



by **Three Time National Karate Champion Keith Vitali**

There are many reasons why tournament karate is rising in popularity in the 90's, but if you had to list one, it could easily be the dynamic kicks on the current circuit. Point fighting has always had a reputation of being quick and exciting, but with this new era of fighters we are seeing more flashy kicks than ever before.

One nationally rated fighter on the tournament circuit who specializes in a wide variety of explosive kicks is Brian Ruth, who happens to be starring alongside of me as "Night Stalker" in the feature film "SuperFights." One of his favorite moves is to pick up his back leg and simply hold it extended fully over his head and at the right time, propel it towards his opponent. What makes this move successful is that he has the ability to pull or lunge on his supporting foot

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towards his opponent while his other leg is still extended. Just the fact that someone has the technical skill and flexibility to attempt this move can be very intimidating, but in reality it's simple to defend against.

Of course I make it sound easier than it actually is, but try a few of these counter moves if you're ever in this situation with an extended foot ready to fall on your head.

First, do nothing. Just stand there until they put their foot down. If they don't have the ability to lunge in your direction and can only raise their leg, then the only way they can score on you is when you move into their range. Simply stand your ground and smile at your opponent until they drop their leg.

If they have the ability of a Brian Ruth, and can chase you with their foot in the air, then try moving in a lateral direction instead of backing up. Once you side step your opponent, you'll find that your opponent has no choice but to simply drop his or her leg.

Both of these simple strategies work against a fighter who holds his/her leg high in the air; but I would rather see

you discourage your opponent from ever attempting this technique again by recommending that you execute a dynamic jump spinning back kick in their direction about belt high. They'll have to put their foot down and get out of the way.

If that doesn't discourage them, then hold out your side kick about belt high, and keep it aimed at your opponent for as long as they have their foot up in the air. There's nothing he can do—it's impossible for your opponent to do anything with your leg in the air.

What makes Brian such a dominant fighter is that he understands the psychology of intimidating his opponents with his flashy kicks. Brian can score with this technique on occasion, but the real deception is that he's setting his opponent up for a left hand body punch. Of course, a left hand body punch is the last thing on your mind when you see your opponent with his foot in the air.

In the next columns, we will discuss ways to defend against other flashy techniques. They look intimidating, but there are simple ways to defend against them that will surprise you.

See you soon.

