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**World Oyama Karate**

**Honbu Newsletter**

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# Hot, Hot Summer

By Founder Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama



**Finally, I got it ! Oisha !**

Summer in the Deep South is the longest of the four seasons. Spring, fall, winter all fly by, but the humid southern summer lingers on and on. The summer/monsoon season in Japan lasts from the end of May until about the first week of July. But the summer here starts in June and doesn't let up until September, sometimes not even until October. It's hard to believe that summer is already here again and that 2010 is half way over. Times zips by faster than a bullet!

We just finished another successful summer camp in Orange Beach, AL, despite the BP oil leak that's been going on for the past couple months. At first, we considered whether or not we'd still have the camp at all. For most students, the highpoint of summer camp is training on the beach in the early morning, doing blocks, punches, and kicks with takedowns in the water and jump drop kicks into the coming waves. Because of the oil, though, this part of training would have to be cut. I talked with Shihan Ron and other senior Black Belts about maybe cancelling the camp. Many students



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had already made hotel and travel arrangements, including Sensei Masa, who'd already bought his ticket from Tokyo. So, we decided to go ahead with the camp, and it turned out to be a great success.

Halfway through 2010, we've already had many big events in the World Oyama Karate Organization. On May 1st we held another successful American Cup Knockdown Tournament here in Birmingham. All the American Branch Chiefs did a great job of coming together and cooperating to make the tournament run smoothly. We also had 4 Branch Chiefs from Japan come and compete—Sensei Naoi, Sensei Fuji, Sensei Ishikawa, and Senpai Munetaka. Kerry Wright from Honbu Dojo won the Heavyweight Division, and Senpai Karl won the Lightweight Division. In the Lightweight final, he fought against Jared Ramsey from the San Jose Dojo. Jared has really improved, and his movements were very sharp. But, Senpai Karl showed

hometown guts and won the decision in overtime.

In the Senior Division, Senpai Paul Speyer finally got 1st place. In past tournaments, whenever Senpai Paul would start getting out of breath, his power and technique would start fading away. Recently, I'd talked to him about this point, how he needed to push through and just hang on during those times. I told him that he'd almost been there a couple times, but didn't hang on until the end.

I give the same advice to all students who compete. During a fight, whenever you start getting tired and breathing heavy, that's when the real fight starts. That's when all the dedication and sacrifice you've made in your training and preparation comes through. Anybody with a little coordination and in reasonable shape can fight for the first minute. They can punch or move around and kick. But when you start getting tired and breathing heavy, your chi naturally will start



Annual Black Belt Clinic at Honbu Dojo

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to fade. So you have to challenge yourself in training to pushing through those moments. I always told my uchi deshi that if the match goes into overtime, you got it. Nobody sweats and trains like you. Overtime—that's your stage, your chance to shine and show yourself to the world.

So I told Senpai Paul, when you reach that point, and you feel your chi fading and the pressure of your opponent, what're you going to do? When your mind tells you to stop and rest, that you need water and oxygen, that's the point where you have to kiai and tell yourself, "No! I'm gonna be champion, I'm not giving up!" This year he finally did it and got 1st place. I was so happy for him.

In the Senior Division, we also had 4 competitors from Japan: Sensei Naoi, Sensei Ishikawa, Sensei Fuji, and Senpai Munetaka—the 4 Senior Samurai. Sensei Naoi has a lot of tournament experience and seems to enjoy competing. But for Sensei Fuji and Senpai Munetaka it was a little different story.

Anyone competing in a knockdown tournament for the first time enters a totally different world. The pressure is unlike anything else. Even the word "knockdown" sounds ominous. Knockdown...I'm gonna knock him down? I hope. Knockdown...he's gonna knock me down? Oh no.

I remember Senpai Karl's first knockdown tournament years ago. It was a December tournament. He was a yellow belt. Before the knockdown matches started, I saw him suddenly rush out the side door. I went to see what had happened. He was throwing up in the grass. His father, a doctor at UAB, was standing beside him with his hand on his back. When I came up, he turned to me and

smiled, "I think he's just nervous."

I nodded my head, "That happens. Have to pass through it." I looked at Senpai Karl, still doubled over. "So what you think? You wanna just wait 'til next time."

Senpai Karl stood up and wiped his face. "No, I'm gonna fight."

"Alright," I said. "But you better gargle some water first, you smell bad."

"Osu!"

"Anyway, your father's a doctor, he's here. We can send you to the hospital quickly if something happens."

Senpai Karl threw up again.

"You have medical insurance, don't you?"

Senpai Karl threw up again.

But, now, Senpai Karl can't wait to fight. He and Kerry just came back from competing at the Yoshukai Knockdown Tournament. They both won 1st place. Senpai Karl dominated his division. This is the 4th year in a row that he's won that tournament. A couple years ago, his whole family came out to see him fight; his parents, grandfather, brother and sisters. His parents looked nervous, so I sat with them. Senpai Karl won and used the prize money to take them all out to dinner. (He didn't take me, though. But that's OK.). While he was fighting, his mother told me, "My son is so different now". The point is, if you make up your mind and dedicate yourself, you can discover a totally new world. Everyone has excuses to not train hard or to back away at the last minute. But if you force yourself to take that first step onto the mat, your eyes will open to something beyond what you could have ever imagined.

So back to the 4 Senior Samurai. As I said, Sensei Naoi has a lot of experience travelling and competing in Japan and here in the U.S. So, for him, deciding to compete wasn't such a big deal. He met with the other three while they were planning their trip and announced he would fight. For Sensei Fuji and Senpai Munetaka, it would be their first time in the U.S. Sen-



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## One for all ! All for one !

sei Fuji works in the government and is over 50 years old, as is Senpai Munetaka. (Sensei Ishikawa is over 40, but has some previous tournament experience). Sensei Fuji and Senpai Munetaka looked at each other, then to Sensei Naoi. “Are we gonna fight?” they wondered.

Sensei Naoi answered, “It’ll be a good experience. When will you ever have the chance again? There’s a big difference between doing something and just watching. They won’t kill you in the senior division. But it’s all up to you.”

Sensei Ishikawa slowly nodded his head. “Hmmm...to be or not to be. To fight or not to fight...that is the question.”

Both Sensei Fuji and Senpai Munetaka weigh about 140 lbs. They asked Sensei Naoi what kind of guys they’d be fighting.

Sensei Naoi smiled, “Oh, probably around 6’4”, 280 lbs.”

“What!?”

“No, not really. Old guys. Their jodan mawashi geri is about waist high, and their chudan mawashi geri is about knee level, so your face will be safe. But who knows?”

After a short pause, Sensei Ishikawa announced that he would fight too. Both he and Sensei Naoi were from Tokyo. But Sensei Fuji and Senpai Munetaka lived outside the big cities, and are more conservative in their approach to everything. Suddenly Sensei Fuji proclaimed, “I’ll fight!” and looked at Senpai Munetaka. “Me too!” Senpai Munetaka shouted. So all 4 Samurai competed, and all 4 Samurai lost. But after the tournament they were so happy about their experience.

Here’s a side note about Sensei Ishikawa. In June, when I was in Japan conducting the Branch Chief Clinic,

he would take care of picking me up from the hotel and taking me wherever we needed to go. One morning he came to my room. I had left my coffee cup on the end table. As we were headed out, he asked me, “Osu! Saiko Shihan, would you please wait for me?”

“What?”

“I need to wash this coffee cup.”

“What? Ishikawa we pay \$200 per night for this room. Washing the cups and cleaning the room is included.”

“Osu, I forgot.”

“Did you wash the cups when you stayed at the Comfort Inn in Birmingham?”

“Osu, yes, I washed everything and left a tip.”

“You’re a nice man, Ishikawa, but you need to open your eyes a little more.”

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“Osu!”

Anyway, the 4 Senior Samurai had a great experience because they challenged themselves to take that step and compete. I always tell people that if you compete, win or lose, it doesn't matter. Your eyes will open to a new world and you will feel the excitement of being alive and facing your fears.

One month later, in June, we had the Fighters' Cup Knockdown Tournament in San Francisco. Jared Ramsey and Senpai Karl fought in the lightweight finals. Jared had really improved and I could see the results of his dedication and the training support he'd received from Shihan John Lehner, Sensei Motoi, and his fellow students. I was happy to see him beat Senpai Karl with a straight back kick. Not happy because Senpai Karl lost, but happy because the rivalry between both of them pushed them to train hard and persevere. After losing in San Francisco, Senpai Karl came back to Birmingham and continued training hard for the Yoshukai tournament, which he won. Congratulations to Sensei Saito, Sensei Yoko, Sensei Mike and all the San Francisco students for another successful tournament. I always look forward to attending, and am looking forward to next year.

One thing I noticed in both the American Cup and Fighters' Cup is that the Black Belts need to spend more time practicing judging and refereeing. A lot of them think they know it, but still make mistakes. I'm the same way; if I don't continue working on something, I start getting rusty. For all the students who've dedicated themselves and trained so hard, it's terrible if the tournament judges make mistakes. Just take the recent examples of the refereeing errors at the World Cup, or the umpire whose blown call cost Detroit Tigers' pitcher Armando Galarraga his perfect game.

After the Fighters' Cup, the next big event was Summer Camp. As I mentioned before, this year's camp was a little different because we couldn't get in the water. But I taught *Sai* to everyone on the sand in the morning and we trained in the Orange Beach Recreation Center during the late morning and afternoon. It was great to see Sensei Joan and Sensei Michael overcome their circumstances and still attend camp. I appreciate Stephanie Atwood letting us use her condo for the closing party. We finished the camp without any injuries and everyone had a good sweat. But it was hard to see all the empty parking lots and absence of people on the beach because of the oil spill. Usually Gulf Shores is packed during summer camp, but not this year. It upset me not only to think of the impact the spill had on the community, but on the ocean itself. The ocean connects all of us, and we need to protect it in order to maintain quality of life. I hope this type of disaster never happens again.



**I am Back ! Oisha !**

# FACING NEW CHALLENGERS

After I'd been training for about a year, I started feeling more comfortable in the dojo. I got used to Kumite training, got used to being hit and kicked. My first day fighting in the dojo, I felt like I was in a slaughter house, but after fighting every day for weeks and months, I got more used to it. I can't count the number of times I got knocked out or had to say, "Mae ri mashita!" ("You win!"), but I felt more relaxed about it.

When I was starting out, I'd try to think of my strategy for fighting each Black Belt. Some Black Belts liked to kick; another might have a lot of power, but not speed. So, I'd plan to move quickly in and out or side to side as I fought. Maybe move in close and try to take him down. But whenever I actually faced them, I felt stiff. I'd look at their mean faces and tense up. I tried to kiai and use my strategy, but they would read me easily. They'd block me and hit me back so hard that firecrackers would go off in my skull. It's funny, though, but over time I got used to the firecrackers, my fear started waning, and I got more relaxed. I continued developing my favorite techniques and fighting strategy.

I liked to kick with my lead foot. I'd kick an opponent's stomach, face, liver or thigh of their front leg (side and front) with the ball of the foot. When I hit a solid shot, they'd change their face, and I'd be able to get in a couple other techniques. I was getting better, but could still only do about 20 – 30% of what I wanted to do. I also had other favorite techniques: right reverse punch, lead foot kick to the groin, knee kick, right foot kick to the head with the ball of the foot.

Once in awhile, my rival, Haruyama, would come to the dojo. I still felt stiff when fighting him. One day I caught him in the solar plexus with my lead foot. It wasn't deep enough, but it made contact. He smiled and said, "Oh...Oisha!"

I returned with a shout, "Oisha!"

He came at me more aggressively, with his eyes shining. My eyes shone too. In the end, he beat me, but afterwards he said, "You're getting better." After that, he was gone for a couple weeks, so I trained as hard as I could so I could catch up to him. Just like Aesop's fable, "The Ant and the Grasshopper"—I was the ant.

Kicking Haruyama in the solar plexus was a million dol-

lar feeling. It was my trophy. I told my brother, Soshu, about it that night and showed him exactly how I'd done it. He smiled and said, "Well, I guess you've moved one step up."

"Yeah, I did."

After that day, I was no longer scared of any of the Black Belts. I was out for revenge. I would think to myself, "This Black Belt slapped my face so many times, even after I said Mae ri mashita! So, I'm going to re-arrange his face next time." Or, "This Black Belt always kicks me in the groin, pokes my eyes, and throws me into the weight pile. So I'm going to grab him, make him lose balance, knee kick him and smash him against the weights and see how he likes it."

I started getting excited about Kumite training. It became my favorite part of class—I couldn't wait. Occasionally, Mas Oyama would shorten the Kumite part, or skip it all together, and I'd be disappointed. But most likely, we'd fight every class.

While training over a period of time, it's often hard to tell whether or not you are actually improving. But whenever I'd execute techniques the way I planned to in a fight, I could feel at that moment that I was getting better. I started seeing the connections between Kihon, Kata and Kumite. (Although some Katas we did had very mysterious movements, for the most part, they contained practical fighting strategies). As I improved, I better appreciated the strategies involved in effective fighting—like chess.

A couple newsletters ago, I discussed how when I first started training, there were no All-Japan championships. Fighting in the dojo was our championship. The rules were open; we'd kick the groin, poke the eyes, grab the dogi and take each other down. Really, there were only a couple of rules, one of which was that if you knocked someone out, the fight would stop. Also, if your opponent said, "Mae ri mashita!" ("You win!"), you were supposed to stop. Some Black Belts, though, would try to show their superiority and continue attacking even after "Mae ri mashita!" I think they were worried that other students might try to get them back one day, so they wanted to dominate them physically and mentally while they still could.

## Facing New Challengers...Continues

In order to survive in this environment, you had to have your own fighting style. Each Black Belt's style was different, a reflection of their character. I challenged myself to read and figure out each Black Belt's style, favorite techniques, and habits. I started keeping a simple training journal. Whenever I did any writing or compositions at school, my teachers always told me I had bad spelling and grammar. But my Karate journal was great. I wrote it for myself and understood each word perfectly.

After training, back in my room, I'd write about my fights against the Black Belts that day—how they fought, what mistakes I made. I'd think about what I needed to do to beat them. Sometimes I drew their faces with black eyes or missing teeth and wrote "Ha, ha, ha!" as I imagined getting revenge.

I figured out how some of the good Black Belts would use kiai and eye contact in different ways. Some would use a powerful kiai to make me attack, then counter my movements. Or they'd look down at my leg, and kick my head. Or they'd attack quickly and make me agitated and lose my timing. Whenever they hooked me, I'd write about it in my journal. The next time they tried it, I knew better. I developed separate plans for fighting each one. Sometimes my plan would work, and the Black Belt would change style against me the next time we fought. So, I'd have to adjust all over again. The strategic element made for really exciting fights.

The first time I ever knocked out a Black Belt, I was in shock. My heart pounded as the other students took care of him. I didn't feel sorry for him, just amazed that my kick had actually done that. That night I was too excited to sleep. The rush of blood continued through the night.

Everything started with kicking Haruyama in the solar plexus. After that, I strategized on how to beat each Black Belt, including my Brother, Soshu. Whenever I lay in bed at night, I could see exactly how they moved, just like watching a film. I focused on mistakes I'd made and tried to figure out how to improve. I'd dream about fighting. Sometimes I woke up in the middle of the night and moved around in my bed, trying to work on my strategy. With each day of training, I could feel myself getting stronger and stronger.

One day before class, Mas Oyama announced that we were having visitors from a local university's Karate club. University clubs were traditionally very powerful

and adhered to a strict militaristic sense of hierarchy. Freshmen were like slaves, Sophomores were human, Juniors were masters, and Seniors were like kings. Karate, Judo and other martial arts clubs were especially strict. Seniors would strut around in their kimonos, showing off. The underclassmen would follow fast behind them. They carried themselves with a lot of pomp and posturing.

Sometimes they went to challenge other dojos. If they were to lose, it was a great source of shame. The university club members that visited our dojo (and other university clubs as well) didn't respect other local students. However, they did respect Mas Oyama because they knew of his reputation and how he'd killed bulls, but they didn't respect us. They were stuck up and full of themselves, with attitudes that seemed to say, "We have more than 100 years of tradition and history! We're going to teach you guys a good lesson today!"

Mas Oyama called Haruyama and I outside before the class started and whispered, "Go beat 'em!". He had a big grin on his face and started giggling like a child planning a practical joke.

Haruyama and I answered Mas Oyama with the same smiling, "Ooosssuuu!"

The visitors were from R. University, which is one of six prestigious universities in Tokyo. They changed into really nice, crisp dogis, which let off a loud "Pchu-pchu!" sound at the slightest movement. Our flimsy dogis looked like pajamas compared to theirs. We all sat back and watched as they started warming up. Suddenly the "Pchu-pchu!" sound reverberated throughout the dojo as they started punching and kicking and moving. It was like the sound effects from a movie—"Chu—pchu-pchu! Shu-shu...pchu-PCHU!"

I looked over at Haruyama. His eyes were popped out and mouth open in mock-amazement (he was a good actor). The university students' techniques looked strong (they certainly sounded strong), but when I looked more closely, I could see they didn't have any real power. Everything they did looked like it was just for show, not real contact. Haruyama started over-acting. He would "Ooh!" and "Ahh!" at everything they did.

After they'd warmed up, they gave a 20-minute demonstration full of the same "Pchu-pchu!" sounds and flashy

## Facing New Challengers...Continues

movements. We all sat back against the edge of the dojo and watched. Most of them were Black Belts. A couple of the younger members were Brown Belts. After they'd finished, the club captain came forward. He wasn't so big, but had a stern face. The two Brown Belts from the club stood next to him. "Alright," he boomed, looking around the dojo with hard eyes, "who's gonna take the first lesson?"

"Oo, oo! Please teach me!" Haruyama shouted as he stood up. I stood up too. We faced the two Brown Belts. Haruyama was over a head taller than his opponent, but he just looked down at him with a beaming smile. My guy was the same height as me, but about 25 lbs. heavier. We bowed to them with shining eyes and shouted, "Onegaishimasu! (Please teach me!)". The captain shouted, "Hajime!"

Both of the club students started moving around with the same kamae. They both had wide stances, almost in zenkutsu dachi, but with the back knee bent. Their fists were clenched, with the back one at the belt knot, and the front one about mid-chest level. (Traditional Japanese Karate didn't use full contact. Students would stop their blows before hitting each other. But we were different). The reason they used this kamae was most of them relied solely on their reverse punch. Very few times did they use kick techniques. It was also hard for them to move quickly left or right in such a wide stance. They relied on a one-step fight. One technique, and that's it. They didn't use any set-ups or combinations. The Black Belts in our dojo were different. If we ever fought that way, we'd never make it out alive.

By that time, I was good about reading my opponents. I

could look at their kamae and movements and know their fighting style. Before Haruyama and I faced the university students, I was nervous, but after seeing my partner's kamae I felt relaxed and confident. I looked at my partner bouncing around in his wide stance with his hands held low. Was I supposed to just touch him, or really hit him? There were so many openings to attack. I didn't know where to start. It would be easy to punch his face, kick his front leg, or kick his groin, or his head. Suddenly there was a loud, "DUN!" Haruyama's partner was knocked out flat on the ground with his legs shaking. I followed by faking a right foot front snap kick and kicking my partner in the head with a roundhouse kick using the ball of my foot. He went down the same way.

The other university students couldn't believe what had just happened. Haruyama and I just stood over our guys and asked, "You OK?" But the captain shouted at them to stand up. My guy stood up, but his eyes were rolling and he staggered around. I turned to the captain and said, "I think he needs to sit down."

The captain ignored me and shouted at the guy, "Kiai!"

I said again that he should sit down, but he still ignored me. Next, Haruyama and I fought the Black Belts one at a time and knocked them all out. As the club students went to leave, Mas Oyama turned to them with a smile on his face and said, "Thank you very much for the lesson. Please come back again and teach my students anytime."

After class, Haruyama suggested we go get something to drink. We sat down to order, and I asked for orange juice (we were still in high school). Haruyama looked at me shook his head with a smile. "Gimme a beer!"



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