Back to training, and the key word for today: kicks. Right kick to the body, left kick to the body. Two right kicks, fast on top of each other. Two right kicks, switch, two left kicks. Working various manner of right/left combinations leads me to a few observations.

First, the ability to quickly switch stances and to control how you bring your leg down after a kick is huge. I admire that ability to look effortless in your switch to a south paw stance and immediately throw the left kick. I'm definitely not there yet, as I can execute the switch and kick, but it's so deliberate and telegraphed that an opponent would see it coming a mile away and I would never get the kick off. But that's what drills are for. The other aspect of this footwork that eludes me is bringing your foot back down in a different position then when you threw the kick. Example: throwing a left kick from the back leg, then bringing your left leg down in the lead position in order to immediately throw a right kick. This sounds obvious and simple, but there's something about the weight distribution that I find very challenging. Perhaps I need to get all boxing style on it and work jump rope and things to get lighter on my feet. As with all of this training, it really makes you appreciate when you see someone like Giorgio Petrosyan who is an absolute master of footwork.

The other big question for me this week was finding the right balance between keeping your guard up and using your hands to help give you power when kicking. This is a tough line to find, and it's one I recall The Voice discussing on more than one occasion during fights. Particularly for Muay Thai, there is a tendency to chop with your hand as you throw a kick in order to add some extra power and torque to the kick. And this is naturally what your body wants to do – try throwing a kick while covering your head and your hands will naturally drop to help push that kick through. But the downside is obvious – dropping that hand exposes the head, and against an opponent with good timing, this is an easy way to get yourself KO'd. So how do you find that balance? For me, the big thing I am working on in this area is simply getting the hand back up to guard as fast as possible, and maybe that's the answer. But I'd be curious to hear from those more experienced if this is an area they think about at all.

Last kicking note – on a personal level, one thing I need to work on is my range. I'm pretty tall (6'4") and want to use that height to my advantage, but I still haven't figured out quite the right range for my kicks. As a result, I don't always catch the pads just right, which throws me off balance, and frankly, just looks embarrassing. Got to keep at it and find that range.

Speaking of embarrassing – I suffered my first (very minor) injury today. Nothing bad, just a bruised or sprained or some word that is slightly less than broken, but still discolored and painful

toe. And how did I get this injury? From improper technique on a kick? Better yet, from using so much power on the kick that my toe simply could not stand the force? Nope, I snagged it on the edge of the mat when dropping down for a push up. This is not exactly the kind of training injury I envisioned, and is unlikely to wow you with my dedication, but hey, I'm here to tell you what happened – even if it is a bit on the humiliating side. Now off to get some tape before next time.

Training Diary is a weekly series documenting my journey starting Muay Thai training. For more on this series, read the first entry here . I train at Conviction Fitness & Martial Arts, 4430 N. Western Ave., Chicago, IL www.convictionfitness.com .