

# STRIKING FROM THE GUARD

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## ABSTRACT

“Mixed Martial Arts” (MMA) has evolved to the point where being caught inside your opponents guard or catching your opponent in your guard often results in a stalemate. This stalemate has come about by fighters being better skilled at avoiding strikes (while lying flat on their back) and fighters being better skilled in submission (especially avoiding submissions). Fortunately through the evolution of MMA, the old days of “lay and pray” have gone, no longer do we see an entire fight or a near entire fight, fought from the guard position where fighters do little more than survive. Recent rule changes in most MMA events result in fighters going back to the stand-up position if there is a lack of action and in some MMA events such as “Pride”, in addition fighters going back to the stand-up position, penalty cards resulting in a 10% loss of pay are also issued.

The objective of this article is to look at striking from a scientific point of view, to assist you in maximising your striking potential from the guard (both offensively & defensively) and increase the chances of you slowing down or stopping your opponent.

## STRIKING TECHNIQUES

**Clenched Fist:** - The objective of striking with a clenched fist is to align the hand so the largest two knuckles (the knuckles of the first & second finger) make contact with the target area.



**Hammer Fist:** - Although seldom used in MMA, the hammer fist has been scientifically proven to deliver more force than a clenched fist.



**Downward Elbow:** - The striking region of a downward elbow is quite small and pointed compared to most other strikes, which can result in either a deep penetrating strike or a strike that cuts with ease.



**Through Elbow:** - The through elbow utilises a short lever, which is useful when your opponent is in close range.



**Palm Heel:** - Although there are limited opportunities to use a palm heel strike in MMA, the palm heel strike can be quite effective and is often the strike of choice for mixed martial artists when striking an opponent caught in their guard.



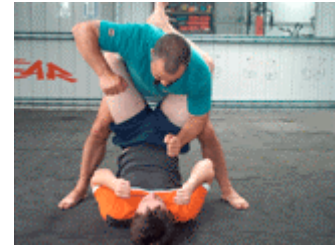
## POSTURING



A



B



C

Posturing is how the striker positions themselves when trapped in their opponent's guard.

In photo A the striker postures low to avoid submissions.

In photo B the striker postures high to create distance to throw strikes

In photo C the striker postures high then gets to their feet to either create distance to throw strikes and/or stack their opponent.

## STRIKING SPECIFIC TARGET AREAS

In this section we are going to look at your more venerable target areas, along with specific strikes that are best suited to cause maximal damage to each target area.

### TARGETING THE HEAD AND FACIAL AREA FROM INSIDE YOUR OPPONENTS GUARD

The head and facial areas are always good targets, significant damage to these areas can result in

- 1) A straight knockout (KO)
- 2) A technical knockout (TKO), the fight being stopped due to injuries such as
  - a) Cuts and excessive bleeding (especially if the blood flow obscures the fighters vision).
  - b) Loss of vision due to injuries to the eyes (eg detached retina).
  - c) Loss of hearing due to damage to the eardrum.
  - d) Fractures and/or dislocations to the jaw, etc.
- 3) A TKO, the fight being stopped due to the fighter being unable to effectively defend against strikes to the head and face region.
- 4) Significant pain (which makes it harder for the fighter to concentrate) as a result of bone fractures, bone bruising, welts, broken or knocked out teeth etc.

### Clenched Fist

To maximise striking power with a clenched fist, the striker needs to posture high to create distance, then strike down at their opponent.

Facial target areas are

- 1) The nose.
- 2) The cheek bones.
- 3) The jaw.
- 4) The eyebrows.

## Hammer Fist

When striking with a hammer fist, the striker can either posture low or posture high to create distance.

Facial target areas are

- 1) The tip of the jaw.
- 2) The nose.

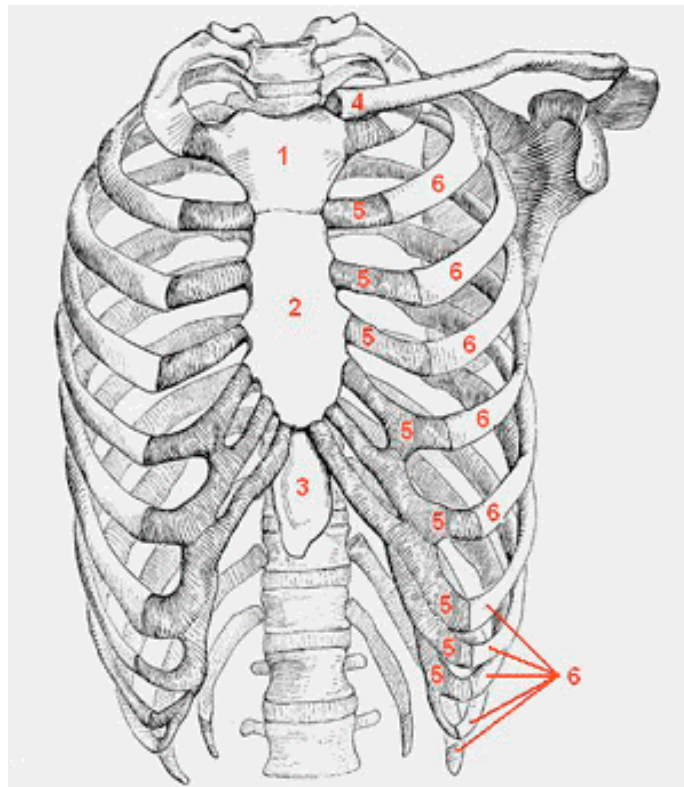
## Through Elbow

When striking the facial area with a through elbow, the striker needs to posture high, get to their feet, then stack their opponent, which will bring the striker into range to target the facial area.

Facial target areas are

- 1) The jaw.
- 2) The cheek bone.
- 3) The eyebrows

## TARGETING THE TRUNK FROM INSIDE YOUR OPPONENTS GUARD



- 1** Munubrium
- 2** Gladioulus
- 3** Xiphoid Process
- 4** Clavicle
- 5** Costal Cartilages
- 6** Ribs

## The Sternum

The sternum is a flat narrow bone made up of three sections, located in the centre of the chest.

- 1) The first section the Manubrium, is located at the top of the sternum.
- 2) The second section the Gladiolus, is located in the centre
- 3) The third section the Xiphoid Process, is located at the bottom of the sternum

These three sections that make up the sternum are all joined together by cartilage. Protruding laterally from both sides of the sternum are sections of cartilage known as the "Costal Cartilages", the role of the Costal Cartilages are to join the ribs to the sternum and allow for some elasticity of the ribcage. The cartilage joints of the sternum and the Costal Cartilages that surround the sternum are all vulnerable to tearing from well executed strikes, making the sternum an excellent target area.

When striking the sternum, you most effective strikes are

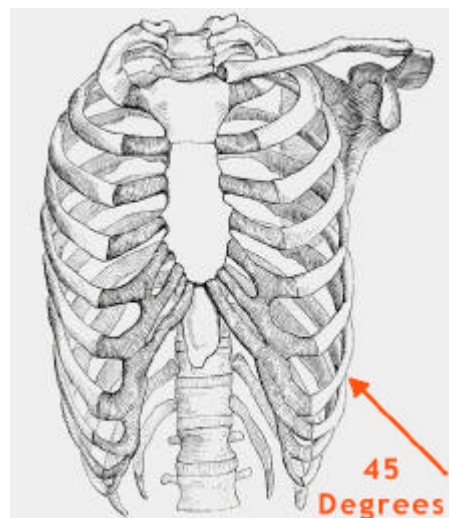
- 1) Posturing high and punching downward with a clenched fist.
- 2) Posturing high and striking with a downward elbow
- 3) Posturing low or posturing high and striking with a hammer fist.

## The Ribs

The ribs are a great target area, from a standing position a good round kick to the ribs can cause bruising, fractures and dislocations, although you don't have the same distancing from inside your opponents guard, you can still

- 1) Posture low and strike with short through elbows.
- 2) Posture high and strike with through elbows (using more body weight).
- 3) Posture high and strike with a hook (clenched fist).

Due to the shape and design of the ribcage and the Costal Cartilage joints, striking laterally at a 90-degree angle to the ribcage will cause the ribcage to compress with minimal damage, to maximise your striking effect, it is more advantages to strike laterally at a 45-degree angle (slightly upwards) which is more likely to tear the Costal Cartilage joints and cause rib dislocations.



## The Clavicle (Collarbone)

The clavicle is an excellent target area, fracturing or dislocating the clavicle takes away your opponents ability to strike effectively, and often results in a technical knockout (TKO)

The most effective strike to damage the clavicle is a hammer fist. When striking the clavicle, the striker can either posture low or posture high to create distance. Striking the centre of the clavicle is likely to cause fracturing, where striking to either end of the clavicle is more likely to cause a dislocation.

## Rectus Abdominis

A successful strike or series of strikes to Rectus Abdominis (RA) can result in the fighter being winded, which usually results in a TKO. The key points to striking RA are

- 1) RA is a large muscle covering a large area, make sure your strikes target the same point each time.
- 2) To get maximal penetration from your strikes, you need to strike the centre of RA, which is roughly where the navel is situated.
- 3) Striking RA is often like striking the thigh with leg kicks in that it is often not one strike that does maximal damage, it is often the effect of cumulative strikes. Quite often you will see a fighter grimace from one strike to the abdomen, if the striker picks up on this and is quick enough and accurate enough, the next strike will wind/drop their opponent.

When striking RA, your most effective strikes are

- 1) Posturing low and striking with a hammer fist.
- 2) Posturing high then punching downwards with a clenched fist.
- 3) Posturing high then striking with a downward elbow.

## TARGETING THE HEAD AND FACIAL AREA WHILE YOUR OPPONENT IS TRAPPED INSIDE YOUR GUARD.

Effectively striking your opponent while they are trapped inside your guard is a difficult challenge because

- 1) You can't get your body weight behind your punches.
- 2) You can only withdraw your striking limb so far before the ground gets in the way, making it hard to load your strikes.
- 3) Your opponent has the advantage of using gravity to assist them each time they strike you while you have to resist gravity each time you strike your opponent.

In UFC 14, Maurice Smith showed the uneducated that it was possible to effectively strike from the guard and inflict some damage on your opponent. I remember watching Maurice move around on his back to create distance and push off Mark Coleman's hips to create distance, each time Maurice created striking distance, he would drop downward elbows on top of Mark's head and facial area.

There are potentially two effective strikes that can be utilised while your opponent is trapped inside your guard

- 1) The palm heel, which has been used over recent times, but not to its full potential.
- 2) The through elbow.

## The Palm Heel

To maximise this strike there are several key points that you need to consider.

- 1) You need to have a specific target to aim at as opposed to aimlessly flailing away at the head. The best target area which is in direct alignment for the palm heel strike is the upper portion of the jaw bone at the “Sigmoid Notch” which is positioned just under the cheek bone, not only is this target area quite painful when struck, it is also vulnerable to fracturing as the jaw bone here divides from one large thick piece of bone into two smaller thinner pieces of bone.



- 2) This strike like all other strikes needs to be practiced on a regular basis to maximise the strikes potential power output.
- 3) Understanding the “stretch shortening cycle” (SSC) concept and incorporating it into this strike will help to increase the power of this strike. The SSC utilises the elastic quality of muscle fibres to catapult your striking limb into a concentric contraction.

For more information on the SSC concept read “Increase your punching power” & “The SSC in throwing and striking sports”.

The three key points to utilising a SSC for a palm heel strike are

- 1) Before you strike your opponent with a palm heel, you need to fully extend your striking arm in an explosive manner to increase the length of your muscle fibres, which in turn puts them under a pre-stretch.
- 2) The pause between then concentric contraction that sets up the pre-stretch and the concentric contraction of your palm heel strike needs to be kept to a minimum so the elastic energy that is stored in the muscle fibres after the pre-stretch isn’t lost.
- 3) Your actual palm heel strike also needs to be performed in an explosive manner to utilise the energy that has been created from the SSC (remember, “force = mass x acceleration”, therefore the faster you can move your striking limb, the greater the final power output).

You will achieve a deeper penetrating strike if you hold your opponent’s head with your other hand to stop the head from moving on impact.



## The Through Elbow

The best way to maximise a through elbow from this position is to

- 1) Use the through elbow to counter strike your opponent after they have thrown a straight punch (jab or cross).
- 2) Utilise the SSC concept to maximise the striking power of your through elbow. When your opponent throws a straight punch at your facial area, you need to slip the punch by rotating at the trunk and rolling away from the punch. The actual movement of rolling away from the punch needs to be performed explosively to put the opposing internal and external obliques under a pre-stretch. The pause between the trunk movement of rolling away from your opponents strike and rolling back into your opponent to deliver your through elbow needs to be kept to a minimum so the elastic energy that is stored in the muscle fibres after the pre-stretch isn't lost. The actual movement of rolling into your opponent and delivering your through elbow strike also needs to be performed in an explosive manner to utilise the energy that has been created from the SSC. The target area for this strike is the jaw area and the cheekbone. When practiced and perfected, this strike has the potential to deliver knockout power.



## CONCLUSION

Striking both offensively and defensively from the guard position is just like any other skill in MMA in that it needs to be practiced and perfected. I hope this article has given some insight into specific strikes and target areas to make your guard striking more efficient and productive.