



Vitali shown in typical postures; at far left, he round kicks, below he retreats before David Deaton, while at right, he sticks a rival Bobby Tucker with a side kick. Vitali says he enjoys frustrating his opponents.



go, "Wait a minute, I've always gotten points for that." Now, with the equipment I had to aim and focus a kick with precision and focus to somebody's vital area, actually timing it and putting it right where you wanted. There's more satisfaction in that. And from there, you can learn to master the technique. There are very few fighters out there with the correct focus, timing and snap.

**What sorts of changes are happening in karate because of the increased use of equipment?**

Karate has been a matter of hands for a long time, but right now, because of the emergence of the equipment, we're developing some fantastic kickers. It's just so much easier to be a heavy puncher without the equipment. You learn how to block kicks, and rather than spending the necessary hours developing kicks on your own, you spend the time on punching. It was like Eddie "Flash" Newman said in that article you published on him. I mean I was laughing. He was saying that, "Kicks don't work out here," (meaning Southern California), but I hit him with eight kicks when I fought him. If you really take the trouble to become proficient with your kicks, you have what I call a long range weapon. And that greater range is going to give you the advantage. At six feet and 150 pounds, I'm living proof of it. If I deserve to be number one, and I think I do, it is because of my kicks.

**Let's go back to your fight with Robert Harris at this year's Battle of Atlanta. You got behind early in the match, and then, about five seconds after the judges had awarded him the point, you jumped across his guard and hit him with the backfist, evening the score. A lot of people don't believe in that kind of technique and will tell you that it has no power.**

I love to hear that. I remember the same arguments when the Koreans were presenting that to Joe Lewis back in the 70s. They were saying that it was not a good tournament

technique, but Lewis was proving that a backfist and a sidekick is an excellent combination by beating everyone in sight. I myself don't like to see it thrown fully extended or with an open hand. But when you close the hand up and pop it in there right, it's gonna do the job. And once I get them respecting my backfist, then my fakes will work. They're going to raise their arms, and let me throw my side kick, which I'm better at anyway. I've fought Robert Harris now four times. Three or four years ago he beat me. But I've beat him three times in a row now.

**He remembered that you'd fought three times, saying the first time he beat you, the second two, you won.**

I don't make mistakes when I talk about figures. It was two Battles of Atlanta and one Atlanta Pro-Am. And I've got all three films to back it up. As a matter of fact, in all three, they were bouts for Grand Champion, and in all three I fought James White right before I fought Robert Harris. Either that, or I fought Harris before White. Those guys are fantastic fighters, though. People around the country just don't realize how fast those guys are. But for two years down here now, I've been kind of like the undisputed regional title holder because I keep beating the guys who are contenders.

**You recently lost to Jimmy Tabares, I hear.**

That was a one-minute fight, not a two-minute. And it was in a team fight where you got two points for any kick, even kicks to the groin. And I had lost that afternoon already in individual competition. With Tabares the fight just went by too quickly. All five team members fought for one minute. When I beat Tabares down here in Atlanta that was a two-minute match. And I prefer the longer period.

**People often seem to score the first technique on you.**

Yes, sometimes they do, because I'm the type of fighter who is very cautious at first. But once I drop a point, very seldom will you see me stay behind for long. I believe to myself