



**INTERNATIONAL SHOTOKAN KARATE FEDERATION**

**ROKUDAN EXAMINATION REPORT  
YOKO-GERI-KEKOMI**

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## Summary

This report is about **yoko-geri-kekomi**, a linear kick that is commonly used in Shotokan karate, both in the traditional martial art, and in sports (competition) training. First, I will introduce a few general aspects of karate training, and focus on two important points when working on leg techniques. I will then discuss how to prepare to develop yoko-geri-kekomi through specific stretching exercises and educational drills, and the various steps involved in executing the kick. I will also describe yoko-geri-kekomi training as such, with respect to striking surfaces and targets, as well as the range and advantages of the technique in sparring. The report will conclude with important points to remember and errors to avoid.

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# YOKO-GERI-KEKOMI

## 1 Introduction

Shotokan karate as we practice it is a martial art based on the use of all the weapons of the human body. These weapons are mainly the arms and legs. In general, using the lower extremities is more demanding and strenuous than using the upper limbs. However, for good balance, any karate practitioner should develop both equally. Personally, I like working on leg techniques, which is why I chose to write this paper about **yoko-geri-kekomi**. I have selected this technique because I like to perform it and I especially like doing it with the front leg to stop a charging opponent. I realized after many years of practice that yoko-geri-kekomi is the most difficult basic kicking technique to perform. It is my hope that this paper will help beginners and intermediates to improve this technique. In this study, I will discuss how I execute and teach this kick.

First, it should be specified that yoko-geri-kekomi is a linear thrusting kick. **It combines the power of the hips with the thrusting motion of the leg.** It can be aimed at any level (jodan: nose, jaw, neck; chudan: ribs, solar plexus, kidneys, abdomen and gedan: thigh, knee and shin), although its use at the jodan level is risky. Flexibility in the pelvis and hips make it easier to learn and execute. As is the case for oi-zuki, the correct path and the correct use of the hips are essential to getting a strong and effective technique. It will, for that matter, determine the effectiveness of this kick.

My presentation covers six (6) areas:

- ***General aspects of karate training;***
- ***General aspects of leg techniques;***
- ***Preparing for yoko-geri-kekomi;***
- ***Practicing yoko-geri-kekomi;***
- ***Important points to remember;***
- ***Errors to avoid.***

## 2 General Aspects of Karate Training

In general, karate techniques owe their effectiveness to the transfer of kinetic energy at the moment of impact. **This energy transfer is maximized through proper technical training**, which is the principal strength of Shotokan karate. Each technique must thus travel along the **proper path, using great speed and maximum kime**. The path is either linear or circular, and proper muscle work is required to perfect it. As is the case for speed, the key element is to relax. Kime, which may be defined as the maximum amount of energy that can be produced, is the result of tensing all muscles in the body at once, for the shortest instant possible. To do this requires maximum energy, good spirit, and a high level of concentration. There are three major ways to generate kime in karate: vibration, rotation and translation. For all arm and leg techniques, the initial impulse is generated from the hara. It is then transmitted to the arms and fists for the upper extremities, and to the legs and feet for the lower limbs. The entire process is controlled by the musculoskeletal system.

## 3 General Aspects of Leg Techniques

Before I talk about yoko-geri-kekomi as such, I would like to emphasize two important points about kicking techniques. Unlike arm techniques, which are executed with both feet on the ground, there is only one supporting leg when kicking. **So, the supporting leg must be firmly planted on the ground to maximize the effectiveness of the technique**. Also, the knee of the supporting leg must be bent to provide good balance at the moment of impact. This point is very important with yoko-geri-kekomi, especially if you are using this kick to stop someone attacking. The other important point is that with leg techniques, there is no concept of withdrawing the opposite leg, such as hikite with arm techniques. For example, when you punch oi-zuki with the right arm, there is an opposite action with the left arm. This is the action/reaction principle. These two points are fundamental and demonstrate the difficulty associated with practicing kicking techniques. The slightest error during their use can be fatal in sparring. This is one of the main reasons why I use educational drills during class. I want my students to develop good strong kicks.

## 4 Preparing for Yoko-geri-kekomi

Any physical activity, whether it is a sport such as cross-country skiing or a martial art such as karate, should begin with a proper warm-up. This should be a series of general exercises aimed at preparing the body for a more vigorous workout. **The warm-up is essential to karate, since movements are usually very abrupt**. It is all the more important when training in leg techniques, since the whole pelvic and lower back region are solicited to a considerable extent<sup>1</sup>. No matter which leg technique I teach, I start off with specific stretching exercises followed by educational drills, and finish off with the step-by-step execution of the kick.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that 80% of the population complains of back pain at one time or another. This often results from inadequate preparation for the task to be performed.

## 4.1 Specific Stretching Exercises for Kicking

When we teach new techniques, especially those using the lower extremities, it is beneficial and educational to begin with specific stretching exercises. They improve flexibility and make the learning process easier. This report shows specific stretching exercises that can be used for any type of kicks. This is not an exhaustive list, but rather a sequence that I use when I teach kicks. The following exercises are:

- 1- Ankle flex (photo 1);
- 2- Ankle stretch (photo 2);
- 3- Quadriceps stretch (photo 3);
- 4- Buttocks stretch (photo 4);
- 5- Hamstring stretch, step 1 (photo 5);
- 6- Hamstring stretch, step 2 (photo 6);
- 7- Pelvic stretch, step 1 (photo 7);
- 8- Pelvic stretch, step 2 (photo 8);
- 9- Calf muscle, hamstring and lower back stretch (photo 9);
- 10- Torso twist (photo 10)
- 11- Hip rotation (photo 11).

The two first exercises, (i.e. ankle flex [photo 1] and ankle stretch [photo 2], are aimed at providing good elasticity and mobility to the ankles. Flexing is beneficial for striking with the ball of the foot (koshi) and sword foot (sokuto), while stretching helps in striking with the instep (haisoku) and toe tips (tsumasaki).



Photo 1 Ankle flex



Photo 2 Ankle stretch

Stretching the quadriceps (photo 3) and buttocks (photo 4), the third and fourth exercises in the sequence, requires proper preparation, since these are the driving muscles that initiate all kicks. After a good yoko-geri-kekomi practice session, it is just as important to stretch them once again.



Photo 3 Quadriceps stretch



Photo 4 Buttock stretch

The fifth and sixth exercises solicit the hamstring muscles (photos 5 and 6), which are used to withdraw the kick. When properly stretched, they make it easier to withdraw the leg in a snapping or thrusting motion, which is a key point in all kicking techniques. Hamstring stretches should also be repeated after working on yoko-geri-kekomi or any other legs techniques. It is important to spend sufficient time stretching hamstring, since most leg injuries that occur during kicking are to these muscles. They require specific attention.



Photo 5 Hamstring stretch



Photo 6 Hamstring stretch

Pelvic stretches, the seventh and eighth exercises, are important for the second part of the technique, namely the twisting motion of the hips (see section 4.3.1). They improve this step tremendously, which is crucial in executing kekomi. Once the twisting motion is set, half of the work is done.



Photo 7 Pelvis stretch



Photo 8 Pelvis stretch

The last exercises, namely the calf, hamstring and lower back stretches (photo 9), the torso twist (photo 10) and hip rotation (photo 11), are of general interest. They solicit various muscle groups at the same time, and nicely round out the sequence.



Photo 9 Lower back stretch



Photo 10 Torso twist



Photo 11 Hip rotation

This series of specific stretching exercises is a good way of preparing the body for the second and third part of the training, namely educational drills and step-by-step execution of the kick.

## 4.2 Educational Drills

Educational drills include the three following steps: (1) raising the knee in front and bending the supporting leg, (2) twisting motion while keeping the supporting leg bent, and (3) extending and withdrawing the leg. When I'm teaching these drills, I'm using zenkutsu as starting position. It makes the drills easier to complete.

### 4.2.1 Raising the Knee in Front and Bending the Supporting Leg



Photo 12 Raising the Knee in Front and Bending the Supporting Leg

The purpose of the first drill is to learn **how to chamber the leg properly**, which is the initial step and will help for the proper execution of the kick. To make it easier, once the knee is in position, you grab the knee and ankle and raise the knee as high as possible, while keeping the body upright. In this position, you work on your balance, which is a vital point in all kicks.

### 4.2.2 Twisting Motion While Keeping the Supporting Leg Bent

The second drill is to set the twisting motion that will help to generate the power to perform a strong kekomi. **It will help to get the hips and the extending leg in same line (see photo 17)**. I observed after many years of teaching karate, that many people have problem when they perform kekomi. The extending leg and the hips are not in same line. They are in a V form, so the kick is weak. With this drill, we avoid the V form and we are improving our kekomi. As in the previous step, working on balance is emphasized, due to the twisting motion of the hip, which is an added difficulty.



Photo 13 Starting Position



Photo 14 Twisting motion



Photo 15 Moving back to starting position

### 4.2.3 Extending and Withdrawing the Leg

The third and last drill completes the execution of the technique. The important point is to **thrust the leg**, as this will generate striking power that is added to the twisting motion of the hip. When practicing this step, the concept of balance is at its peak because of the thrusting motion of the leg.



Photo 16 Starting position



Photo 17 Extending the leg



Photo 18 Withdrawing the leg

These three drills, which I work on when I teach yoko-geri-kekomi, are aimed at bringing the leg to travel the proper path. You might say that it is a way of educating the legs.

## 4.3 Step-by-Step Execution of the Kick

Since leg techniques are more difficult to perform than hand techniques, it is a good idea to teach them using many steps. When I'm teaching kekomi, I'm using five steps: (1) chambering the leg, (2) the twisting motion with the hips, (3) extending the leg, (4) withdrawing the leg and (5) returning the leg to the ground.

### 4.3.1 Chambering the Leg

As mentioned in item 4.2.1, **chambering the leg is required for the proper execution of the kick**. At this stage, the knee of the striking leg is close to the upper body and the heel is almost touching the back of the thigh. In this position, the body is upright and the knee of the supporting leg is bent to provide good balance.



Photo 19 Starting position in zenkutsu



Photo 20 Chambering the leg

#### 4.3.2 Twisting motion of the Hips and Thrusting motion of the Leg

For this kick to be effective the twisting motion of the hips must be well set and the thrusting motion of the leg must be very quick. When the thrusting motion is initiated, the leg must travel at maximum speed. The twisting and the thrusting motions are essential to get a good and strong kekomi. The striking power of this kick depends on the combination of these two motions. Upon impact, the striking foot must be parallel to the ground with a good tension in the ankle, the knee of the supporting leg must be bent, and the foot of the supporting leg must be firmly planted on the ground. Otherwise, the technique will be much weaker.



Photo 21 Starting position



Photo 22 Twisting motion of the hips



Photo 23 Thrusting motion of the leg

#### 4.3.3 Withdrawing the Leg and Bringing the Foot Back to the Ground

The foot must follow the same path on the return as it does for the kick and this must be **well controlled**. I'm always telling my students that they must control the return of their kicking foot. The kicking foot must never be dropped to the ground, regardless of the type of kick. When bringing the foot back, the knee remains up in case the kick needs to be repeated, should the opportunity arise in sparring.



Photo 24 Withdrawing the leg



Photo 25 Returning the leg to the ground

## 5 Practicing Yoko-geri-kekomi

Now that we have seen how to prepare our body for yoko-geri-kekomi and the step-by-step execution of the kick, let us look at how to practice it. Although yoko-geri-kekomi can be done from various starting positions (heisoku-dachi, hachinoji-dachi, heiko-dachi, etc.), the most commonly used stance is kiba-dachi. Mainly, in Shotokan karate, we are practicing yoko-geri-kekomi in kiba-dachi. However, it is good to practice also in zenkutsu-dachi, because in kumite we usually work not on the side like in Twae-Kwon-Do, but more on forty-five degree angle, which give us more opportunities to attack or to defend ourself.

To begin, the kick should be practiced slowly and completely, since this type of exercise provides the advantage of improving balance and increasing muscle tone in the legs. It is also a good idea to practice with an obstacle in front of the kicking leg, to learn how to chamber the leg properly and execute the kick along the linear path. This will help to perfect the path of the technique. Also, practicing the kick with an elastic band is beneficial, especially for the thrusting motion.

Yoko-geri-kekomi is a kick with one mainly striking surface, but we can use it on many different targets. It may be used at close, medium or long distance, and there are many advantages to using it in sparring.

### 5.1 Striking Surfaces and Targets for Yoko-geri-kekomi

We use mainly the side of the foot (sokuto) as the striking surface. But we can also use the heel (kakato). For the targets, there are many possibilities: face, neck, upper body, legs and knees (photos 26 to 30).



Photo 26 Face



Photo 27 Neck



Photo 28 Upper body



Photo 29 Legs



Photo 30 Knees

Yoko-geri-kekomi is one of the strongest kicks in Shotokan karate. It is therefore very important to exercise proper control when we are practicing with a partner. Regardless of the target you want to reach, the control must be perfect.

## **5.2 Distances for Yoko-geri-kekomi**

Since yoko-geri-kekomi travels along a linear path, it is best used at medium or long range. It can be used at close range, but this requires good hip flexibility. In close range situations that arise during sparring, yoko-geri-kekomi must be performed with the front leg, which is called kizami-yoko-geri-kekomi. At medium range, either the front or rear leg may be used, depending on the situation and the distance. If you kick with the front leg, you may have to slide forward on the supporting leg to be within the proper striking distance. The rear leg is most appropriate for kicking at long range and the power will reach its maximum.

## **5.3 Advantages of Using Yoko-geri-kekomi in Sparring**

Yoko-geri-kekomi is one of the most powerful kicks. A small person can use it advantageously against a larger or taller opponent. We can use a front leg kekomi at close range to cut off an attack, or we can deliver kekomi with the rear leg as a medium to long range attack.

In kumite, a quick kizami-yoko-geri-kekomi executed with the proper timing and a strong supporting leg, can allow a small person instantly to end a match against a larger opponent or at least dissuade such an opponent from attacking at will. This technique can be used alone, without combination with other techniques. It is very valuable asset in kumite.

When we spar with a taller opponent, kicking with the rear leg allows us to cover a longer distance. When we execute kekomi at medium or long range, we usually do so in combination with hand techniques to cover or mask the kick. Great speed is required in order to reach the target with a rear leg kekomi, especially at long range. If we generate high speed, the kick will be powerful when reaches the target.

As mentioned above, at medium or long range, it is better to combine kekomi with other techniques. These can be leg as well as hand techniques. Due to the hip extension, which provides greater reach than mae-geri, the body is well positioned with respect to the opponent, who has a harder time reaching with a counter attack. A few samples of combinations are shown below:

1) Mawashi-geri jodan — yoko-geri kekomi chudan same leg (medium range)

The mawashi-geri is used as a feint to raise the guard, creating an opening for kekomi.



Photo 31 Mawashi-geri jodan



Photo 32 Yoko-geri kekomi chudan

2) Gyaku-zuki jodan — yoko-geri-kekomi chudan (medium range)

The gyaku-zuki is used to cover the kekomi.



Photo 33 Gyaku-zuki jodan



Photo 34 Yoko-geri-kekomi chudan

3) Kizami-zuki jodan — kizami-kekomi chudan — oi-zuki chudan (long range)

Techniques to follow an opponent who is moving back.



Photo 35 Kizami-zuki jodan



Photo 36 Kizami-kekomi chudan



Photo 37 Oi-zuki chudan

At a closer distance, we can use kizami-kekomi to defend or to attack.

#### 4) Kizami-kekomi chudan against an opponent attacking (close range)



Photo 38 Starting position



Photo 39 Opponent attacking



Photo 40 Kizami-kekomi

#### 5) Step forward and kizami-kekomi chudan to attack an opponent (close or medium range)



Photo 41 Starting position



Photo 42 Step forward



Photo 43 Kizami-kekomi

We can do a lot of other combinations in sparring with yoko-geri-kekomi, such as:

- Mae-geri chudan — mawashi-geri jodan and yoko-geri-kekomi chudan (same leg);
- Kizami-zuki jodan — gyaku-zuki chudan — yoko-geri-kekomi chudan;
- Kizami-kekomi chudan — uraken jodan — oi-zuki chudan;
- Oi-zuki jodan — kizame-kekomi chudan — oi-zuki chudan;
- Ashi-barai – kizame-kekomi chudan – uraken jodan – yori-ashi and gyaku-zuki.

## 5.4 Practicing Yoko-geri-kekomi in Heisoku-dachi and Kiba-dachi

In the previous section, I used the zenkutsu-dachi position. However, in Shotokan karate, we are required to perform kekomi in kiba-dachi in our regular training and also for kyu and dan tests. When I teach this kick for the first time to yellow belts, I start with the heisoku-dachi position first. A chair or parallel bar may be used as a balancing aid. After some weeks of practice, I introduce the kiba-dachi position. The photos below show these exercises being performed.



Photo 44 Starting position



Photo 45 Raising the Knee



Photo 46 Twisting motion of the hips



Photo 47 Extending the leg



Photo 48 Withdrawing the leg



Photo 49 Return to starting position



Photo 50 Starting position



Photo 51 Crossing the feet



Photo 52 Raising the knee



Photo 53 Twisting motion



Photo 54 Extending the leg



Photo 55 Withdrawing the leg



Photo 56 Return to starting position

There are several important points to remember when we practice kekomi. As mentioned in the previous sections, chambering the leg properly by raising the knee, bending the knee of the supporting leg, the foot of the supporting leg firmly planted on the ground upon impact, and so on. According to my experience, one of the most important points is the twisting motion of the hips (see photos 14, 22, 46 and 53). **It will help to get the hips and the extending leg in same line (see photo 17, 23 and 54) and the kick will be stronger.**

### 5.5 An Example of a Good Yoko-geri-kekomi



## 6 Important Points to Remember

Important points to remember include the following:

- 1) The body should remain upright when chambering the leg;
- 2) In the chambered position, the knee is close to the upper body;
- 3) In the chambered position, the heel is almost touching the back of the thigh;
- 4) Proper hip twisting with thrusting motion of the leg;
- 5) The kicking leg must be in straight line with the hips;
- 6) The knee of the supporting leg should be bent;
- 7) The supporting foot should be firmly planted on the ground;
- 8) Upon impact, the striking foot should be parallel to the ground;
- 9) The return of the foot to the ground should be controlled.

## 7 Errors to Avoid

The most common errors that occur when practicing yoko-geri-kekomi include:

- 1) Moving the upper body or arms when initiating the kick (signals to the opponent);
- 2) Leaning the upper body forward when chambering the leg (upsets balance);
- 3) The knee of the chambered leg is too low (reduces effectiveness);
- 4) The knee of the supporting leg is straight rather than bent (upsets balance);
- 5) The heel of the supporting foot is raised when striking (upsets balance);
- 6) The striking foot is at an upward angle upon impact (reduces effectiveness);
- 7) The hips are not in line with the extending leg (reduces effectiveness);
- 8) The upper body is going in the opposite direction of the kicking leg (reduces effectiveness);
- 9) Letting the leg drop after the strike (hinders striking consecutively).

## 8 Conclusion

In closing, it should be remembered that yoko-geri-kekomi is a linear thrusting kick that combines the power of the twisting motion of the hips with the thrusting motion of the leg. To be effective, it must travel along the proper path using great speed and maximum kime. When executed, the knee of the supporting leg is bent, and the supporting foot is firmly planted on the ground. When it hits the target, the striking foot must be parallel to the ground and the ankle has to be tense to avoid injuries. It is a useful kick in sparring, since it can be aimed at different targets, including sideways, at close, medium and long range, and it can be combined with other arm and leg techniques.

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