

Stances and Their Importance

By Bob Loyd

Stance is a vital element in any sport. In baseball the proper stance and swing at the plate may mean the difference between a clean single to left or a whiffing strikeout! In boxing the proper stance may mean the difference between ducking a right hand across or getting tagged on the chin. In football the men on the line must be poised to charge when the signals are called. In karate too the proper stance is of great importance when facing a foe. Stances are a fundamental part of karate. They serve many purposes: they act as the foundation from which your techniques are delivered, providing stability, reach, posture, body movement and power.

In the early days of karate, when it was being formalized into the form we know now it was considered as a form of exercise and many of the practical fighting stances were magnified. Therefore stances that had functional applications at one and-a-half shoulders wide, were increased to 2 shoulders. These stances had reduced fighting application, and very unlikely to consciously place yourself into such a stance in an actual fight. However, such stances served to develop muscle strength and explosive movement that makes your fighting stances so much better.

Since there are a multitude of moves in karate there are different stances for each situation. Stance must be flexible; it must be changed with direction and type of movement. The stability of a stance depends to a great extent on the area included within its base. And, as the center of gravity is lowered, stability increases. Therefore, stances in which the hips are relatively low tend to be more stable than those in which the hips are high. A particular stance loses stability as the center of gravity is raised, but conversely, aids mobility. No one stance is suitable for all occasions. Generally, when moving from one stance to another, the hips remain at the same level and the feet slide lightly across the floor.

Stances are transitional points, through which you might move on the way to somewhere else. They can also be the starting or ending point of a movement. Thus, a low stance like horse, might be a preparatory position for a lift, or the final position for a throw or grapple, whilst back stance is an excellent stance for generating rotational movement. Some styles of karate advocate low deep while others prefer higher more mobile stances. Stances found in a style reflect the emphasis, which the style places on such things as speed, power and hip movement.

Stances are more than mere foot and leg angles and positions; they are about muscle tensions, and your body's interaction with the floor. This could be about grounding yourself, to make yourself strong and immovable, or it could be about using your stance and posture, to deliver power via any connecting joints, to the point of impact, alternately your stance can be used to redirect your opponents energy via your joints, so that it is dissipated with minimal or no effort on your behalf.

You must first learn the most fundamental dimensions, energies and interactions of a stance before you can progress to develop it into a more useful part of real- world karate.

Ref: GKR Karate; Karate Secrets; Martial Arts Encyclopedia