

# Read the movements in your opponent's body and mind (Ito Harufumi)

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How can we seize the “Okori (striking at the moment your opponent starts moving)”?

Ito Sensei says, “You have to make both your opponent’s body and mind move.”

In order to read your opponent, it is necessary to learn the process.

Ito Harufumi, 8th Dan Hanshi



Born in Tokyo in 1941. After graduating from Kamakura Gakuen High School and

Takushoku University, he joined the Kanagawa Prefectural Police. He participated in the National Police Tournament, the National Sports Festival, the All Japan TOZAI-TAIKO (East VS. West Japan) KENDO TAIKAI, and the Meiji Mura Tournament. In 1978, he founded the Yobukan Ito Dojo in his home in Yokosuka City, Kanagawa Prefecture, where he continues to teach kendo as the director to this day.

The Okori is one of the great opportunities to strike. Many people may long for the opportunity to strike the opponent as they are about to emerge. However, in order to strike the Okori, one must pay attention to the steps prior to striking.

First of all, Seme is important as the first step to capture the Okori. Without Seme, there is no moving of the mind and action.

There are three types of Seme: Ki (spirit), Ken (sword) and Tai (body). In exchanges with an opponent, you must use these three types of Seme effectively and discern how the opponent will react to your Seme.

This is a very difficult part. Therefore, it is necessary to study the three opportunities to strike: the moment your opponent is about to move, the moment your opponent blocks your attack, and the moment after your opponent finishes their attack. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand the three kinds of openings: an opening in Kamae, opening in spirit, and opening in movement.

As for the opening in Kamae and opening in spirit, if you do not show any openings yourself, you will not be struck by your opponent. However, the opening in movement always appears when you strike. It is necessary to devise a way to prevent the opponent from seeing these openings as much as possible, so that they will not strike.

On the other hand, from the side of the attacker, it is impossible to cover the openings in movement. This is the point where you aim to hit the target, and then you will be able to strike the Okori.

There is a saying, “Strike the “s” in strike”. In this way, you can catch the moment when the opponent strikes. The key is to attack firmly, create an opening in the opponent’s movement and mind, and strike at that moment.

To do so, you must gain experience and anticipate what actions your opponent will make when you attack.

When you consider this kind of Seme, you can clearly see that “Okori” does not just refer to a simple movement. If you “hit the opponent when he moves,” without considering Seme, it is simply a game of speed.

Suppose you predicted that the opponent would come during the Seme, and they came out as you predicted, and their hands went up and you got an Ippon. In such a case, you would have been able to catch the opponent in the shortest time because you were able to move as quickly as you predicted. That would be the best way to strike the “Okori”.

### **To induce the opponent’s Okori.**

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In order to induce an opening in your opponent’s movement, you need to be creative with your Seme. To be more specific, it is a good idea to ask yourself, “If it were me, how would I deal with this situation?” If the opponent is a person of an equal level of ability, the way you would deal with the situation is generally what they will think about as well. First think of a situation in which you’d think “I have to hit or want to hit”.

This is an advanced technique. I often ask the people who attend my Dojo, “What kind of Seme would make you attack?” If you can imagine that, you will gradually learn to move your opponent.

If you simply attack and strike on your own, the opponent will not let you strike. In the process of attacking each other, you must thoroughly examine the opponent’s condition and predict his movements, and when you have all the information you need, attack boldly, let them come, and then strike.

This is probably the first approach to moving your opponent and capturing the Okori.

I happened to talk about the three kinds of openings at a training session a little while ago.

#### **Opening in Kamae**

An opening in Kamae, such as the tip of the Shinai being open or the tip of the Shinai being lowered.

#### **Opening in spirit**

The state of being surprised, afraid, suspicious, confused (the four sicknesses), being caught off guard, etc.

### **Opening in movement**

An opening caused by movement, such as when striking.

Think about the gaps in your movements with the three openings in mind. You should be able to find a way to attack that suits you.

Many people tend to think of Debana when they hear the word Okori, but there can be other cases as well.

The opportunity is when the opponent has not yet made a move. When a person makes a move, the brain first thinks, "I will move like this," then the body issues a command, and finally the action takes place. When the brain thinks, "I will strike," that is also Okori.





Sensing an opponent is about to move and striking Debana-men





Sensing an opponent is about to move and striking Debana-kote



The Kensen is open, and the Men and Tsuki can be

hit



The hands are up and the Kote and Tsuki can be hit.



The Kensen is down and the Kote, Tsuki, and Men can be hit

## Using two different methods of Seme

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If you can use the two different Seme of “attacking” and “drawing in,” you will have a great advantage.

It is also a good idea to stop your opponent from moving and strike or strike when your opponent attacks out of desperation. It is also important to slow down the attack when you have cornered your opponent and invite or draw them out.

There are several ways to create an opening in the opponent’s posture, such as using Harai, pressing down the opponent’s Shinai, or using Maki. However, when you try to break the opponent’s Kamae, you will move, which may be what your opponent was waiting for. Therefore, it is difficult to break someone’s Kamae.

If the opponent is a better player, it is not easy to break their spirit. However, kendo is a competition of strikes, so you have to get Ippon. In the end, the theory of kendo is to aim at openings in movement.

Why are masters and experts called so? It is because they are able to strike without showing any openings in their movement to their opponents.

The technique of not showing the opponent the openings in one’s movement is not only a matter of speed. It is also a matter of Seme.

In order to attack and utilize an opening, you need to make a prediction. It is very difficult to utilize an opening based on mere intuition. In fact, prediction in kendo is both prediction and not prediction, and refers to getting close to a state of certainty.

In other words, the step after prediction. Prediction is like a gamble in a sense that you don’t know whether it will come or not, but you can increase the probability of predicting right by sensing your opponent’s tendencies and way of thinking in the course of pressuring each other. It is difficult...

In order to identify your opponent’s tendencies, start with thinking, “What would I do if I were the one who was attacked? If I was attacked, I would probably back down, avoid their attack, or restrain them with my Shinai.”

In this way, you will be able to think, “If they attack like this, I will do this.” You will be able to predict with a high degree of certainty. It is important to make predictions

based on intuition, but that is not all there is to it. As you gain experience, the probability of your predictions will increase. If you get hit, it is important to understand why you got hit so that you can move on to the next step. Of course, successful experiences are also important. Both experiences can be used in the future.

## **Operate and draw out the opponent using dignity and demeanor**

I believe that ultimately, high Dan grades require Riai (rationality), dignity and style. As a judge for 8th Dan examinations, I have seen many examinees who seem to have neglected the idea of dignity and style.

In the past, I was taught that one should not do the Kendo of a footsoldier, but the Kendo of a feudal lord. Even in a single action, it is better to perform a dignified movement with feeling than to perform a movement without feeling, as it will be more effective in the subsequent Tachiai.

The most obvious example is the Yokozuna in Sumo (the highest rank in Sumo). The Yokozuna steps into the ring, gets in Sonkyo, and begins the match, but if you look closely at the movements, you will see that all the movements are made by the weak wrestlers first. The Yokozuna moves in a relatively relaxed manner, but the fullness of his energy can be felt even through video.

We want to do this in Kendo as well. From the first bow to Sonkyo, move with a slight delay, but when you stand up, you show your best posture and have the feeling of being ahead of your opponent. Don't let out Kiai first. Let your opponent go first, and then give Kiai with more enthusiasm than them. I always tell my students this.

It is important to have the feeling of "come on, if you don't come, I'll come". If you can create that feeling, you will naturally have dignity and style. Simply saying, "Here I go, here I go," does not have dignity and style. You need to have a strong sense of nobility, to the extent that you can say, "I am better than my opponent". This will also lead to strong Seme. If you practice, you will surely come close to this.

It was during my days as a student that I was taught about "feudal lord Kendo" and "Shogun Kendo". I was a fourth-year student at Takushoku University where I was taught by the late Koyama Asahide Sensei. At the time, I was captain and Taisho.

Koyama Sensei also told us about the competition in team tournaments, “In a tournament, the competition lasts until the Fukusho. The Taisho is the lord of the whole country, so they should show Kendo appropriate for that position.”

For this reason, ever since I was a student, I have always valued the feeling of representing my club when I was a Taisho. This continued when I entered the Kanagawa Prefectural Police Department. In the world of police Kendo, one has to value winning in competition, but I maintained that style of Kendo since I retired from the Tokuren and became an instructor (Ito sensei passed the 8th Dan examination at the age of 48, the minimum age to be eligible to take the examination at that time).

I hope that by keeping this in mind over the years, you will acquire dignity and style. Please do not cut corners in your efforts, no matter who you are dealing with. I would like you to show a respectable attitude even when dealing with children. That dignity and style will create a fullness of spirit and will help you capture Okori.

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