

Surprise: Our Secret Ally

By Stuart Anslow

sur·prise

transitive verb **surprised** -'prised', **surprising** -'pris'ing

- to come upon suddenly or unexpectedly; take unawares

- to attack or capture suddenly and without warning

- to cause to feel wonder or astonishment by being unexpected

- to present (someone) unexpectedly with a gift, etc.

- to cause by some unexpected action to do or say something unintended: to surprise someone into an admission

- to bring out or elicit by such means: to surprise an admission from someone

Origin: ME *surprysen* < OFr *surpris*, pp. of *sorprendre*, to surprise, take napping < *sur-* (see *sur-*) + *prendre*, to take (see *prize*)

noun

- NOW RARE the act of surprising or taking unawares

an unexpected seizure or attack

- the state of being surprised; feeling aroused by something unusual or unexpected; wonder or astonishment

- something that surprises because unexpected, unusual, etc.

Many of us now incorporate Boon Hae (or applications) into our martial arts training these days, as to be honest, it is the only way to travel for those trying to gain more from their system or those actually studying their system to the degree it deserves.

There are different levels to training and drilling applications; the most common being to run through a drill with a compliant partner! First a pattern is learnt and then many jump to what I refer to as stage '3' and start practicing applications. However, stage '2' is a very important stage and this is simply looking and studying your patterns in detail or in-depth as it is this

knowledge that is the basis to making an application actually work, as opposed to simply working with complicity – it's all in the small details!

However, despite the various stages of drilling applications, stage '4': drilling them against a resisting opponent presents a couple of major problem! Now, if you are attacked in the street it would usually be because a) your being an a#####e because you have had too much to drink or b) because you seem an easily defeatable target (hopefully – in a weird way, the most likely).

Obviously you have trained in self-

protection routines – colour codes, target hardening etc. Your ‘fence’ work is at optimum levels and you have trained ‘lessons in aggression’ (switching on/off) as well as studied the effects of adrenaline - but still you are attacked and here is where the difference between the dojang and the street kick in!

As I said, when you are ‘attacked’ it is because in some way, shape or form you are considered an easy target and thus, easily defeatable – should you respond then you ‘surprise’ your attacker, should you respond with an intelligent counter, your attacker will be even more surprised – hopefully as his face hits the pavement and you saunter off unscaved!

In this scenario you have used, not only your training (which you have fostered and honed in the dojang) but also the element of surprise to your advantage – all this helped you obtain victory!



With the element of ‘surprise’ unexpected results occur!

The problem is, how do you actually train ‘surprise’ within the dojang? And more to the point, why try to train it at all, after all, all we can all ‘surprise’ our opponents in the way described above.

Well, let me answer the second question first, why try to train ‘surprise’? The reason is, not for the advantage it may give, but to see and more importantly to *understand* the effect that it has, and this in turn will shape your future training and will stop you discounting certain applications because they seem not to work so good for you and

thus, in return, add more to your counter arsenal of techniques.

No matter whether you are drilling applications with a compliant or resisting partner they always know that one way or another, one of you will be trying some form of application against them, hence ‘surprise is lost’ and its down to technique and, to be honest, how much resistance your partner will offer, as from what I’ve seen, even in non-compliance type drills, partners ‘comply’ more than say a normal person may because they know the effect certain applications will have without such compliance!

Take for example a block that is actually an arm-lock; through training, your opponent comes to understand that once the technique is almost on, to resist would mean an injured elbow joint – so complies more easily

than someone who doesn’t understand this! This, though resisting, is human nature or in other words, self-preservation! In a street encounter, the same technique to an unknowledgeable opponent may well result in a broken elbow joint, as that is the final outcome of such a technique and what, as students, we desire when using them in a self defensive mode.

So, the secret to applying a technique, against a fully resisting opponent is firstly to train and drill it so it becomes second nature, but also ‘surprise’. Which leads me back to the first question as the problems

exists of how to train the area of 'surprise' and the answer is.. Surprisingly (no pun intended) – we don't!

We don't, because we can't, as it's a conundrum – if we attempt to train it as in a drill (as most are use to or know drills to be like) in a standard fashion then it's no longer a surprise and thus, we aren't training it.

As an example to highlight this to my students I often use the following: I explain in similar terms as I have in this article about the effect of 'surprise'. Then I get a student slightly heavier than myself and tell him

I'm going to pick him up and he/she should drop their bodyweight and 'think rooted' and basically not allow me to pick them up. Through this, depending on who is picked and how much they understand about 'rooting'

and/or 'thinking heavy' the other students see that it's either impossible, very hard or not without a struggle!

Now, "impossible, very hard or not without a struggle" are not things you want added to the scenario if you have to defend yourself – "easy, quick, like clockwork, as I trained" are the terms I'd like to hear relating to someone having defended themselves – but these all come, in the main, with the element of 'surprise' attached to them.

To train 'surprise' you have to break the rules – perhaps the rules of your dojang (though you could always seek the instructors permission beforehand), but more-so the rules of engagement regarding types of training, as by breaking the rules it allows us to add the element of surprise into the training. We shouldn't go over the top or perform wild or dangerous applications (such as elbow breaks etc.) but by breaking the rules we circumvent our opponent's expectations and thus 'surprise' them.

See how easy a sweep is perform if your



Taken when shooting pictures for Ch'ang Hon Taekwon-do Hae Sul - I'm sure you can imagine the effect if Mr Gautam (the other black belt) was not acting in jest - the element of surprise at its most painful!

opponent doesn't expect them because the rules dictate 'no low attacks'. See how easy it is to gain an 'arm-lock' or a 'choke' when the rules state 'no holding or grabbing', even see how easy it is to land a kick when the rules (at that particular

time) state 'hand techniques only' – as opposed to when the rules 'do allow them' - what surprise does it take a technique that perhaps has a 50% chance of working against a trained defender and give is a 90% chance of working and remember – our attacker on the street isn't a trained defender – he/she expects you to capitulate easily, or else you wouldn't have been chosen!

Why is this important to applications?

Well, it's because students discard

applications as 'unworkable' too quickly, while continuing to practice that 'flying side kick' over and over and over! And to discard the very techniques that could prove very useful in a self defence situation to me seems silly.

I have two very good examples to offer to make my case that surprise is not only an important factor, but needs to be 'realised', as to its usefulness. The first involves an opponent that knew not only the technique I was about to do, but also what I was trying to achieve via the technique, but he didn't understand the 'how' – how the technique could achieve the result I said it could or moreso, how it works to that effect. The second involved 'breaking the rules' – funnily enough I didn't set out to break the rules, it just sort of happened, but highlights my point nicely.

Scenario 1

We were shooting photos for my first book "*Ch'ang Hon Taekwon-Do Hae Sul: Real Applications To The ITF Patterns*" and I liked to vary the students involved in the role of 'uke' in a effort to get them in the

books. The technique and application were fairly simply in nature so I asked a lower grade (green belt) if they'd like to be in the photo shoot and demonstrate it. He said he would and I explained what I was going to, the technique I was going to use and what the outcome would be and asked them if they were able to pose for the photo's correctly! After a few tries *aka* going through the motions, it became clear that the student didn't understand what we needed to achieve for the shoot. I wanted to photograph – in step by step, single photography – an application for *chookyo makgi* (rising block) that not only moves an opponent backwards, but also upwards as it's executed. I thought I had explained it well, and it was a fairly easy thing to grasp and re-enact (yes, we do that with book photographs – sorry) – but still the student didn't get it and asked me to demonstrate on him – after all, 'we feel and we understand' right!

So I proceeded to demonstrate the application to my student so he could understand it fully and my student resisted to what 'he thought' was going to happen. I



The applications discussed in 'scenario 2'

applied the application and he went 2 feet in the air and about 6 feet back – landing on his backside with a ‘very surprised and shocked’ look on his face – we went rushing up to him, slightly shocked as well, to check he was okay! All of us were ‘shocked’ at just how effective the application was and it was this effective, not because of the application itself but because it also had the added element of surprise, as even though the student knew something was going to happen, his mindset had lead him in one direction and the application in quite another – 6 feet back actually!!

The element of surprise helped the application to work more efficiently than anyone suspected because the student didn’t understand 100% what was going on and that maximised the effect of the application.



Having a laugh with ‘superstar’ Dev Patel, whilst shooting the pictures of my first book

Scenario 2

Before he became famous in *Skins*, *Slum Dog Millionaire* and now ‘The Last Of The Airbenders’ I was free-sparring with my student Dev Patel. It was standard Taekwon-Do competition based free-sparring – full speed, medium contact. All was going as ‘standard’ when, for a split second I noticed Dev held his front arm out further than it really needed to be and without thinking I had grabbed hold of it and performed a 3 move combination from pattern Joong-Gun which resulted with Dev in a choke, with his arm pinned to his back, unable to counter me! If slowed down it would see me perform a ‘forearm guarding

block’ to lock my opponent and turn him rearwards slightly, a ‘*palm pressing block*’ to accentuate the lock into a full lock as well as release my other hand for the next movement, followed by an ‘*angle punch*’ which applied the choke technique – in other words moves #28, #29 and #30 from pattern Joong-Gun tul!

I had broken the rules, but by doing so I had proved, with the element of surprise, applications or combinations of applications work! We had been shooting

the pictures for the applications of these techniques at the previous class, hence why it probably just kicked in – another reason to train applications consistently and on a regular basis, after all, repetition is the mother of technique.

Furthermore, I have shown these applications to my class and at

seminars and it was by far the easiest to apply it on Dev, more so than even demonstrating it on a compliant opponent at a seminar – because I was in 100% control and the element of surprise was on my side!

The above examples show that surprise works – however, it is important to know that to fully understand the true effect of an application you need to at least ‘*understand*’ (in the flesh so to speak) the effect that ‘*surprise*’ has on an opponent.

Sometimes, fairly often in fact, applications

that seem hard to execute on a resisting opponent, work like a charm against a surprised opponent – the difference is that one knows what is coming and the other doesn't (just like your opponent on the street!). So don't discount an application you may be having difficulty with in training straight away, as it may simply be harder to do because it is missing that essential element of 'surprise'.

Like other applications, do not wait until you have to test this theory for real, test it in the dojang/dojo now! At our school we do what's called 'Traditional Sparring' – this is basically a fight and allows strikes, punches, kicks, takedowns, throws etc, even groundwork for a bit – however, even this is not a 100% realistic scenario of how a correctly trained self defence application should work – it's a scenario of a fight – what happens when your self defence techniques go wrong (which co-incidentally is what happens when your self-protection routine goes wrong).

A self defence technique (or what I call a pattern application) should be over in a split second – it should just kick in when an opponent grabs you or lunges at you – it is the A,B,C of martial arts – **it's what we train for!** Or what I always thought we trained for (as opinions in martial arts differ these days sadly)!

For this to happen we need to:

1. Understand our patterns inside out and outside in – after all, it's what a majority of our training time is utilised on!
2. *Train in realistic applications to our patterns – emphasis on the word 'realistic'*
3. Drill them over and over (and then some more)
4. *Drill them against resisting opponents intent on hurting us should we fail – we learn by our mistakes!*
5. Understand how the element of 'surprise' works to our advantage!



Stuart Anslow - Traditional Sparring with his senior Instructor Vikram Gautam

So if you are ever unfortunate enough to be attacked outside the realms of your dojang don't rely on the hope that your training may work – know that with proper training and with the benefit and understanding of 'surprise' – it will work! As without putting it into practice, your training is not 100% complete!

Disclaimer: Though this article encourages you to 'break the rules' it is in reference to applications that DO NOT harm or injure your opponent and are for the purpose of understanding how 'the element of surprise' can aid you in regards to self defence. The author, nor Jissen magazine accept any responsibility for students/instructors/individuals taking this out of context and injuring themselves or their fellow students. All students are reminded to exercise 'good judgment' on their choice of application should they execute them on a 'surprised' opponent.