

# Boxing for Bartitsu

## Moving Beyond the Straight Line

Half Arm Hits! Side Steps! Angles! Uppercuts!



Science of Self-Defense (1889) - Bart Doran

“Under Bartitsu is included **boxing, or the use of the fist as a hitting medium**, the use of the feet both in an offensive and defensive sense, the use of the walking stick as a means of self-defence. Judo and jujitsu, which are secret styles of Japanese wrestling, (I) would call close play as applied to self-defence.

In order to ensure, as far as it is possible, immunity against injury in cowardly attacks or quarrels, **(one) must understand boxing in order to thoroughly appreciate the danger and rapidity of a well-directed blow**, and the particular parts of the body which are scientifically attacked. The same, of course, applies to the use of the foot or the stick.

Judo and jujitsu were not designed as primary means of attack and defence against a boxer or a man who kicks you, but are only to be used after coming to close quarters, and **in order to get to close quarters it is absolutely necessary to understand boxing and the use of the foot.**<sup>1</sup>

Produced by Peter Smallridge for

## Basingstoke Bartitsu Irregulars

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<sup>1</sup>E.W. Barton-Wright (1902). "Ju-jitsu and judo". *Transactions of the Japan Society* 5: 261.

## Introduction: Sources and Self-Justification

Boxing, or pugilism as it is often called to distinguish it from the modern sport, was one of the martial arts practiced and blended at the Bartitsu Club. Compared to the cane and jujitsu elements, however, we have little direct sources on what was taught at the Club. We can, however, draw on the corpus of boxing texts produced in the period.

This seminar draws largely on *Boxing* (1889) by Allanson-Winn<sup>2</sup>, which is from a similar sporting background (English amateur boxing) to that which we might imagine the Bartitsu club trained in. To supplement this we will use *Championship Fighting* (1950) by Dempsey<sup>3</sup>, which provides clear (perhaps unequalled) explanations of the mechanics of different punches.

As often interpreted in Bartitsu, boxing/pugilism is a matter of the straight right and left, the advance and retreat, the guarding of the head and mark, and (perhaps) a slip of the head or two, supplemented by the delights of chanceries and throws. All of these are certainly key elements that cannot be under-emphasised. However a perusal of texts of the time and viewing of surviving footage of boxing matches also shows lateral footwork to take angles, “half-arm” or “contracted” hits (what we would now call hooks<sup>4</sup>), and uppercuts. Certainly, these short range punches are less prominent when wrestling forms a significant part of boxing, but they are there to be seen. English boxing of the time was noted for its use of the straight left compared to the more in-fighting based systems of the Americans, and it was commented that the American style was more “fighting” while the British was an “art”.

We will find all of these boxing techniques especially useful in developing effective systems of (neo-) Bartitsu. Some of the elements which make the half-arm hits “less” than straight punches, such their shorter reach and roundabout path, become virtues when contextualised into Bartitsu. Often the Bartitsu solution in combat is to close for jujitsu, and at close quarters there is no room for the straight punch. Not to mention that the hook, uppercut and overarm cross are some of the hardest hitting, fight ending blows in the boxer’s arsenal.

Moreover, the set-ups for these punches involve traversing the reach of the opponent’s straight punch, a gauntlet we must run if we wish to come to grips. By learning how to deploy these punches, we also learn how to deploy other weapons of the bartitsuka.

Accompanying bent-arm punches we also have indirect and circuitous footwork, namely the sidesteps and shifts involved in taking an angle on our opponents. Hitting someone who can’t hit back is an effective means of self-defence! In the self-defence context of Bartitsu we must always have an eye to the possibility of disengagement and evasion, and the footwork needed to take an angle offline to our opponent provides an excellent escape route out of the fight or sidestep the rush of an aggressor.

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<sup>2</sup> **Rowland George Allanson Allanson-Winn, 5th Baron Headley** (1855 – 1935) also known as Shaikh Rahmatullah al-Farooq, an Irish peer and a prominent convert to Islam. A keen sportsman also co-wrote *Broad-sword and Singlestick* (1890) with C. Phillipps-Wolley; he was also offered the throne of Albania and declined to accept it.

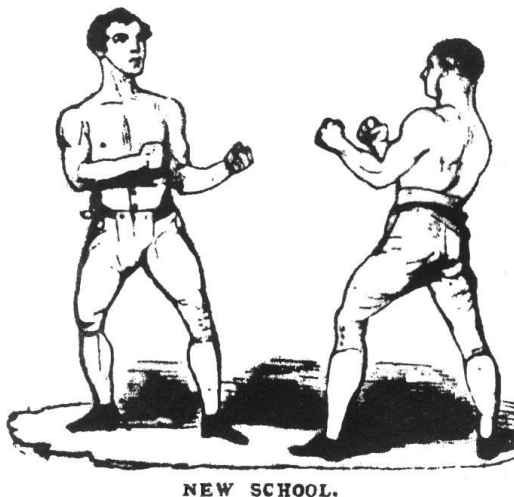
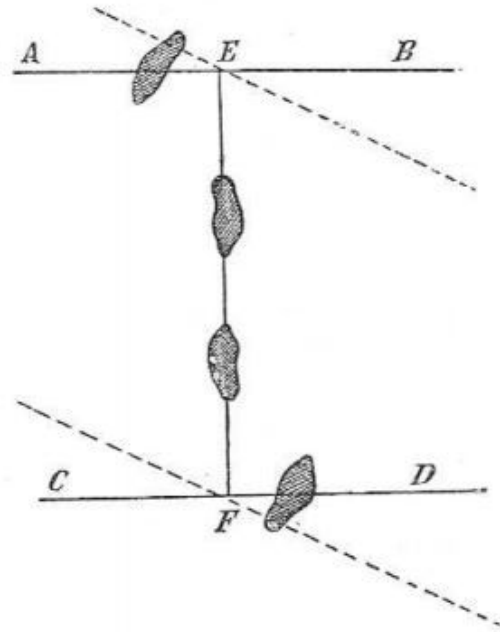
<sup>3</sup> **William Harrison "Jack" Dempsey** (1895 - 1983) held the World Heavyweight Championship from 1919 to 1926. His match against Georges Carpentier was the first million dollar gate in boxing history. Despite the late publication date, his book draws on the style learned prior to his 1919 world heavyweight title win and is in many ways a good sample of “American” style boxing of the time.

<sup>4</sup> Note that at the time terminology was not consistent - often “hook” was used to mean a straight armed swinging blow. This is not what we’ll be encouraging in this class!

### Stance: Standing, Guarding, and Threatening

Illustrated below are a few examples of the boxing stance and basic guard of the era. Note the balanced and relatively straight legs, the front foot aimed directly to the opponent, the lead elbow floating off the ribs aimed downwards rather than out and the lead fist aimed to the opponent, the rear forearm guarding the mark.

Clockwise from top left: stance from Allanson-Winn (1897), footwork and shoulder-line diagram from same, the “boxer” antagonist from Barton-Wright (1901), stance from Owen Swift’s Handbook to Boxing<sup>5</sup> (1840) as an example of the similarity of older bare-knuckle postures.



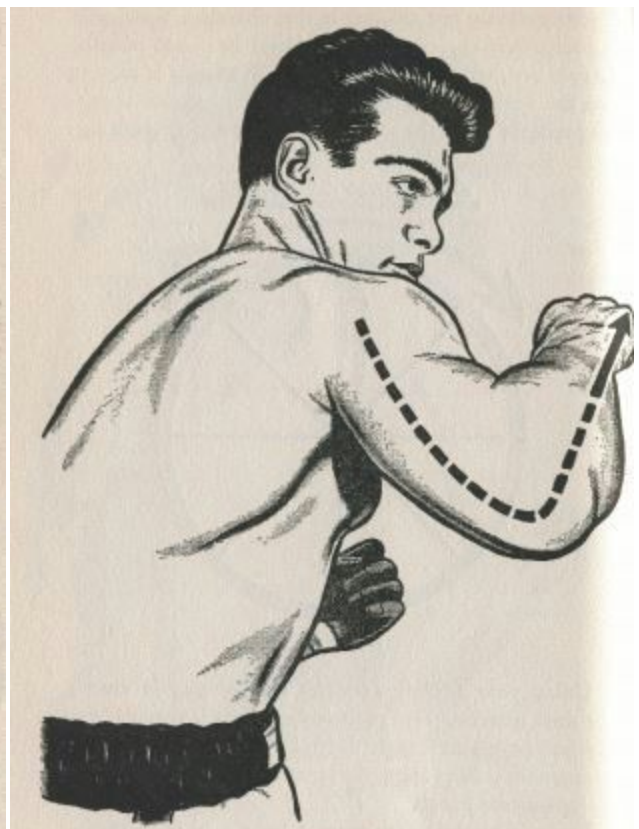
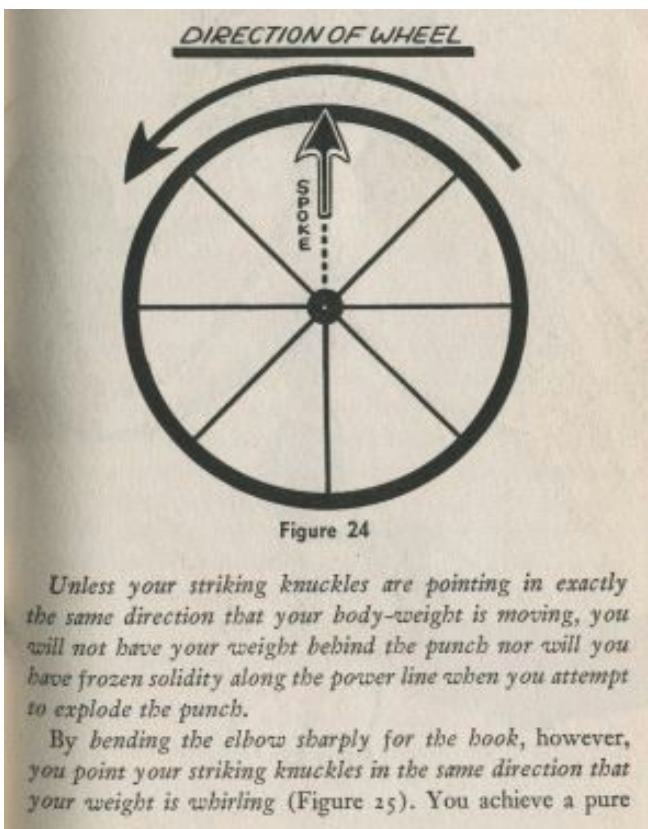
<sup>5</sup> Owen Swift is perhaps most notable for having killed “Brighton Bill” Phelps in a bare knuckle match, precipitating the writing of the London Prize Ring Rules which replaced Broughton’s Rules from 1838 onwards.

## Punches: Purity, Power, and Perfection

We will cover four types of punches delivered with the bent arm. All are what Dempsey would call a “pure punch”. That is say one delivered in line with the forearm and in the same direction as the body’s movement. As bent-arm punches, they require the forearm at ninety degrees to the upper arm for strongest structure to transmit the force of the punch.

1. **The Horizontal Hook** may have the knuckles aligned vertically or horizontally (i.e. palm to the puncher or palm to the floor - this author’s preference is the latter), but the key to the punch is to deliver it as the rim of a wheel centred on the punched. You’re not throwing it looping outwards, but a tight punch with the body behind it, twisting from the feet up through the core to the arm. Begin with hands held together at chest, practice twisting from the toes. Then lift the elbow as you twist and throw the hook. Then begin throwing hooks from regular guard, trying to minimize any withdrawal of the hands to load the punch. With a squat of the legs, these hooks can be thrown to the body rather than the head. Note the limited reach of the right hook unless the right foot is stepped up until square to the opponent.

From Dempsey: explanations of how a hook can still be a “pure punch”.



2. **The Body Hook** or shovel hook is similar to the horizontal hook, except that you are aiming to hit at a 45 degree angle upwards as well as inwards. Turn the palms slightly in, and consider elbows glued to their points relative to the hips, the hips twist and rise behind the punch. “Less arm, more hips” is the motto!

3. **The Uppercut** is vertical, palm facing you. Try to use the legs to power this punch, and minimise the movement your hand makes. Whereas hooks twist the hips to power the punch, uppercuts will almost require you to sway the hips to the side as you load up the punch. Note the left uppercut has an awkward path.

Right: Uppercut from Dempsey, showing the targets of the solar plexus and the chin, featuring one of the most punchable faces ever.

4. **The “Overarm” Cross Counter** is one of several possible ways to deliver a right hand cross counter to a left straight. Depending on relative heights, angles and extension of the arm, the cross can be thrown as a straight right, a horizontal hook or this overhand. The overhand version, with the elbow raised above horizontal, is mostly included in this class for completeness, and because it tends to arise in the case of height differences. The movement of the shoulders with the slip of the head to the left can be used to turn the cross over, not unlike bowling a cricket ball, except with the arm bent to deliver the punch along an aligned forearm.

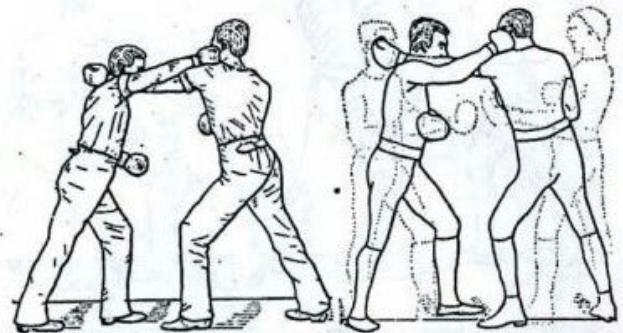
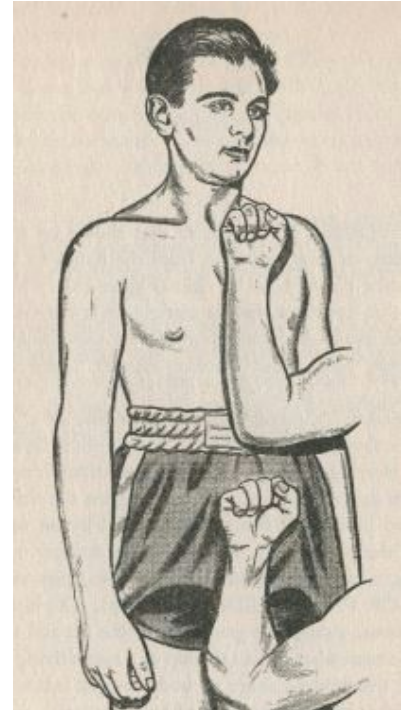
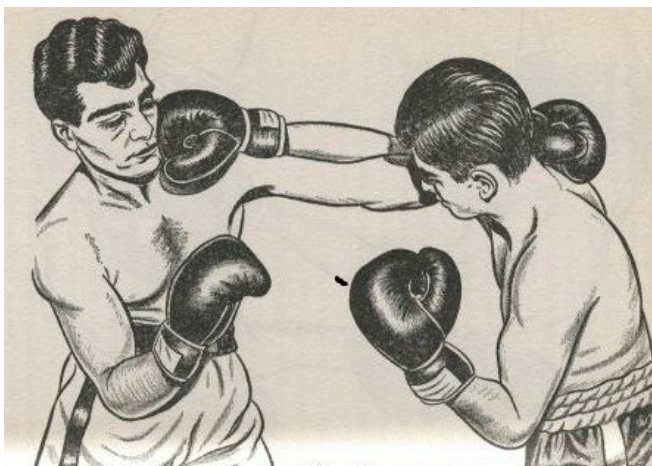


FIG. 43.  
RIGHT-HAND CROSS-COUNTER.

FIG. 44.  
CHANGE IN POSITION FOR A RIGHT-  
HAND CROSS-COUNTER.

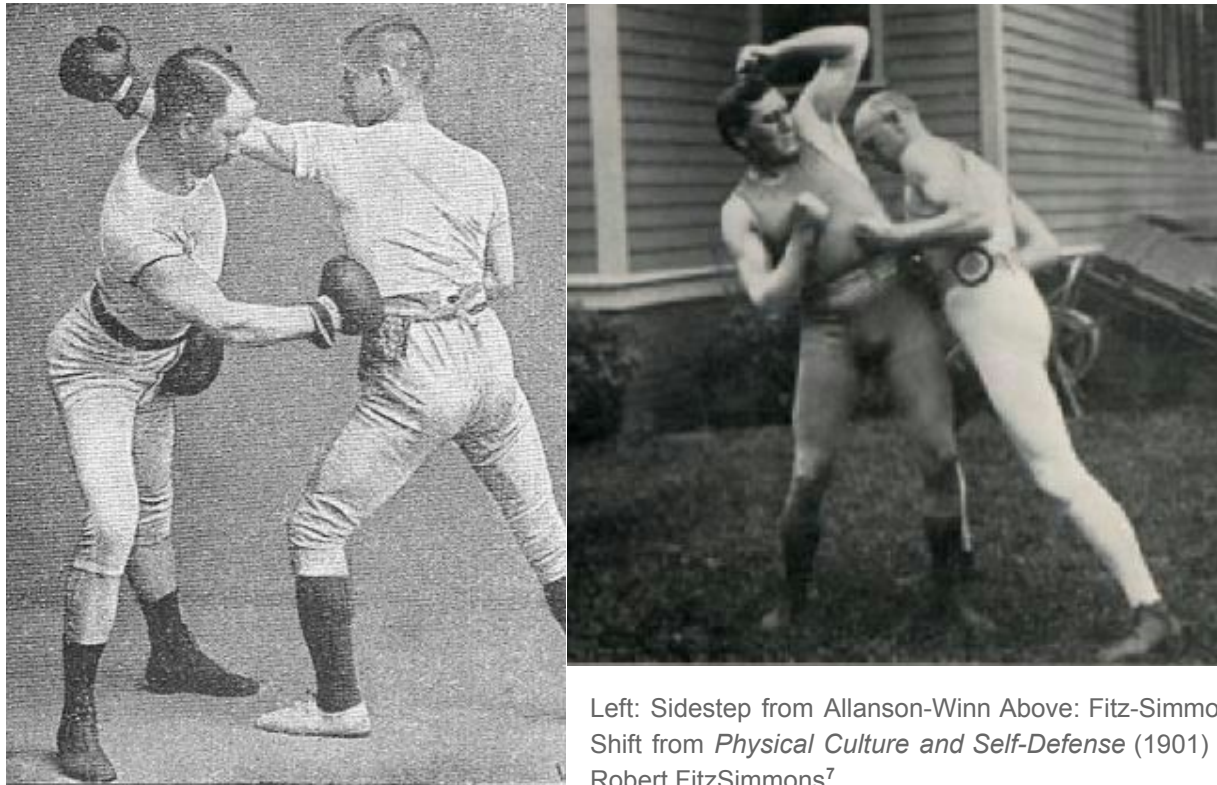


Three different cross counters: Top left is 5'9" Mark Hunt hitting the 6'11" Stefan Struve in the UFC, top right Soviet boxing coach K. V. Gradaplov's *Tactics of the Foreign Masters* showing Joe Gans, bottom from Dempsey.

## Angles: How to Move and How to Survive

“To return to the straight left, which I have described above as the foundation of the art of boxing. Let us enter in to the subject still a little farther, to show how side-stepping, swerving, ducking, and various other movements of the legs and body were invented to avoid the extended left.” - Georges Carpentier *The Art of Boxing* (1926)<sup>6</sup>

Now we come to taking angles on an opponent. Remember that there is only a limited arc in which you can throw a useful punch - perhaps a ninety degree arc centred on your “front”. Moreover, the further to the edges of this arc you stand, the less effective your opponent’s offense will be. His punches will be weaker from both hands, or even impossible to throw from the far hand. Don’t forget that compared to fencing, circling in boxing takes us to a greater angle due to the closer distance we’re fighting at. So take an angle, and take the advantage!



Left: Sidestep from Allanson-Winn Above: Fitz-Simmons Shift from *Physical Culture and Self-Defense* (1901) by Robert FitzSimmons<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> **Georges Carpentier** (1894 - 1975), the “Orchid Man”, progressed through every division from welterweight upwards. Fighting professionally from 14, he was welterweight champion of Europe in 1911, middleweight champion of Europe in 1912, and light heavyweight champion of Europe and heavyweight champion of Europe and “White Heavyweight Champion of the World” (the title created for “White Hopes” while Jack Johnson held the heavyweight title) in 1913. The white heavyweight title bout sported a purse worth 9,000 pounds sterling (equivalent to approximately \$995,947 in today’s funds) so it should not be seen as valueless. After WWI, where he served heroically in the French Air Force, Carpentier defended his title twice again in 1919 before dropping down a weight class to win the light heavyweight championship of the world. Carpentier lost to Jack Dempsey in a million dollar gate fight for the world heavyweight title in 1922.

<sup>7</sup> **Robert “Bob” Fitzsimmons** (1863 - 1917), held the World Heavyweight, Light Heavyweight and Middleweight titles at various points from 1894-1904. He was #8 ranked in *The Ring* magazine’s Top 100 Greatest Punchers, one place below Jack Dempsey.

### Vocabulary: Things Coach Will Call Out at Random

To **Sidestep** left, begin with the left foot, then follow with the right. To side step right, begin with the right foot, then bring the left across.

The **Slip** is a movement of the head offline to avoid an incoming punch. It combines very well with a step offline in the same direction.

The **Shift** is switching which foot leads. We'll be using it a lot because it lets us take a passing step forwards as we change angles.

To **Bob and Weave** is a two part action - we bow to let the opponent's blow pass overhead, then come up to the other side. Like the slip, we combine it with footwork to move offline.

The **Pivot** is when you turn around one foot. You can use it with a sidestep to realign yourself with an opponent, or on its own to let a punch brush past, especially a straight to the body.

### Sequences: Putting Things Together In Interesting Ways

Player One	Player Two
Ducks to right with left to head	Ducks right with left to body
Retreats, feints left to face	Cross counter
Slip and sidestep to left, right straight to body	Backfist with right or pivot blow

Player One	Player Two
Ducks to right with left to head	Slip and shift step to right, left shovel hook
Catch on right forearm, right straight reply	Pivot out to right, right hook to head
Duck hook, uppercut with rise	Parry or stiff arm, uppercut or shovel hook

Player One	Player Two
Leads with straight left to head	Pivots on left foot, left hook to head
Retreats, comes in with right straight to head	Ducks punch, left horizontal hook to body
Retreats with left straight	Shift punch left straight

Player One	Player Two
Ducks to right with left to lead	Steps out to left with left to head "safety lead"
Ducks to left with shifting right shovel hook	Block with left, immediate left shovel hook
Retreats, come in with left straight to body	Pivot right with parry, step in for side-fall

**Own Notes:**