



# 国際大山空手道連盟総本部

## World Oyama Karate

### Honbu Newsletter

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By Founder Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama

# AIM HIGH ! OVERCOME EGO !



Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama

After summer camp this year, I felt like summer was over and done with. A sun that is no longer strong and burning hot. I was ready for fall - a softer sun, cooler breezes and the beautiful colors of autumn leaves. Now it's almost the end of August, and I'm STILL waiting for fall. It's still like a hot summer - morning, afternoon, and night.

I still remember when I first came to the United States and my first summer in Alabama. It was September, and the sun was blazing. Shouldn't it be cooler? I thought maybe God had forgotten about all the seasons except summer, and I was a little afraid that there would only be summer here. But, after living in Alabama for over 30 years, I know fall is coming soon. There will be relief.

Like a lot of people, I enjoyed watching the Summer Olympics. There are so many different kinds of competition now. I know the ancient Greeks would be surprised at some of these sports. Who could imagine beach volleyball competition in those little bathing suits?

My favorite competition, though, and the most exciting of all in my opinion, is the marathon. The marathon has its roots in a legend of ancient Greece. In 490 B.C., a great Persian army landed on the Greek plain of Marathon (the race is named for this place), about 25 miles away from the city of Athens. The Persians intended to capture and enslave the people of Athens. The small group of Athenians

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Saiko Shihan with Black Belts students at Summer Camp ( Run ! Shihan John ! Run ! )

defeated the invaders, though. The legend says that the runner Pheidippides ran the 25 miles to Athens to tell the people about the victory. He ran so hard that right after he proclaimed the victory to the Athenians, he died on the spot. Actually, this runner did something even more spectacular than is told by the legend. In an effort to get the aid of the Spartans to join the fight and save Greece, he ran the 150 mile distance from Athens to Sparta in less than 2 days! The “marathon legend” has persisted for over 2500 years, though, and it is the reason that this great race is now part of the Olympics today. The modern Olympics captures the spirit of the ancient Games that were played in Greece for hundreds of years – long before the marathon legend even began. Those sports competitions took place every four years beginning at least as early as 776 B.C.. They brought the strongest and swiftest athletes of the ancient world together to see who would be champion.

When I watched the women’s marathon in the Olympics, I thought a lot about the human ego. Many grand masters of martial arts teach that ego is bad, but I have a big question about this. I disagree. Why is ego bad? Of course in group activities and team sports, you have to deal with other people. I understand that a big ego causes conflicts in relationships, and this means trouble for a team. But, in the individual sport of Karate and other martial arts, the grand masters work hard to kill their students’ ego. In my opinion, if you try too much

to kill the ego – if you push this point too hard – then you are escaping into the mental world. This kind of martial arts master would say that training must be spiritual and that this is more important than physical training for strength and stamina. This sounds pretty,



Noguchi and Radcliffe

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but it misses the big point of training. In more than 50 years of training and coaching experience, I have trained with many people who believe that spiritual and mental training are more important than sweating and I have seen the failure of this philosophy over and over again. Every time he is out of breath, he is ready to quit in less than one minute! Of course, such a person always has plenty of excuses. He always gives some lame reason why he can't train so hard that day. I don't think this kind of person is strong in any way – not even spiritually or mentally. If he is, I can't see it. It has no reality. Karate is not a religion. You have to sweat. You have to push yourself hard. This is the kind of training that makes you face yourself. Every time you train hard, you fight yourself. One voice in your head says, "Stop it now!" The other voice says, "No, you can do it!" Probably, the guy who trains spiritually will say, "No, this is enough. I can quit." And so, he tells himself that it's o.k. to escape the hard training. These people are actually not strong at all – not physically, spiritually or mentally. You have to challenge yourself! Everyone has two egos. One says, "Step forward!" The other says, "Give up." Which voice you will listen to depends on what kind of person you are and how much you want to reach your goal.

Well, back to the Olympics... I was fascinated by the women's marathon. I carefully observed each competitor's strategy and felt their spirit. They all ran together for about the first 8 kilometers, but then they began to separate into packs. The lead pack had about 13 women in it with Paula Radcliffe, the British world champion, setting the pace. She had to be the favorite. Japan's Mizuki Noguchi was in this pack, too, biding her time. I could see the competition even within the groups. The women were testing each other – very subtly. One would push forward and see what the reaction of another would be, then drop back. Then push ahead, then back.

At about 14 kilometers, as they entered the steep hills above Athens, Noguchi made her strategic move. She burst out of the pack into the lead just as the course got really tough. The only one who kept anywhere close to her was an Ethiopian, Elfenesh Alemu. Radcliffe set the pace for the lead pack but they were far behind Noguchi and Alemu. The grueling hills and the blazing heat did their work on the lead pack. The pack began to splinter at about 15 kilometers. The two lead runners, Noguchi and Alemu, widened their lead on the rest of the pack,



Noguchi running for her country

and Noguchi had her greatest lead when they topped the last hill at the 32<sup>nd</sup> kilometer. At that point, she was a full thirty seconds ahead of Alemu. But Catherine Ndereba, a Kenyan, now started to gain on both of them as the race course descended. One woman that everyone had written off until this point in the race was Deena Kastor, an American who was so far back in the middle of the race that she didn't seem to have any chance at all to bring home a medal. She had been gradually gaining all along, though, and now she was in 8<sup>th</sup> place! I had to admire her spirit! At about 34 kilometers, Ndereba passed Alemu into 2<sup>nd</sup> place. The biggest surprise came soon after that when Radcliffe quit the race completely at the 36 kilometer mark - less than 7 kilometers to go! I couldn't believe it. She just sat down on the curb! Kastor continued to fight with everything she had though. At the finish Noguchi, this wisp of a woman, defeated all to win the gold medal for Japan. Ndereba won silver for Kenya. Kastor, the American who "didn't have a chance", gave everything that she had to fly past Alemu, the Ethiopian, right at the end to take the bronze. What a race!!! It still gives me chills to

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Deena Kastor never gave up. AWESOME !!

think about it!

I love to run. Running has been a fundamental part of all sports training for thousands of years just as it is today. This training is as old as civilization itself. The ability to run with power and stamina is basic to survival, and so it has been a part of every soldier's training since the beginning of recorded history. It was a part of the military training regimen of ancient Japan, ancient Europe and anywhere else you can name in the world. In those times, the style of warfare was pretty much the same everywhere. First the archers rained their arrows down on the enemy from afar. Then the cavalry attacked on their war horses. Then finally the foot soldiers moved in to fight in bloody, grizzly hand-to-hand combat. These soldiers wielded giant iron axes and swords for hours. Their strength and stamina were unbelievable, and it had to be - their very lives depended on it. They also had to march for hundreds of miles carrying everything they needed to survive. To

prepare for this grueling warfare, they ran in rivers, up and down mountains and through the desert. They ran everywhere! Guess what - life has not changed so much for the modern-day soldier. All soldiers run to condition their bodies - even in the Navy and the Air Force. Strength and stamina are still fundamental to survival, and so they still run.

If you are lucky enough to have two feet, then you'd better run, or at least walk strenuously if you can not run. Running gives you powerful legs and strengthens your KO SHI. (KO SHI is the body's center of gravity, the TAN DEN, between the groin and the navel.) When people get past middle age, they begin to get weak in the legs and the KO SHI also get weaker. This means that we all eventually slow down. Then its your time to share your experience with the young fellows. Maintain the strength of your legs and KO SHI as long as you can by running. Unfortunately, according to the MRI scan, the disks in my lower back are separating, and so now I can't run. When I jog, this bounces my back and does great harm. I truly miss running. So run now while you are able. Be glad to sweat! At summer camp, I saw Shihan John Lehner running. I'm not going to tell you his age, but it is great, and I'm jealous that he can run more than many guys half his age! Now, I'm just walking.

Well, back to the Olympics again... I think the Olympic Marathon is a very hard physical test, of course, but it is also very difficult mentally. When I look at a marathon runner, I see a philosopher. At about 14 kilometers into the race, Mizuki Noguchi, the top Japanese woman, sprang out to run ahead of the lead pack. The T.V. commentator said that, with the great heat and running up and down the hills, the women in the lead group were testing the upper limit of their conditioning, not only physically but also mentally. It made me think about what must be going through their minds. I believe towards the end of the race, the top people in this lead group were thinking, "I wish some accident would stop the race. I don't know if I can go on. Maybe this is my limit. I can't do it anymore. But I CAN'T give up. I've trained for years for this Olympic race. There's no way I can give up. I've put everything behind me for this race - pleasure and fun and sometimes even sorrow and sadness. I've trained through it all, and it's all been for today - now - this race. I'm going to show my power.

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I'm going to show my name to the world." Most likely each one is fighting this very personal battle in her own head. They have reached their mental limit and they are fighting themselves.

Even as this mental battle goes on, each is aware of the competitors around her. She feels their struggle, too. "How hard is that one breathing?" "Did that runner's rhythm change?" "Is her tempo slowing?" And they're all asking themselves, "Who will break free from this group? Who will take the lead?" They are evaluating each other, sizing each other up and planning their strategy. It's just like a chess game. A runner first fights herself, then she tests the strength of the other runners. She pushes a little bit, and then drops back. Then she pushes a little more. They are all testing each other. As the race goes on, these challenges become more and more difficult. The runner's personal ego carries her through most of this, but in the end it takes a power greater than personal ego to push the champion beyond her competition to a first place finish. In the last fight - in this last challenge to body and spirit - the runner must call on something bigger than herself. Now she is running for her family, for her people or for her country. I saw this in the little Japanese woman who ran to victory. Noguchi was straining every fiber in her body. Her eyes were wide open. She was crazed as she sprinted in the front. The others, the Kenyan, the Ethiopian, and finally the American who came on strong, were fighting, too. Little Noguchi weighed just 88 pounds and looked like she was half the size of the other runners. A strong breeze should have carried her away. But the legs of this small woman were stronger than any NBA basketball star at that moment. She swung her arms with the strength of a great heavy-weight boxer. I could feel her KIAI as she broke her rock. This was not just her. It was a power beyond herself. The Kenyan Ndereba never gave up either. She chased Noguchi to the very end and finished an impressive 2<sup>nd</sup> to take the silver. The 3<sup>rd</sup> place American Kastor was especially impressive. It seemed she didn't have a prayer. She wasn't anywhere near the lead group for a long time, but she ran her own race and fought her way through all the groups to fly past the Ethiopian Alemu right at the end to take the bronze.

Watching this race taught me more than 100 books - more than reading a million pages. I never talked to these competitors. I never even met them. I can't even

pronounce many of their names, but they taught me much. Just thinking back on the race gives me chills. Their spirit and dedication and sweat have inspired me to work harder to achieve my goal.

My point is this. When you first decide that you want to do something, your ego is your motivation to achieve the goal. Its what gets you started, and its what inspires you to work toward your goal in the beginning. So, the human ego is a good thing. But, to actually reach your goal, sometimes you need more than ego, especially when your goal is high and the path is long and tough. Of course youre inspired when you begin your journey. But along the way, difficult times come up. When this happens, its easy to loose sight of your goal and go off in a different direction. You need a greater vision. You must look beyond yourself. Its bigger than you, and youre not doing it for yourself alone. If you can see this, then you will find the strength and determination to win. Your ego says, Its just too hard. I want to quit. Your marathon spirit says, This is not just for myself. I can not give up. I will not give up.

My greater vision is for all of the World Oyama Karate Organization. It is my driving force. World Oyama Karate is the greatest Karate. It is true Karate, and we will always have the highest standard of excellence. I want all the world to know this. This is my goal and my promise to you. Until I cannot move, I will continue to work hard to achieve this goal. You have my word.

Dictated to Senpai Jean Johnson



2004 Olympic Women Marathon Winners

# The Road to Japan by Shihan Dai Perry Burnett



Shihan Dai Perry demonstrates Shita Zuki

## Surviving Japan – Part 2

Making real life style changes like beginning an exercise program or changing your diet is difficult for most people. Anyone can do it for a while but staying with it is the real challenge. That is one of the beautiful benefits of World Oyama Karate. As a student, all you have to do is go to class on a regular basis, try hard, and concentrate and your life will begin to change - guaranteed. It's not easy and it is challenging but World Oyama Karate is a system that works.

When I stepped off the plane in Japan in 1985, my life was forever changed. All at once, I was thrust into a culture so fundamentally different from my own that I might as well have been on another planet.

When instructors, fighters or students from Japan come

to the US. They work, live and eat with other Japanese people that not only speak their language but also show them the way and help them get adjusted. They have a built-in support system when they come here that I did not have when I went to Japan. It was an entire week before Shihan Goda and I sat down with an interpreter to talk things over. We discussed the reasons for me being there and what would be expected of me. I was navigating without a compass. I would have to find my own way.

My first few weeks were extremely intense and full of pressure and stress. Even though there were people all around me I often felt lost and intimidated. Saiko Shihan had warned me of this. He even said that I would probably want to come home and maybe even try to find some excuse to see if I could shorten my stay in Japan. Saiko Shihan had told me that when I hit that point (because he knew that I would), it would be a very important time for me - a test. Saiko Shihan told me that the key would be to sweat and train harder than I had ever done before. It was extremely important to sweat morning, afternoon and night. Saiko Shihan had told me many times that whenever I feel a lot of stress, it's often not good to think too much. During this time, it's better to move and push my body. If I do it enough, I will begin to feel my spirit release and I will begin to better understand myself. Those first few weeks in Japan boiled down to two things: follow Saiko Shihan's advice or fail. Failure not being an option. I went with Saiko Shihan's advice and by doing so I began to push through my obstacles. Little by little the challenges of language, culture shock and apprehension started to melt away and my heart, mind and body started getting stronger.

Even though I was still a fledgling black belt it was not during class that I had my most difficult times. I knew how to kick and punch and as I mentioned before, when you're moving you don't have time to think. Often it was the everyday stuff that was hard; like how do I wash my uniform and clothes or mail a letter. One day I told a black belt that I wanted to make a phone call home. He said 'No, no...too expensive.' I had a heck of a time getting him to understand that the call would be collect and that my family would pay for it.

I have so many stories like that, too many to tell them all but some of those times are some of my best memories. Sometime the situation would get so out of control that everyone involved would start laughing so hard that

## The Road to Japan ... Continue

it felt we would never stop. And sometimes it would be a little thing that hit at the wrong time during a tired or frustrating moment that would make me want to quit.

I recently found a small journal that I kept in Japan. As I went through it I thought “how could I want to give up such a fantastic opportunity over something stupid”. I also found an entry where I wrote “all relationships take time and if I try hard I will find my place here”.

Having the luxury of hindsight, I can now look back and see that I was going through what all karate students go through. The difference being, my experience was more intensified because of the living in Japan and doing karate full time. Karate is about fighting yourself, not other people. It's about self-doubt, ego, fear, pride, and a whole lot of other internal stuff. Saiko Shihan has said many times, “You have to fight yourself.” Most karate students reach a point at some time (maybe many times) when they feel they have been pushed too far. That's when they began to give all of the excuses that all advanced instructors have heard so many times. These excuses come from parents of students as well as adult students. The complaints range from ‘that person hit me or my kid too hard’, ‘why did that student get promoted and I didn't or my child didn't’ to ‘we no longer have time to train,’ etc. The thing is, our advanced instructors know better than any parent or student where his or her limits are. One reason is we, as instructors, have been through all of the hard training ourselves and we have watched the students go through their challenges for decades. Speaking for me and other advanced Black Belts that have shared their stories with me; we still have to challenge and fight with ourselves. It never ends and this is a good thing; actually it's a wonderful thing because we get to continue growing. Students and parents must keep in mind that Oyama Karate is a hard contact style. The opportunity for self-growth is exponentially greater than with a soft contact style.

The first stages of my stay in Japan I often thought that some of the students and fighters wanted to kill me. I now know that those thoughts were false and that I was letting my mind play tricks on me. I also know that the time I spent in Japan was very good for me and my life experiences as a young adult.

I should have already said some things about Shihan Goda but I could not decide how to begin. He is one of

the world's most blessed, gifted and kindest people. Shihan Goda is the top man in a world wide full contact karate organization. He is one of Saiko Shihan's best friends and his generosity made my stay in Japan possible.

Shihan Goda had two full-time dojos. The main dojo was in Tabata. The other dojo was about a forty-five minute train ride away. I and one other uchi deshi were responsible for teaching most of the classes at both dojos. Shihan Goda lived nearby and he had a separate apartment in Tabata for his instructors/fighters and that is where I lived. The apartment was about a ten minute walk from the dojo. Living in Tabata was great. It was a family oriented area as opposed to some of the more international districts. There was a kitchen in the dojo where we cooked two meals a day. Often, I had to do the shopping for the meals. As I said before, I was thrust into this new culture as soon as I arrived. In most of the shops the people did not speak English which forced me to start learning Japanese right away. This was good and I made friends with some of the neighborhood people as I went about my errands. Of course I felt put upon at first because getting around was not easy and I would think, ‘Why do they make me do this stuff? They know I don't know what I'm doing.’ But I now know that this is part of karate.

Karate is not just for the dojo and is not just for self-defense; karate is for everyday life. At that time, Japan had almost zero crime, so I didn't need self-defense. Doing all this other stuff went along with what Saiko Shihan has always said “just do it”. All humans have ‘ki’ or ‘chi’- personal inner spirit. Everything we do affects this inner energy. If daily life always makes you feel frustrated or negative, then life is controlling your emotions, your ‘chi’. Our karate philosophy of understanding through action is the best way to take control of your own life; your own ‘chi’. I was not aware of it at the time but I was getting this philosophy forced upon me everyday. I understand it now and I enjoy training more than ever, even though my body doesn't always agree. They say that youth is wasted on the young. I'm still thinking (no, I'm training) on that one.

So, that's it for this news letter, but, I will leave you with one more quote from my journal I kept in Japan; ‘Patience brings results’.

*To be continued.....*

# Champion's Road “Karate Monogatari”

by 拳気 一  
ken ki hajime

## Chapter 8

*Continue ...*

I couldn't see a thing. Everything was black, and all I could sense were the sounds of the dojo. The fog slowly lifted and I absorbed Rachel's sweet smell. Her face was directly in front of mine, looking into my eyes. "Are you ok?" she asked. "I'm so sorry!"



Ken came up and said, "He's not so bad. He's not knocked out. Stand up." I stood up, and everyone had stopped. They were all looking at me. I was a little embarrassed. Toby and Mike were both looking at me and smiling. Ken said, "continue," much to my surprise.

I felt like I had to kick much harder this time. I kicked very hard with my right foot, but she stepped and blocked very easily. She said "That's a great kick," but to me it seemed almost patronizing after I had passed out. Ken stood behind me and shouted "harder! Don't worry about her. She'll knock you out again!" We finished the exercise, and I relaxed my body with a deep breath.

I looked over to the right, and some guy was lying on the mat, groaning, holding his side. I quickly realized that it was Toby. Ken said "Mike! You should control yourself more! What's the matter with you?"

Mike just responded with a shrug and said, "but I was controlling myself." Sensei Ken tries to move Toby. He stood up slowly, covered in sweat, holding his rib area with both hands. His face was as white as a ghost. I had never seen him look like that before, so completely pale. I forgot my headache from Rachel's kick. I was worried that Toby may have cracked a rib.

## Chapter 9

Sensei Ken checked Toby's body. He put a hand under each side of his *dogi* and opened it out to check his rib area. He moved his hands down each side of Toby's ribcage. He was smiling a little bit the whole time, which made me feel like everything would be all right. His calm expression made it seem that Toby's injury wasn't too serious. I think it relaxed Toby, too. He was still breathing pretty heavily.

Sensei Ken said, "Well – I think it's not broken. Maybe a little cracked, though."

Toby squeeze out a strained "Osu..."

"Try to twist the upper body," Ken said.

Toby twisted slowly right to left, and Ken watched his movement. "I don't think you broke a bone. If you broke something, you'd feel a sharp pain. You don't feel that do you?"

"No. But it's not too comfortable either," said Toby.

"Probably just cracked."

Sensei Ken gave Toby his prescription: "If you have a wide bandage, try to wrap it around your ribs. If you have a newspaper, put it inside the bandage and wrap the bandage around the paper. This makes the ribs steadier, keeps them from moving. But if you're going to bed, you need to take the whole bandage off, and sleep without it. You don't necessarily need to go to the doctor. They will probably give you a few X-rays and some muscle relaxants. Some people like that, but I don't recommend it. They'll charge you a lot of money." We smiled as he says this, familiar with the doctor's high prices.

"Probably after a couple of weeks, your body will begin to understand its damage. It will get more comfortable, but sometimes the pain might relapse, or come back again after a few weeks. But that's ok. After a couple of weeks, the pain will fade away altogether. Will probably take a month or a month and a half." His explanation showed us that he had so much experience. I knew he wasn't a medical student, but he's seen so many situations like this before that he knew what to do. His diagnosis was confident. I could tell he wasn't misjudg-

## Champion's Road "Karate Monogatari" 空手物語 ... Continue

### Chapter 10

ing. I looked at Toby's face, and could tell that he believed his opinion. He trusted him. I felt better, too. We know what to do now in a situation like this.

Ken said, "I'm sorry this happened." But he looked at us with a very serious face: "If you want a black belt, or if you want to seriously improve yourself, this is something that happens. Don't chicken out. Don't get discouraged. This is part of the growth. You need to get him back next time. He has more experience. You just need to keep working. If he punches 100 times, you punch 200. If he kicks for an hour, you kick twice as long. If you do that, you can reach his level. Sometimes this kind of experience makes you stronger. Makes you appreciate it more."

I don't know why, but Sensei Ken turned his face to me, looked me in the eye and said, "Just make up your mind. Put in your *Kiai* (Chi)." He looked back at Toby and said, "Well, just take it easy. Take a hot bath and drink some beer to relax the muscles. Get lots of rest. Take an Advil if you need it. Need to relax body. Tomorrow morning, when you get up, you will have a lot of discomfort. If you laugh or sneeze, it might hurt. Try not to laugh or sneeze," he said with a smile. "Just take it easy - nice and easy walking." We say "Osu."

That night, I lied in my bed and looked at the ceiling, and thought about all that had happened that day. I thought about the experience of Rachel kicking me in the head and me passing out. Her weight is probably 110 or something. I weighed around 180. One kick can totally change the world. I wasn't angry with Rachel, but her power made me feel extremely impressed by karate. I can remember the power of her leg kicking my head. I couldn't figure out how she did it. I thought back over the lesson that evening, and when I opened my eyes and Rachel's face was so close to mine. Such a beautiful feeling. She was sweating, but still smelled so good. I felt like I needed to work harder. I didn't want to let someone ever knock me down like that again. Karate is so fascinating, I thought. I remembered what Ken said to us when we first began: "You can reach any level that you work toward. You must believe in yourself and work as hard as possible." So many thoughts ran through my head, but I felt tired and nodded off to sleep, thinking of the new start I'll have at the beginning of next class.

It was just two more weeks until the promotion. I had become mostly comfortable with all the basic punch and kick techniques. Sometimes I still had a little trouble with the *kate*, "*Kihon sono Ich.*" For a while, I would just try to memorize the right movements, but lately I was beginning to feel more comfortable with the actual technique. My body was beginning to move more smoothly from stance to stance. I had especially improved in the *Ura Ken Gan Mec Uch* and *Sei Ken Gya Kazuki* techniques. Before, I would always have trouble changing directions from move to move. My stance would become narrow, and I would lose balance, but now I was able to make a much more powerful stance.

Whenever I punched, I felt much more power in my move. Sensei Ken, more often than not, approved with a simple "good" when I completed the technique.

Now we trained often with partners, training for free fighting (*Kumite*). We didn't exactly do free fighting to its fullest extent. We still wore arm guards and chest pads, but the training was still good preparation for free fighting. It was good practice using combinations of techniques against a real opponent. Sensei Ken always stressed the importance of using combinations of moves. He told us not to just use one technique over and over again. "Punch, then knee-kick," he would give us as an example, or "Front snap to roundhouse, roundhouse to front snap. If partner doesn't move after first technique, use this to your advantage. Make timing of the next move more difficult for them to follow." This type of training was a lot of action, very exciting. I enjoyed this more than anything else.

But sometimes Sensei Ken would stop us. He would mention that we were getting bad at the basic form, so he stopped the free fight training and we would work on perfecting the basic, fundamental forms of karate. "Must not begin bad habits," he warned us, and began drills on the basic punch and kick techniques, the basic stances. "With bad habits, your fighting skills are going to be limited. With correct form, your potential is limitless." Correct form, I began to understand, is important for proper technique.

He gave us another piece of advice for free fighting.

## Champion's Road “Karate Monogatari” 空手物語 ... Continue

“Whenever free fighting,” he began, “Most beginners depend on their dominant side. Right-handed people only use the right foot. Left-handed people only use the left. A right-handed person will always pull back the right hand to try and make a powerful punch. They are not used to free fighting, and also they have fear, so they rely on what they are used to.”

I understood this. Whenever I practiced at home, I did tend to emphasize the side that I knew I could most count on. I could understand doing the same thing in a fight, especially when my opponent was giving me so much pressure.

“A beginner’s fighting form (*kamae*) will often emphasize their strong side,” he told us. Whenever we got into fighting stance for free fight training, I almost always put my left hand and foot forward, so that my right hand was back, ready to deliver a powerful technique.

Sensei Ken used this fact to make a very important point. “Whenever it’s fighting time, you need to read your opponent’s fighting style. Most likely, if they are right handed, they’ll put their left foot front so they can use their best technique. So they can shift weight smoothly and powerfully. Very few people who are right handed will put their right foot front.”

I thought about other sports and realized that the same is true in most physical activities: in baseball, the right-handed pitcher puts his left foot front. It’s the same with a quarterback in a football game, or a javelin thrower, or a boxer.

“You guys are beginners, so maybe you don’t understand yet the importance of good *kamae*. *Kamae* is the starting point and the finishing point of karate. The more you train, the more you understand what kind of *kamae* you have and what kind of *kamae* your opponent has as well. After a lot of practice, you will be able to read it ahead of time. If you can’t read your opponent’s *kamae*, you’re in big trouble. They can use it to confuse you. But,” he continued, “reading your opponent doesn’t come from just looking in their eye. It comes from watching the total body and feeling what they are going to do.”

Well, he told the class and me all kinds of stuff, and some of it I didn’t understand, but I felt that I kind of

understood this. It made me excited for a real free fight. My condition was getting stronger. Whenever I finished a class, I felt like I left stronger than when I came in. I wished sometimes that I could train more often.

### Chapter 11

That night I laid in the bed, looking up at the ceiling, just wondering about what Sensei Ken had told us that day. He said “if you train for a long time, and build experience, you can tell it by your *kamae* (body posture).” You can tell if you are a strong or a weak fighter. *Kamae* is the starting point and the finishing point of karate. Look around at any kind of sport – football, baseball, hockey – the stance of the athletes is the key fundamental element.” I sort of understood the emphasis on body posture, but not entirely. I felt that after more training my posture would improve, as would my understanding of its importance.

When I first started karate, I thought it would be all about just punching, kicking, karate chopping. When I first told my friends I was going to train in karate, they sort of made fun of me – the most popular joke was to fake a karate chop technique like the stereotypes on television.

I didn’t know any more about it than they did. I didn’t know then if I could read the black belt or not, but I was very excited about the possibility. I never thought, before I began, that my body could perform the techniques that it did. I never thought I could go through the motions that I made in class. Whenever I punched or kicked, it was nothing like a joke, nothing like my friends had thought. Instead, I felt that each technique was a new self-discovery. I learned something new about my body. I did something I didn’t think I could do before.

I fell asleep while thinking about all of those things, all of the possibilities. Before karate, I used to fall asleep to thoughts of beautiful girls, a future career as a rich attorney, or video games, but now I fell asleep thinking challenging myself with karate. I felt like I must have caught some sort of bug – a karate bug. I would relax into sleep as I realized the need for rest – I had karate training tomorrow.

One week before the promotion, the training began to become tougher – we were training for free fighting. I

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didn't know what I would do if I actually hit someone or if someone actually hit me. What sorts of emotions would go through my head? I knew I wanted to contact my opponent more than they contacted me. I imagined landing series of kicks and punches. I had a strategy - I'm strong with my right hand and right foot, so I'll emphasize this strength in the fight. I can move pretty quickly; before my opponent has a chance to hit me, I can get in two or three shots, a kick or two - I would think. Inside I felt confident.

In class one day, we started with *kata* training, then combination training: punch, knee kick; knee kick, roundhouse kick; front snap, roundhouse kick. Sensei Ken tried to teach us different ways to connect naturally the various techniques. Also, he made us practice movements. After this, to my surprise, he had us do a light contact free fight. He partnered me with a blue belt from the class. He had a little more experience than I did, but we had partnered together before, so I felt comfortable.

When I first got into fighting position, I felt a little nervous, but it was not so bad. I looked into my opponent's eyes and I couldn't tell whether he was excited or not. We bowed to one another. Sensei Ken said “*hajime* (begin).” I didn't even think about it, but I immediately did a right foot roundhouse kick. My opponent blocked my kick easily and immediately hit my chest with a right hand reverse punch. I was really surprised. It was not so powerful, but getting hit so suddenly was like an electric shock. I thought my kick would contact him, and didn't think he would so easily contact me.

He kicked a right foot roundhouse kick and then a left foot front snap. I stepped back and then to the side to escape. I kicked another right foot roundhouse kick. This time he completely blocked with his left hand then returned a right foot front snap kick. I barely blocked this technique. I heard Sensei Ken say “combination! Don't do just one kick or one punch. Need to combine! That's what we're training for!”

I started to move around and tell myself mentally “Combination! Combination!” My opponent did a one-two punch combination and then a left roundhouse kick. I blocked both punches, but couldn't block the kick. It hit my left shoulder with a little bit of power. It wasn't enough to hurt my body, but it sort of hurt my feelings! My mind was racing. I felt jittery, like I needed to do

something fast, to avoid defeat. But then I heard “*yamae* (stop).”

We faced one another and bowed once more. We shook hands, and my opponent told me “You did good,” but inside I was thinking “What are you talking about?” I looked to my side and my eyes contacted Rachel's. I felt embarrassed. My heart was still pumping.

Sensei Ken said, “don't do just one technique. You need to combine techniques, like one, two, three. Everyone relies on the same moves.” I felt confused. “What's happening to my technique?” I thought to myself. I felt like I had been so good before, but in this one moment I felt that I was never any good at all.

After the lesson, the beginners' class left the mat to make room for the advanced class. As I passed Rachel, she said to me “you did good. You need to save your right foot technique until later, though, since it's the strongest. Do other techniques first.”

“Osu.” I said.

Back at the apartment after class, I knocked on Toby's door. He was still uncomfortable, but getting better. “We fought at class today,” I told him, “I didn't do a very good job. I thought it would be easy, but the reality was so different. It was really hard.”

“Don't worry about it,” he told me. “You'll get it! You have a strong right-handed technique. You should set yourself up for that. Just like in the *kata*, the setup is so important.”

“Rachel told me the same thing!”

“Yeah,” Toby said proudly, “She and I share the same views. She's ok.”

I laughed, but then said “Yeah. I guess your guys should know, since you both have experience.”

I drank a couple of beers before bed. Lying in bed, I thought about the fight. Punch, kick, get hit. That's how it went. I didn't expect my opponent to make so much contact. In my mind everything seemed so clear. I understood what technique I was going to use, and I envi-

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sioned myself arising victorious from any fight. Looking back at the fight, everything seemed to move in slow motion. I didn't know why I relied so much on my left foot. Maybe I was just nervous, I thought. But my opponent was a blue-belt, so I guessed he had trained more than I had. I think I got a good experience that night, though. I knew I could do better.

I felt asleep feeling confident once again.

### Chapter 12

The promotion was to be tomorrow morning, Saturday, at 11 am. On Friday nights, me and Toby and a couple of other guys usually go out. Sometimes I'm lucky enough to have a date to take out. Toby asked me if I wanted to go out with some guys for pizza, maybe some beer. I thought about it for a while, but remembered the last night we all went all. One thing led to another, and I didn't get to sleep until two or three the next morning. "I'll take a rain check," I told him. "I have promotion tomorrow."

I ate dinner a little earlier than usual, and then sat back to try and relax. I have to admit that I like to watch a little television now and then. One of my favorite sitcoms was on that night, so I watched that at eight. I had a glass of milk before bed, and I thought of the guys out drinking beer instead. At nine, I decided to try and get some sleep. I was excited about then next day, but felt like I needed a lot of sleep. I pulled the covers up to my neck and flipped off the bedside lamp. I closed my eyes for sleep.

My heart wouldn't stop moving inside me. I knew it must be the *chi* (spirit) that Sensei Ken was always talking about. I couldn't stop thinking about the day ahead. I remembered Sensei Ken told us that people from dojos all over the city would be there for the promotion. I wondered who all would be there. This made me a little more nervous. I didn't want to do the *kata* wrong and embarrass myself in front of everyone.

I thought through the steps in my head. "I think I've got it," I thought to myself. So many thoughts were going through my head. "My left kick is weak – will they notice that? Who will be my partner? If I have to fight Mike, what should I do? I saw what he did to Toby... If my technique is failing me, I'll probably just punch him

in the face! ... but I need to calm down ... just sleep ... *kumite* ... free fight." The words spun through my mind. "Better not think about it." I tried to think of school instead. I thought about what classes I'd need to take next semester.

My room was quiet; there was not a sound in the air. But my busy thoughts made it seem like the room was filled with noise. I turned over and flipped on the lamp. 10:30 p.m. I picked up the remote control to turn on the TV, resolved that I was not going to get to sleep without some sort of distraction. The last thing I remembered before falling asleep is the clock that glared 12:00 as my eyes became heavy and my thoughts blurry.

*To be continued.....*



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