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An article by Lee Morrison

Defining the Default position



I'd like to talk a little bit about the use of *the default position*, carried on the back of what's often referred to as our *natural flinch response*;

let me explain what I mean by that. First of all I am talking from a situational perspective, where we have found ourselves in a confrontational

sense, reacting to something that someone is either doing or in the midst of doing to us. In other words we are defending, which as we all know

is never the ideal, but if initiative is lost to the other guy then we must have a contingency plan in order to regain that said initiative ASAP. The

default response refers to a moment in time during a physical assault, where we employ a response that will act as a transition between, limiting the damage inflicted upon us and actually regaining the initiative in one big hurry.

Notice that I said *limiting the damage* as oppose to offering

Complete protection which of course, no default can guarantee.

During the course of this article I am going to refer to comments, advice and physicality's that relate to this specific topic from a variety of my

peers, people who I have studied with, listened to, read about and observe and all whose opinions I respect. Basically many of the top people

within our field have, as I am fond of saying, *come to similar conclusions via similar experience*. We all may employ a slightly different slant on

the way we teach in a technical sense, but the same bedrock principles remain as a constant. In short we all have the same point to make.

One of the early pioneers of modern-day Combatives was *Tony Blauer* whose conceptual idea of employing an offensively defensive response

against an aggressor's encroachment be it an attempted shove or any kind of haymaking/angular attack, working off the back of our natural

instinct to flinch and cover.

The problem with the way in which we employ this flinching instinct in a natural primal sense, is really quite negative and inadequate from a Combative point of view. Naturally we are inclined to drop the head and raise the arms to cover the same, (*which is considered the general*

of the body) all good so far, but in addition to this we also tend to move and turn away from the source of agitation greatly compromising

our base and balance, whilst pulling a stupid squinty facial expression. Out of all of these negative aspects, it is the compromised balance and

moving back, thereby giving the aggressor the room he needs to continue the assault, not to mention moving to the most dangerous part

of the weapon be it a fist impact tool or whatever, where it has now accumulated maximum velocity and power; that is really where the real

danger lies.

The Natural Flinch:

As you can see, the natural flinch response usually involves a massive compromise to your base and structure, all your weight on the back foot,

turning laterally with the feet and body, turning the head and looking away from the stimulus as we distort our visual sense by squinting, in

some cases even shutting the eyes. Finally moving back to a point where the weapon has gained its maximum velocity, giving the aggressor

room to continue the assault.



Base and structure severely compromised, leaving you in too negative a position to respond effectively.

Tony Blauer strived to rectify this problem by fusing this natural flinch response, onto the back of the trained motor action of driving forward

with a spear like formation of the arms, (*hence the term for the acronym S.P.E.A.R*) that jams the aggressor's encroachment in an offensive

way, placing you at Close Quarters for the employment of immediate follow up tools to end the engagement. This was a good platform from

which sound tactics have spawned via like-minded people. If you look how far back Blauer was actually developing this kind of stuff (*early 80's*)

we should all agree that he was way ahead of everyone else at the time.



Tony Blauer was an early pioneer of the default/flinch response.

Of course like most ideas there are pro's and con's. The fact remains that a trained response is one thing and a primal instinctive response is

another. I tend to agree with Southnarc when he said *'I don't think that you can ever truly; totally over-ride the natural flinch response if you are*

taken completely by surprise.' As an example; if you turn a corner tight and blind, *(something that no good SP practitioner should ever find*

themselves doing) at the exact moment someone starts to swing a bat at your head, then you will most likely raise your hands lean back,

turn away pull a silly face and get clobbered. The conclusion to that example is that you must have some kind of INCLINATION that something

is about to happen. Whether you catch a glimpse of something out of the corner of your eye, or you pick up on a body language cue such

as pull back of the arm/shoulder, grimace of the face whatever, anything that indicates that something is coming at your head in one big

hurry. This is inclination and let's face it, if we are aware of the approach and we see it coming, as we should then we would employ some

kind of situational control, *(fence)* in order to either *defuse* or if need be, *pre-empt* the situation this is our *game plan*

and the fact that we

have put up any kind of fence in the first place, is because we have an INCLINATION that there could be a problem. We know that any assault

on our person could be immanent. It is under such circumstances that any default response could be brought into play, if the aggressor seizes

initiative.



As we can see here; if inclination is present, then the transition to an immediate emergency cover (regardless of choice) can be obtained in a heart beat, followed of course by a just as immediate counter offensive.

Here our hands are already up and higher than his and the transition to covering and crashing forward is only a heart beat away. This is where

the natural instinct to flinch can marry up with the trained response of the default position, regardless of your favoured method. Now in the

21st century we are often spoilt for choice, this can be a good and a bad thing, the principle of *Hick's law* can present itself in the company

of *Murphy's luck* and if you have too many choices during your moment of need, then *log jam* will certainly cut into your reaction time. Like

I said in the beginning of this article all good Combative instructors share commonality. We are all pushing the same point, under the

circumstance of lost initiative cover your head, crash forward and counter from Close quarters, with an offensive that will take out his entire

ancestry and blood line. Any default cover is for that moment in time, to limit damage and take the fight back to him period. To quote

Southnarc again, *'it is not a place you want to hang out!'* Getting back to choice, there are a number of different ways that we can adopt

a default position, in my opinion and it is just that an opinion, there is no better or best way, just what's preferred and in my case what has

proved to work for me, on numerous occasions under pressure. So let's take a look at some of what's out there. Let's look at some of the

choices and their sources then place what you decide to practice, into the area of choice, trial and error and natural fit.

The primary function of any default position:

Input here again, comes from Southnarc; No default position will prevent you from getting hit, its objective is damage limitation during the

transition from lost initiative to regaining the upper hand. What the default should do **first** is prevent you from getting knocked down or

knocked over. If you're on the ground you are vulnerable and before any chance of escape is possible, you must first regain your feet which

is easier said than done. The **second** thing it should do is to prevent you from getting knocked out, to do so it should offer a fair degree of

protection and cover to the main knock out points on the head, i.e. the temples, the chin/jaw or button and the sides of the neck. Damage

can be pretty much sustained at-least temporarily, else where on the head i.e. nose, teeth etc, without knocking you out unless of course,

you let it stop you psychologically, which shouldn't happen if mindset is in place. If the default covers the above criteria then it's a valid tool

in my book.

Before we start ask yourself the following questions:

Can I use this response standing/against a wall?

Can I use it seated or rising from a seated position?

Can I use off my back or from my guard?

Will the same cover offer me some degree of protection, from both a straight-line and angular shot?

How about attempted grab or encroachment?

What about a leg/waist tackle?



Here we can see the cover employed from both a standing and seated ambush perspective; in both examples we can present an

adequate barrier between the offensive stimulus

and what we need to protect i.e. *our noggin!*



Here we can see the cover being used from the ground. Cover your head and brace your feet close to your back side, in preparation to

thrust explosively upward with your hips to buck
your opponent forward after alternate elbow strikes into the groin.

Where possible we want one non-diagnostic response that with help with all of these eventualities, as in that moment, there is no time to

diagnose what's coming. Again none of these, are positions that I want to get caught in none than the less they are feasible scenarios, that

my support system or in this case, my default should be able to cope with. Now let's take a look at some of the various methods practiced

within the Modern Combatives fraternity. In some examples the differences are slight, in others they are more obvious in all variations the

commonality that we've talked about is glaringly present; check it out.

The Spear:



Tony Blauer jamming forward encroachment with the Spear; same from the front and jamming an angular attack, just drop the head raise the arms and blast forward.

The SPEAR is basically a wedge shape, that is driven forward and into an aggressor's encroachment, be it an angular

assault, an attempted attachment or just sudden forward pressure. The term 'Spear' was coined due to the similarity to the geometrical shape of a spear head and the structure of the arms, as the tool is employed. This diamond formation of the

forearms in relation to the upper arms offers an extremely strong structure that can stunt a sudden encroachment if thrown into

the chest/neck area, as well as jam any kind of angular assault if employed before momentum is gained. Personally I find

the spear good for the above, but less functional for any kind of straight line or combination attack. The open extension of

the arms compared to a tighter and more compact cover doesn't really offer me personally, the confidence of the latter.

Sound tactic though, again drop the head raise the arms to cover, as you drive in with forward pressure. Again works well off

the fence, making a fast transition to cover as long as inclination is in place, once again Tony Blauer is to be commended for

his early use and development of such a concept. Tony was developing this stuff when most of us were still locked into the

more traditional way of thinking. The Spear was a good power base from which similar ideas and tactics have developed.

The Shield:



Richard Ryan preventing forward encroachment via the shield, commonality to any tight cover that you employ whilst moving in, is the immediate follow up potential; here Ryan is straight into the aggressor's face off the cover of his arms. The last picture offers an overhead view covering a hook line.

Richard Ryan of Dynamic Combat employs a similar method he calls the shield. His idea comes from updating an old concept.

To quote Richard who says; *"since ancient time's men have utilised shields to form a blockade against their opponent's*

weapons, to ram and crush through their defences and counter attack". The concept of the shield is the same; protect your

vitals from attack, by employing a structure for the assailant to beat on, slam or strike against without being able to penetrate.

Of course this falls in line with the whole idea of the default; *cover crash and counter*. Ryan like the rest of us, only suggests the

use of the shield as an emergency response under the circumstances of lost initiative, and then only for as long as it takes to

employ an immediate counter offensive. I agree with Ryan on the point where he says; *"Stay tight and compact,*

the greatest danger in shielding is extending your limbs away from your head. This will open you up to a variety of attacks and

nullify the shield process." Like any default response it should only be used as a momentary cover to help maintain your ability

to see, breathe and think before making your escape or countering. www.dynamiccombat.com

The Crazy Monkey:



The hands constantly move to protect the head and face from a multiple punching attack. The front of your forearms and elbows deal with

any frontal straight punch, while the sides of either outer arm can be closed tight to cover any angular (hook line) punches from the side.

In reality you want to close him down after one or two punches are taken on the arms;

and finish it from the clinch.

Full credit for this method goes out to excellent MMA coach, Rodney King. Rodney developed this (*in my opinion and*

experience) extremely functional method, from his active experience from working the doors, before taking the concept into

the MMA arena. The position for the CM is made by placing both palms on the crown of your head, leaving your forearms

and elbows covering your face and chin. This position is never static but constantly moving and covering the entire

head/facial area just like an exaggerated motion of washing your hair, as you slip your body and move your head to the left

and right, to present a harder to hit moving target. A very similar cover was shown to me some years ago by one of my

instructor's the late Peter Robins, back then it was described as the 'wash your hair cover' and we would often practice

it in multiple assailant/crowd drills, just cover up, keep moving and blast through a gap in the simulated gang/crowd.



As the aggressor throws punches strive to destroy his fists with your pointed elbows as you dive through his space and guard and clinch onto his neck.



From here get inside to clinch the neck and finish with multiple knees to the groin and thighs; follow up as appropriate.

Additional note:

A good way to practice is to have a partner wearing bag gloves, throw multiple punches at your head as you stand with your back to a wall.

It is important to only go forward as you cover and fend, moving back gives your opponent room to operate and develop power. So by

training with your back to the wall, the only way you can go is forward. Practice the drill for say 20 seconds then close him down into a clinch.

We practice it like this in the beginning for one reason only; it will help you to develop composure to deal with this kind of multiple punching

attack. In reality you would go for the close down as soon as the attack starts. Whether we are fending multiple punches from a skilled boxer

or a wind milling Neanderthal the response is the same. Cover your head with your hands and arms, presenting your opponent with only the

points of your elbows and forearms to hit and drive forward to close him down as soon as the assault starts, cover, *crash and counter*.



The CM cover to a momentary rapid flurry of hands, offers good damage limitation and a quick close down to Close Quarters where I can quickly regain initiative.

The Cow-catcher:



The Cow-catcher employed as it would be, with impact; against the Bullet man suit. You can see the sudden jolting effect and the space created by the simultaneous thrust of both palms.

This method developed by Lee Aldridge of New Mexico sticks to the same commonality that we've looked at so far, work

off the flinch via some kind of inclination. Dropping the head as you raise the arms, only this time the arms are extended as you

shove hard with both palms into the high-line. The object seems to be to create space and distance between you and the

would-be aggressor, which may allow you the opportunity to facilitate an escape and/or access a weapon/firearm etc

where applicable. Out of all the arms extended type variations, I'd probable go with this one. I particularly like the idea of an immediate response to create space in order to access a weapon, improvised or otherwise. www.fightingconcepts.com

The O'Neill cover:

This is another technique that can be incorporated into our natural flinch response. This was originally part of the O'Neill system

ala Dermot 'Pat' O'Neill, who was an instructor in Shanghai under Fairbain and again later in WWII. Although the skill was

employed by O'Neill more as an offensive attack it also lends itself well as a default position. It brings into play the same drop

of the head whilst raising your arms for cover, as you step deeply into your opponent, jamming his forward offensive.

The difference this time is that you now hold your arms in a horizontal formation one on top of the other in front of your face.

Make a small gap so that you can look between your arms as you drive forward, spiking your opponent in the throat with the

top forearm/elbow and in the chest area with the other or somewhere approximate to that area. From here a natural follow

up is to drive through and upward into his groin with a rear knee strike as you walk violently through him.



This is the arm and body position for the O'Neill cover and here is the cover in application; as you perceive your aggressor's intent, just drop

your centre of gravity and drive through your aggressor with the cover, from here walk violently through him with knee strikes to his low line

striving to literally blow out his base.

The spiked elbow cover:

This is the method depicted in a lot of Kelly McCann's tapes it is a great tool to use if someone throws any kind of angular

attack or if the individual simply attempts to encroach on your space. All you are going to do from here is step in with a falling

drop step action and spike him in the chest area with the point of your elbow. This again fits in with our

flinch response in as

much that the head is dropped, whilst still keeping your aggressor in view as the hands come up to protect the face and

neck. The spiked elbow arm is brought up high into centre line and your opposite hand is open and in front of your face as a

monitor.



What is most probable from here is that as your opponent is speared in the chest, he will be knocked back from the strike, in

pain with the wind knocked right out of him. But if some reason he is still on his feet the follow up potential is massive. To

practice this drill have your partner hold a padded shield flat against his chest, and simply fall forward into the pad impacting

with the point of your elbow and your body weight behind it. From here the progression is to have your partner close on you

with increasing force and power, then you will realise that the bigger the guy is and the harder he comes at you the more your

elbow will hurt him as it impacts his centre of body mass. Take the progression through all stages, from compliancy to an all out

attack with compliancy removed, really pressure test it. If we must react defensively because we have been caught slightly

off guard, then the best course of action is to be defensively offensive and the spiked elbow offers just what we need for that

purpose. It can also be employed against a straight line shot by shifting to your flank slightly to cover the shot, followed by

clearing the attack limb and throwing an immediate counter.



Here it is in application. Drop slightly as you cover the head and move inside to jam the attack. Continue instantly with a clinching elbow

strike into the face following up as needed.

The Fend drill:

The Fend was developed through the trial and error of pressure testing, by CQB Services and Personal defence solutions

instructor Simon Squires and a mutual friend of ours Brian from South Africa. Here was a classic example of two lads looking for

something that would stand up to a relentless continuous punching attack.



Here CQB instructor Si Squires demos the fend position.

The Fend is what they come up with and it certainly offers some merit. Personally I find the position a little static and I have

found that novice students tend to stand still with it, shut their eyes and hope for the best, rather than

looking to gain composure.

Such a problem only requires practice and experience to overcome so I certainly wouldn't score that as a point against it.

Good tactic provides a good tight cover from standing, seated and grounded ambush attacks. Here we see it employed to

fend a multiple punching attack. Regardless of whether the attack is from a skilled boxer or a wind milling Neanderthal; the

response is the same, cover your head with your hands and arms presenting your opponent with only the points of your elbows

to hit. Drive forward to close him down as soon as the assault starts then get inside to clinch and employ the appropriate follow

ups. www.personaldefencesolutions.com



Standing cover and fend to a multiple punching attack whilst blasting forward to close down and clinch etc.

The Keysi method:

The Keysi system is an off-shoot from the JKD concepts approach, though recognised as a respectable system in its own right.

They employ an array of tight elbow covers pretty much in line with what we've seen so far. From such cover an immediate

counter is employed using a variety of natural bodily tools, including hammer-fist strikes and punching skills

from boxing range

and close quarters.



Keysi man Andy Norman demonstrates one cover position from his art, and me depicting a couple of others, again from the Keysi system.

Notice the last picture and its similarity to the O'Neill position of some 60 plus years earlier.

Default/Southnarc: www.shivworks.com



Southnarc showing the Default Position and the importance of leading with points and edges.

This is basically an in-fight contingency plan to employ, should you lose initiative and find yourself now, having to negotiate an

aggressor's attack. This is what SN refers to as an "oh shit! Moment" The cover protects your temples, jaw hinges and the sides

of your neck, which are the most likely knock out points. The chin is less vulnerable due to the fact that

you have created a

tight cage around your head thereby supporting the head and limiting the brain shake via impact. Priority lies in keeping the

hips square and orientated forward with the pelvic girdle back. "Nose over toes" is the sought after position this goes a long

way toward preventing you from being bowled over, whilst providing you with traction for your own forward drive. That

combined with caging your head provides a fair degree of cover from in-coming blows regardless if they are thrown left or

right, angular or linear, single or multiple.



SN jamming forward encroachment; also employing a Fist helmet to feel the energy of an immediate follow up in this case elbow strikes.

SN default against a straight-line attack, leading with points and edges the straight punch slides over the top.

Default/Mick Coup:



MC's long and short default cover; demonstrated here as a counter clinch and wall crash.

Mick Coup's default cover employs a slightly elongated arm position, along with square hips, shoulders ahead of the hips for

stability. Mick likes to employ this cover under the circumstances of lost initiative before launching an immediate offensive, or

as he calls it *"hitting the go like F**k switch"* Again commonality, under certain conditions Mick will also employ a tighter and

more compact cover if circumstances dictate such a need.

The Armadillo boxing guard:



The Combative sport of Boxing has also employed a similar tactic for years the classic Armadillo guard or cross-arm cover has

been used effectively, from the days of Bob Fitzsimmons to Jo Frazier. This was particularly suited to a shorter boxer who was

likely to be subjected to uppercuts from a taller opponent, or just as a means to cover from an on-slaught of punches, or when

a boxer was faced with a two handed attack that threatens to overwhelm him unless he covers up. Covering up is what we

will do instinctively and the above tactic offers the best means to do that, in a ring environment. Aspiring young boxers should

find a cover that best suits their body type for such a time when they need it. The same can be seen with the use of the Crazy

Monkey, within the realms of MMA. Although, this is of course combat sport orientated and a very different environment to the

street, commonality is the same, in that any type of cover employed is a brief, temporary defensive measure that enables

damage limitation, whilst awaiting the opportunity to counter and retake the initiative. A means to keep composure and blast

back at the first opportunity.

Conclusion:

As you can see spoilt for choice, all probably come with their own set of pros and cons that remain to be found during the acid

test of training. My suggestion is find one that suits you and drill it to exhaustion, take the progression up to having a partner with

boxing gloves and bad intentions, really trying to knock you out then you'll know and be confident. Once there place it in the

tool box of your support system where it belongs. Bottom line is as always, if it's going to get physical then, you be the feeder.

You take the initiative by being first, if you need to employ any default use it offensively, aiming to shut the aggressor down

straight away, don't give him room and don't let him work his game just **cover, crash** and **counter**.

Peace LM