

IN PRAISE OF KO-UCHI-GARI

In a previous article (In Praise of Osotogari) I dealt with what I regard as one of the most powerful ashi-waza in the book. In this article I deal with Ko-uchi-gari which I regard as the quickest throw in the book. The main reason for that is it can be done with the absolute minimum of movement. With a single quick reaping action of the attacker's right leg the opponent can be thrown down whether he is stationary or moving.

As the name of the throw suggests the key action is the *gari* or reap. In pre-modern farming reaping of corn etc was usually done with a sickle or scythe which have curved blades and which cut in a curve. This is the action of the throwers reaping foot which 'cuts' in a semi-circle. The key part of the reap is the return of the cut. It is a simple matter to insert your right foot between the opponent's two legs but the uninterrupted circular returning clip on the heel/ankle is not that natural and some with stiff ankles and feet might find it difficult to twist the foot so that the underside of the thrower's right foot connects with the back of the opponent's right heel. It is usual to teach the throw with the underside of the foot making contact with the opponent's heel, however some ko-uchi people are able to almost curl their big toe round the heel especially if aiming to make the reap through the legs as opposed to past the left leg. This action can usually be acquired without too much training

The actual direction of the *gari* may be past one's left leg on the outside or between ones two legs or to retreat with the left leg and reap the opponent's foot towards the space vacated by ones own left foot. A lot will then depend on the relative foot positions of the two contestants for example as in the kenka yotsu (left v. right) posture. A wrongly chosen direction may result in a clash of opponent's foot against your shin.

The *gari* movement which seeks to reap the opponent's right foot between the attacker's two legs is more of a contest move which requires a flexible foot. It also has to be done carefully since it can stress the opponent's ankle.

Ko-uchi-gari on the move.

Ko-uchi-gari is often taught on an *advancing* foot. Here the attacker tries to reap behind the opponents' forward stepping foot on the heel a fraction before the foot settles down on the floor and a coach may liken it to somebody stepping on slippery ice. With this moving Ko-uchi the opponent's right foot is 'reaped' past the attackers left foot on the outside or the attacker simply steps back with his left foot. This opportunity is often taught but rarely achieved since opponents are wary about stepping forward so freely.

Another way to make the Ko-uchi-gari on the move is when the opponent steps sideway as in Okuri-ashi-barai. This seems unlikely because all it seems to achieve is a sideways splits of the legs but in fact at the end of the sideways sweep the opponent's foot can be brought forward with a return cut of the *gari* action and down he goes. All Japan champion Toshiro Daigo 10th Dan in his prime was very good at this.

The Static Ko-uchi-gari

A static Ko-uchi-gari is often taught with a two step entry against an opponent who has perhaps braced back slightly against a front pull by spreading his legs wider. In both cases the thrower releases the pull and simultaneously reaps forward as above. This two-step entry is primarily a gap closing one with first the right foot, then the left foot following it up and then the right foot making the reaping action (R~L~R). However making the throw with three steps takes longer than the single step entry and that may be a make or break difference.

A competitor should regard his Ko-uchi-gari as a weapon that can be popped in at any moment of a contest. It is especially useful when grip-fighting. When setting up the throw keep the feet bouncy and the grip-work active which will create a fair amount of upper body tension between both players then stab at the throw like lightning. Often it can be done with just the attacker's right hand holding the lapel and the free left hand can look for Kibisu-gaeshi (Ankle-pick) opportunities. If you have both hands holding on try squeezing both your hands (lapel and sleeve) in towards each other as you push the opponent down obliquely to the mat. The right hand can also be used to push a taller opponent's head up and back. Ideally the impetus of the throw should be transmitted simultaneously through reaping foot and the thrower's two hands.

Ko-uchi-gari is open to counter throws which may be tsurikomiashi, ko-uchi-gari or other ashi-waza. The most dangerous moment is when the attacker lunges at his opponent from some distance away. Imagine standing a metre away from a wall but leaning on it. The angle that is created is very unstable. For this reason it may be necessary to restrict the lunge somewhat in order to stay more upright.

The trajectory of the throw is important. Try this test : Get somebody to stand in front of you and spread his legs wide. Then kneel down and with both hands tug his right foot forward. In most cases you will notice that the opponent does not fall straight backwards but pivots round somewhat on his left foot so as to fall across to the thrower's left. This is the natural trajectory of the throw. So when making the throw use your arms to follow this trajectory and don't try to push the opponent's body where it does not want to go.

In following articles I will look at other basic ashiwaza such as ko-soto-gari, tsurikomi-ashi, o-uchi-gari, uchimata and ashibarai . O-uchi-gari and Ko-uchi-gari are often linked together especially when being taught but O-uchigari is much more vulnerable to counterthrows I think. These ashi-waza should be part of every competitor's repertoire (to a degree). If you look in my article on Kenshiro Abe you will see that he was a noted ashi-waza man but most importantly he worked specifically on his footwork by doing lots of skipping and gymnastics. A few modern I know judoka have trained with tyres laid flat and making different fast stepping patterns. I have known some who were very good at tsubame-gaeshi (aka ashibarai-gaeshi) and one had to be very careful when attacking them with ashi-waza. **It pays to develop fast and clever feet.**

Finally for jujitsu people there is a way to combine the throw with a knee lock. Insert your right foot behind the opponent's right ankle then bring your right knee across and in front of the opponent's right knee. This may mean pivoting slightly to your

left. Then use the side of your right knee to push in against the opponent's right knee.
This would not be allowed in judo □.

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