the first physical cues of their attack—a twitch of the shoulder, shifting weight, or a change in breath. Practice launching your own strike precisely when you detect this movement.				
Predictive drills: With a partner, practice different combinations. For example, have your partner consistently throw a right punch and a left kick. Your goal is not to block and counter (<i>go no sen</i>), but to intercept their attacks the moment they begin, either by entering with a strike or a simultaneous block-and-strike.				
Blindfolded sensitivity drills: Practice with a partner while blindfolded to develop a sense of their intentions without relying on sight. Focus on shifts in their balance or breathing patterns. This heightens your other senses and forces you to feel the attack rather than just see it.				
Simultaneous block/strike techniques <i>Sen no sen</i> is often realized through techniques that simultaneously block the opponent's initial movement and deliver a counter-strike.				
Partner interception drills: Have your partner throw a basic punch. As they begin to move, step offline with a simultaneous block and counter, such as a <i>gedan barai</i> with an immediate <i>gyaku-zuki</i> to the midsection. The timing must be exact: your technique should land as their attack is still unfolding.				
Closing distance: As your partner moves to attack, practice closing the distance with a technique like a backfist (<i>ura-ken</i>) or ridge-hand (<i>haito</i>). This intercepts their line of attack and puts you in a superior position.				

Sen No Sen:	Repetition Number		
Advanced application in <i>jiyu</i> Varying the tempo (<i>hyoshi</i>) Once you've built a foundation of awareness, you can train to disrupt your opponent's timing and create openings for <i>sen no sen</i> .	Online front/back	Off Line to Right	Off Line to Left
Offensive broken rhythm: In free sparring, instead of maintaining a steady pace, deliberately change your tempo. Attack with sudden bursts of speed, then slow down, then stop abruptly. This throws off your opponent's rhythm and makes their attacks more predictable.			
Baiting attacks (<i>sen sen no sen</i>): Intentionally expose a part of your body (a lower guard, a seemingly careless retreat) to create an opening that invites a specific attack. Your awareness must be sharp enough to anticipate their move and intercept it with a preemptive strike.			
Applying strategic mindset <i>Sen no sen</i> is more than just a physical technique; it is a mindset of seizing the initiative before the opponent can.			
Sparring with a purpose: Instead of just trying to score points, enter each <i>jiyu kumite</i> round with the specific goal of attempting <i>sen no sen</i> attacks. Focus entirely on timing and interception, even if it means missing opportunities for easier counters (<i>go no sen</i>).			
Video analysis: Film your free sparring sessions. Review the footage to identify the tells and subtle movements that precede your opponent's attacks. This helps train your eye to see openings that you miss in real-time.			
Transitioning between principles: A truly skilled martial artist can fluidly switch between all three timing principles (<i>sen sen no sen</i> , <i>go no sen</i> , and <i>sen no sen</i>). Practice moving between seizing the initiative, countering reactively, and preemptively striking based on what the moment dictates. This makes you a more unpredictable and adaptable sparring partner.			

Sen Sen no Sen

To use *Sen sen no sen* as a training tool for *jiyu* (free sparring), you must train yourself to perceive your opponent's intent to attack and then initiate your own attack an instant before theirs begins. This level of perception requires deep, regular practice to reach a state of intuitive, or "sixth sense," timing.

Intermediate to Advanced Drills				
Sen Sen No Sen:		Repetition Number		
Understanding the three timings The concept of <i>sen</i> ("initiative") comes in three stages. Training all three will sharpen the perception needed for <i>Sen sen no sen</i> : Go no sen ("after the initiative"): This is the counter-attack, where you block or evade an opponent's finished or committed attack and then striking. This is the most basic level and focuses on reacting effectively. Practice this by having a partner throw a strong, committed attack while you practice blocking and immediately countering. Sen no sen ("initiative of the initiative"): This is a simultaneous counter-attack. It involves striking at the same moment as your opponent, with the goal of neutralizing their attack and landing your own. To train this, you and your partner can spar in slow motion, focusing on sensitivity to their movement and launching your technique the moment you see them begin their motion. Sen sen no sen ("initiative before the initiative"): This is the highest level, where you sense your opponent's intention to attack before they physically move, allowing you to strike preemptively. It involves observing subtle cues like their breathing, balance, or body tension.		Online front/back	Off Line to Right	Off Line to Left
Training drills for <i>jiyu</i> using <i>Sen sen no sen</i> <i>The goal of these drills is to shift your focus from simply reacting to actively reading and controlling the engagement.</i> Perception and anticipation drill <i>This drill helps you develop the subtle perception required for pre-emptive striking:</i>				
Setup: Two partners face each other in a sparring stance. Drill: Instead of sparring, partners focus solely on reading each other's intent. Partner A's only goal is to launch a single, committed attack. Partner B's only goal is to identify the exact moment Partner A decides to move. Refinement: Gradually speed up the intent and movement. Over time, Partner B will learn to recognize the shift in weight, glance of the eyes, or subtle change in breathing that precedes an attack.				

Sen Sen No Sen:	Repetition Number		
Creating an opening (<i>Ken no sen</i>) Rather than waiting to react, this training helps you learn to provoke an opponent's initiative in a controlled way.	Online front/back	Off Line to Right	Off Line to Left
Setup: Two partners spar freely. • Drill: Partner A uses feints, changes in rhythm, and subtle movements to create an opening or provoke a response from Partner B. Partner A then uses their newfound perception (<i>Sen sen no sen</i>) to strike as Partner B begins to take the bait. • Refinement: Practice this both offensively and defensively. As the defender, learn to recognize when your opponent is trying to bait you and resist falling for the trap.			
Simultaneous attack and defense This drill, used for both <i>Sen no sen</i> and <i>Sen sen no sen</i> , teaches you to combine offense and defense into a single action.			
Setup: Partner A throws a slow, basic attack (e.g., a straight punch). • Drill: Partner B does not block and then counter, but instead moves offline and strikes simultaneously. For example, as Partner A's punch begins, Partner B performs a sidestep and lands a punch to the opponent's exposed ribs. • Refinement: Progress to faster attacks and more complex movements, such as intercepting the attack with your arm while simultaneously launching your own technique.			
Mind over muscle <i>Jiyu</i> at a high level is a game of strategy, not just physicality.			
Setup: Spar with an intense focus on mindfulness, not just brute force. • Drill: Before sparring, define a specific goal for yourself, such as "only use preemptive strikes" or "only counter after creating an opening." This forces you to think strategically instead of relying on instinct alone. • Refinement: Practice against opponents with varying levels of experience. Beginners are often more predictable, while advanced practitioners require a higher degree of perception to read.			

By integrating these specialized training methods into your regular *jiyu* practice, you can transition from reacting to an attack to sensing and controlling the moment before it even begins.

Final Notes

As mentioned previously, this paper is intended as discussion framework with the intent on providing instructors a framework and tools for teaching Kumite. It is also a framework that individual karate practitioners can utilize for their own personal growth within the sport.

My role has been to assemble information and present it in a format that is both informational and usable. I take no credit for the actual content.