

LIGHTNING STEP STRIKING

The Art of Hitting Without Getting Hit

By Interview by MASTERS Magazine

Many people consider the ultimate skill in martial arts to be Hitting Without Getting Hit - being able to move into and out of range, control the distance and striking the opponent while not taking damage. This elite fighting ability is achieved through movement/positioning, speed/timing and sensitivity/awareness.



Explosiveness, reflexes/reaction speed, and overall quickness are naturally at our highest during our youth, however these can all be developed through proper training to be at our peak throughout our lives.

Another critical component of this elite striking ability is the skill to strike from either side of the body and change stance/position in the process. This is sometimes known as "Switch Hitting" and although many people think it's a new technique, it's been around for a long time.

Many boxers in the early 1900s were experts at "switch hitting" - changing stance while striking their opponent, including Jack Johnson, Benny Leonard, Willie Pep and Sam Langford. Modern Switch hitters are often regarded as the best in the sport such as Terrance Crawford, Naoya Inoue, Visiliy Lomachenko and Tyson Fury. Recent Hall of Fame inductees who were renowned switch hitters included Marvelous Marvin Hagler (perhaps the best switch hitter of all time), Manny Pacquiao and Andre Ward.

MMA fighters will frequently switch stance due to kicking or attempting a takedown, and it's quite common in MMA competition. Some of the sport's most dynamic fighters are famous for switch hitting like Max Holloway, Sean O'Malley and one of the greatest ever George St. Pierre. Many top MMA Trainers will have their athletes fight from both sides to develop confidence and coordination when switching and during all transitions from kicks and takedowns.

Filipino Martial Arts (FMA) such as Arnis, Escrima and Kali often contain footwork that is synchronized with the strikes. In particular, FMA will frequently include a V-Step or Triangle Step footwork pattern.

Many Japanese and Okinawan weapons martial arts systems will emphasize a step with every cut/strike, and most martial artists will use a forward lunge strike. However, a lateral movement with synchronized striking as seen in boxing and MMA is not as common.

Some traditional martial arts instructors and boxing trainers discourage switch hitting and they say that the technique has several critical flaws:

For example: Off balance/no base stability when hitting. As a result, the fighter is susceptible to being easily knocked down and will also lack power in their punches.

Awkward/difficult to perform: it's difficult to harmonize the hands and feet together. Most fighters will never be able to do it well.

Open for counter strikes: probably the biggest criticism is that the switch hitter is open and walking into a punch.

However, a good athlete will pick up the skill and be able to maintain balance and defensive posture. Crawford, Inoue and others have shown that you can also generate power when you time the strikes effectively.

The key is to develop muscle memory that combines flowing footwork with coordinated and synchronized strikes. Also, proper hand positioning and defense posture while stepping and moving with explosive power.



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Based on FMA, JKD, Kempo and boxing/kickboxing, as well as the exercise science curriculum of the Functional Training and Sports Specific Training Program from the National College of Exercise Professionals, Lightning Step Striking by Sensei Adam James is a unique and dynamic switch hitting program that is designed to integrate with other martial arts styles - in particular with MMA, FMA, JKD, Kickboxing, boxing and Free Fighting.

Adam says that the Lightning Step Striking creates attack angles while being a moving target by utilizing the V-Step footwork of FMA, Kempo and JKD with the strikes of boxing, kickboxing and MMA.

Additionally, Adam emphasizes that the NCEP sports specific training curriculum is incorporated into the Lightning Step Striking program to develop athletic explosiveness, reaction speed, strength, power and muscle memory.

Focus Sticks were designed by Leo Fong and Adam James as a complement to this unique training program, and they serve as both the striking target and also as a replication of the opponent's strikes to enhance your defensive positioning and parries/blocks, as well as counter striking skills.

The program emphasizes that people can learn the skill of "Switch Hitting" and how to go from orthodox to southpaw and back while moving in and out of range and striking your opponent at the same time.

Also, Adam says that the program will explore trapping hands and how to use movement and positioning to "Trap without Trapping" and control the opponent's attack and create openings for your own strikes.

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According to Adam James, Lightning Step Striking is designed to integrate into any martial arts style and combat sport and will enhance the skills and abilities of any martial arts athlete.

A component of the NCEP-Rainbow Warrior Martial Arts MMA Trainer certification program, the V-Step and Focus Sticks have been taught at some of the most prestigious MMA Academies, health clubs and martial arts schools in the country, including:

- Gokor Chavichyan's Hayastan MMA Academy in North Hollywood, CA
- Harmony By Karate with Sensei John Mirrione at the Reebok Sports Club New York.
- The Honolulu Club and Powerhouse Gym Hawaii.

In addition, the curriculum has been taught at Darren Tibon's FMA Legacy, one of the top combatives seminar events each year.



Masters Magazine sits down with the creator of the Lightning Step Striking program Sensei Adam James of Rainbow Warrior Martial Arts to ask him about the origins of this program.

Masters Magazine: Thank you for joining us. Please share with our audience how you came up with Lightning Step Striking.

Adam James: It's an honor to be here and thank you very much for speaking with me today. The program is based on the V-Step footwork of FMA that is integrated into a JKD/MMA-Free Fighting approach.

Also, I use the functional training and sports specific training methods of the National College of Exercise Professionals in the training curriculum so that it accelerates the development of the martial arts athlete.

Masters Magazine: Interesting. How does the exercise science work into the program?

Adam James: We use the NCEP curriculum for balance/stability and explosive power, as well as endurance and strength. In addition, we use the NCEP neuromuscular development technique to facilitate the correct muscle memory for the athlete. I also touch on nutrition, flexibility, and attitude training from NCEP.

Masters Magazine: And what about the martial arts aspect of the system?

Adam James: Well, I don't like to look at it as a system. Rather, it's a training program that will enhance other people's martial arts. Some people are already doing various aspects of what I'm teaching here and they will appreciate how the information is presented.

The program is an extension of my previous work with Leo Fong, as well as my own experience in Kempo, working with the military and Law Enforcement communities, and my time as the Director of World Black Belt which was founded by Bob Wall, Chuck Norris, Gene LeBell and 50 of the world's greatest martial artists.

Masters Magazine: What is the V-Step and how does it work with your striking system?

Adam James: The V-step is martial arts footwork often seen in Filipino martial arts and is sometimes known as triangle step. Basically, from your fighting stance, you step with the back foot 45° up and simultaneously slide your front foot back. Making a V or triangle with your footwork.

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Masters Magazine: yes, that's quite common in all martial arts when the fighter changes their stance.

Adam James: however, this is not just changing your stance, but stepping and striking simultaneously. Furthermore, there are some fundamental athletic and physiological errors to how some people will perform the V-step because of poor movement habits.

Masters Magazine: what do you mean by poor movement habits? Can you give me an example?

Adam James: one of the most common mistakes in the V-step is the person will slide their front foot back to the tip of the triangle and then slide the back foot forward. It may look the same to some, but it's very different. It's less effective for free fighting for a number of reasons. It's slow - there are two moves with the feet instead of one. Also, you don't want your feet to be together like that. You'll be off-balance. Instead, the step is like a side step in Aikido combined with a shift to reposition that happens in one movement.

Masters Magazine: OK, yes, I've seen the difference in the top FMA practitioners. They all do that step you're talking about.

Adam James: another example of a move that is similar but different - and I want to emphasize the difference - is jumping in the air to switch stance. This can be effective in certain martial art sports but it's risky in combatives, and very different from the V-Step. Rather than jumping, the V-step is like walking - like taking a step in everyday life. The goal is to make the footwork smooth and natural so that you have maximum balance, agility and quickness. To make your fighting footwork your everyday footwork.

Masters Magazine: what are the FMA roots for your Lightning Step Striking program?

Adam James: my longtime friend and teacher Leo Fong is most known for being Bruce Lee's close friend and training partner. However, he also spent extensive time with Angel Cabales of Serrada Escrima and Remy Presas of Modern Arnis. Leo developed his own FMA system called Modern Escrima along with his other styles Wei Kuen Do - which was his version of Jeet Kune Do and Chi Fung - which is similar to Tai Chi and Chi Gung with weights.

It's from his training with FMA footwork that he came up with the idea to integrate the V-step with boxing strikes. I had the honor to work side-by-side with him as we discussed and developed the concept and techniques.

Masters Magazine: what are some of the things that you created together?

Adam James: we developed the Focus Sticks - which are an excellent martial arts training tool. You increasingly see them in boxing and MMA gyms. Basically holding two sticks for the fighter to punch at but also receive blows from. When Leo and I first started doing it, you didn't see that anywhere.

The reason we started doing it is because Leo had a bad shoulder and it bothered him to hold the focus mitts for me. He had two padded training kali sticks that had been given to him as a gift by Ted Lucaylucay, a top FMA/JKD instructor. Leo came up with the idea to have me punch at the sticks instead of the boxing focus mitts, because he thought it would be a harder target for me to hit and easier for him to receive. In time we developed an entire training program around the focus sticks and even made a training video together with a Hollywood producer.

“Leo Fong learned trapping from Bruce Lee and Jimmy Lee, and then Leo taught it to me.”

Masters Magazine: yes, I've seen those training sticks at MMA gyms recently.

Adam James: we gave a pair of Focus Sticks to one of our top NCEP trainers who at that time was the strength coach for Andre Ward and worked with Virgil Hunter. He was one of the first top boxing trainers to use Focus Sticks and now they are all over.

However, most people aren't getting the most out of this amazing training tool and my program also teaches how to use it to develop the Step Striking technique.

Masters Magazine: you also mentioned Trapping as part of the program - is that from Wing Chun and JKD?

Adam James: yes, inspired by Wing Chun and JKD but designed for Free Fighting - specifically MMA and the street.

Leo learned trapping from Bruce Lee and Jimmy Lee, and then Leo taught it to me, however, Leo was a Golden Gloves boxer so he took the Free Fighting approach in his trapping with an emphasis on the explosive initial trap followed by dynamic striking combinations. Then, as we incorporate the FMA V-step footwork, we can create angles that also provide opportunities to strike while limiting the opponent - the Art of Trapping Without Trapping.

Masters Magazine: how can people learn more about your Lighting Step Striking program:

Adam James: the curriculum is a component of the NCEP-Rainbow Warrior Martial Arts MMA Trainer certification program that has been taught at some of the most prestigious MMA academies and martial arts schools in the country including Gokor Chivichyan's Hayastan MMA Academy in North Hollywood, Sensei John Mirrione's Harmony By Karate in New York City and in my hometown of Honolulu Hawaii.

In addition, I've taught the curriculum several times at Darren Tibon's FMA Legacy, one of the top combatives seminar events as well as at other martial arts events, private lessons and small group training. I've designed the program to be concise and clear so it's easy to learn and fit into virtually any martial arts style.

My goal is to strip away all the unessentials of traditional martial arts tapestry and focus on the fundamental techniques and exercise science of the V-step and synchronized striking presented in a program that will make every martial artist more explosive and dynamic in their Free Fighting.

Masters Magazine: thank you for sharing your knowledge with us today and we're looking forward to hearing more about your work in a future interview.

Adam James: I'm very grateful for the opportunity and it's always an honor to work with you and the team from Masters Magazine. I'm wishing you all the best and continued success. 

