



Break It Down – Alf Del-Brocco – Wing Chun’s Inside ankle sweep

Why Should I Use It?

Wing Chun is well known for its devastating close quarter hand strikes. Amongst those who train in Wing Chun, there is also an extensive array of footwork, involving the training of moving ones body position forward, back, left and right. Contained within this footwork are Wing Chun’s low kicks – the ankle sweep being one of its champions. The misconception amongst many is that Wing Chun is very linear in its offense and defense. However, this couldn’t be further from the truth. Wing Chun footwork teaches a practitioner to move and defend a 360 degree zone. The inability to not be able to maintain ones balance or effectively cover a radius of 360 degrees could leave a student of the martial arts susceptible to being taken down in a multiple opponent scenario, especially from behind or the side. Thus, footwork training involves maintaining a 50 / 50 weight displacement over both legs. Obviously, a shift in weight displacement will occur when delivering hand strikes, leg kicks or intercepting, deflecting or striking secondary targets (i.e. hands or feet). But once executed, coming back to a 50 / 50 balance is imperative in order to continue moving in any direction as a scenario may unfold and in order to ‘reload’ or ‘re-chamber’ your strike or kick.

The Wing Chun system trains several sweeps, leg checks and low kicks. It also trains several high kicks, that is, kicks above the waist. However, in its logic, principles and strategies, a Wing Chun practitioner would prefer not to sacrifice his speed or compromise his balance by kicking above the waist in a self-defence or multiple opponent scenario. This leaves an array of ankle kicks, foot locks, reverse and hooking sweeps, not to mention knee strikes – all kept and trained at a boxing to stand up clinching range. The ankle sweep is very effective in ‘upsetting’ the balance of your opponent, leaving him in a ‘recovery mode’ unable to effectively defend or strike while you go about ‘finishing’ or resolving the situation.

Wing Chun’s low inside ankle sweep is executed fast and with devastating effectiveness and can be employed by any student of the martial arts.

When & How Should I Use It?

The ankle sweep needs to be executed at a close range. By close, we refer to the clinching range of combat. The Wing Chun system primarily uses the boxing and clinching range to nullify an adversary. The other two ranges are kicking range, the range of combat outside boxing range where kicking strikes at waist level or above are used and ground-fighting range where the situation finds itself on the floor.

As many 'street' confrontations can and do start very close, like someone right up 'in your face', the ability to effectively use low kicks without sacrificing your balance, and by this I refer to finding yourself on the floor with your adversary, is an integral part of the Wing Chun combat system. It is used to primarily put your opponent in a compromising position and to prevent yourself from going to the ground, especially when a confrontation starts very close. After all, we really do not want to find ourselves on the ground in a multiple opponent scenario.

The flat of your foot is used (see pic.1) and this can also depend on the footwear you may find yourself in. Assuming that the footwear has good grip, but not a lot of ankle support, the flat of the foot is used. Due to the instability of the ankle from a normal stand up position, the foot needs to be turned with your sole of the shoe the striking area used. With footwear that may support the ankle, the sole of the footwear is still used, however, I suggest 'testing' your 'kicking or working' boots out beforehand finding if the boot restricts your ability to execute the strike. An adjustment in the shoelaces may be all that is required to gain the right angle.

What Are the Targets?

The primary target from a 'cross-leg' position, that is 'orthodox Vs orthodox' or 'southpaw Vs southpaw' is the inside of your opponents ankle with your lead foot. From a 'parallel-leg' position, that is 'orthodox Vs southpaw' and visa-versa, set-up strikes can be used to move oneself into position, however, the diversity of Wing Chun's other low kick arsenal would compensate for the extra work to get into the most favorable position. Striking above the ankle to the inside of the leg and as high up as the inside of the knee are other options. As with all Chinese martial arts system, the understanding of and attacking the acupuncture meridians in order to 'drain' energy and set-up Dim Mak strikes, are their specialty. There are 6 meridians running from the hands and 6 meridians running from the feet. All meridians can be traced to have an influence over the organs and bowels within the body, and striking specific points at a certain time of day and season is not a Hollywood fairytale. The junction points or 'major' crossover stations for the meridians can be found around the ankles, knees, wrists and elbows. The Spleen meridian can be found running up the inside of the leg along with the Liver, Gall Bladder, Stomach, Kidney and Bladder meridians also emanating from the feet.

How Do I Execute It?

The set-up of any leg attack, be it a kick or sweep, must be in combination with hand strikes or clinching and grabbing movements. Too often I see students and fighters trying to deliver a low kick from either too far away giving their opponent time to see and react to the attack or as a 'first' movement, again having their opponent react to the initial move. Effective sweeps and leg attacks are best employed while the adversary is being subject to a 'raining' of hand combinations forearm and elbow attacks. This would pre-occupy the adversary with defending himself, that is, protecting his head and torso, leaving his brain, eyesight and 'touch reflexes' unable to deal with an effective ankle sweep or leg attack delivered simultaneously or in combinations.

As a Wing Chun practitioner would choose to use the ankle attack to forcibly shift his opponents weight onto one leg, it is used in conjunction with Wing Chun's hand arsenal, be it a forearm strike to the side of the neck or a Wing Chun Larp Sao grabbing movement to the adversary's neck or arms. The result from the execution of the ankle attack will also very much depend on the physical stature of the adversary and the surface one may find oneself on. The ankle attack can have as 'little' effect as simply momentarily having your opponents weight shift onto his lead leg – effective now in following up with other low kicks e.g. front heel kick or low round kick to the inside of the knee in combination with palm or punches to the head, or with the result having your adversary fall to the floor – leaving them open to palm and forearm strikes from above or knee and shin kicks from yourself.

How Do I Train It?

The Wing Chun System uses a combination of training drills and training apparatus to train the low sweeps and kicks. The Wing Chun Wooden Dummy has specific sequences of movement to practice the ankle sweep. Double Arm Chi Sao (Sticky Arms) training is another medium extensively used along with specific Wing Chun Chi Gerk (Sticky Legs) training. Simulated combat scenarios in a controlled environment with a compliant training partner are a definite 'must do'. With a real-training partner simulating hypothetical offensive and defensive drills, a student will quickly learn to understand the range and 'force' needed to successfully use an ankle sweep. A heavy bag (6 foot) can also be used and as the weight of a heavy bag is at the bottom primarily, makes for good conditioning.

Aside from 'traditional' training drills and aides, the diligent practitioner should train with the footwear they would use on a daily basis, and the footwear they would use as a recreational or work footwear e.g. security guard in boots etc. While we may initially train bare foot or with martial arts type footwear in a controlled environment, nothing beats the familiarity with training in 'street wear'.

Who Else Uses It?

The Southern Styles of Chinese Martial Arts are quite adept with their variety of low kicks and sweeps. I have also seen Brazilian Ju Jitsu fighters successfully use the ankle sweep at clinching range to get their opponent to the floor.

How Does Alf Use It?

Obviously as an instructor, the extensive hand and leg drills are taught and trained every day. At an advanced level of training, Wing Chun's Dummy, Chi Sao & Chi Gerk drills are practiced extensively. The ankle sweep was very useful in my experiences as a bouncer on the door in some of Sydney's most frequented nightclubs and pubs. Often situations would arise with someone 'standing in your face' and management wanted them removed from the premises any which way. A quick inside ankle strike followed simultaneously with either grabbing and control restraints or hand strikes (not sure you can do this these days within the security industry?) had the 'aggressor' being quickly removed or escorted from the premises. Being aware of the

surface you are standing on is also very, very important. Thus the use of an inside ankle strike does not adversely affect or compromise your balance. My favorite combination strike is a forearm to the side of the neck (Stomach 9) in conjunction with the ankle sweep followed by multiple Wing Chun palm strikes to the side of the face and head. They have never, ever gotten back up from this combo!