Book Excerpt: The Character Of Goju-Ryu, Kata Implications

by Rich Stamper Chapter 88 - The Technique Should Not Define The Tactic

The technique should not define the tactic. The tactic should not define the strategy. The strategy should not define the theme.

We tend to select a particular technique from some kata and then create a scenario to demonstrate an application. That is good in that it shows our creative intelligence, but it reveals a fundamental lack of understanding of kata theme, strategy, tactics and technique. We have it backwards oftentimes, but it’s all we know or how we were taught.

When we select a movement from the kata and then create a situation around it, that procedure defines the tactic involved. The way we show how a technique is applied tells us how it is used and the pertinent situation regarding its use – the tactic. Then, having the tactic defined, the strategy that dictates it is defined. That is sort of like discovering a leaf and then making an imaginary tree out of it – backwards.

For example, in the kata Sasquatch, there is a hand movement that looks like chopping with a hatchet. So we observe that movement and, using our creative intelligence, determine that the application is to chop with a hatchet. Now we have let the technique define the tactic – which is to use a hatchet and chop in certain fashion with it. Further, the now defined tactic suggests the strategy of using a hatchet as opposed to an axe. And all of this points to a lumberjack theme for the kata.

In the example above, our picking out an application for a movement without considering the theme of the kata first, then one of its particular strategies, then one of its tactics, and only then the application has totally confused the message of the kata – and the application.

Actually, the movement referred to in our example just cited is how to use a badminton racquet in a certain fashion, and is consistent with the general theme of Sasquatch kata. Everyone knows that the badminton racquet is the preferred weapon of Big Foot.

But then it gets worse. You see, the same general hand movement appears in four different kata. Once we have determined the movement represents chopping with a hatchet, we tend to use that same application anywhere it appears – even in other kata.

As you know, in Sasquatch the application is using a badminton racquet, while in Salmon kata the same movement represents casting a fishing rod, whereas in Sloppo kata it represents using a paint roller, and only in Shred kata does it represent using a hatchet. The kata theme provides the strategies which reveal the tactics which define the technique. Obviously, a technique in Saifa (wasp theme) and a similar technique in Seiunchin (sumo theme) would have vastly different applications. And the front kick in Shisochin is very different than the front kick in Sanseiru.

So when trying to discern an application for a particular technique, we should first consider the general theme of the kata, then select the appropriate strategy from the (typically) four or five contained therein, then choose one of the tactics inherent to that strategy and, by using that process, the correct choices for determining applications of the technique should become apparent.

The technique should not define the tactic, and so on – backwards up the chain.