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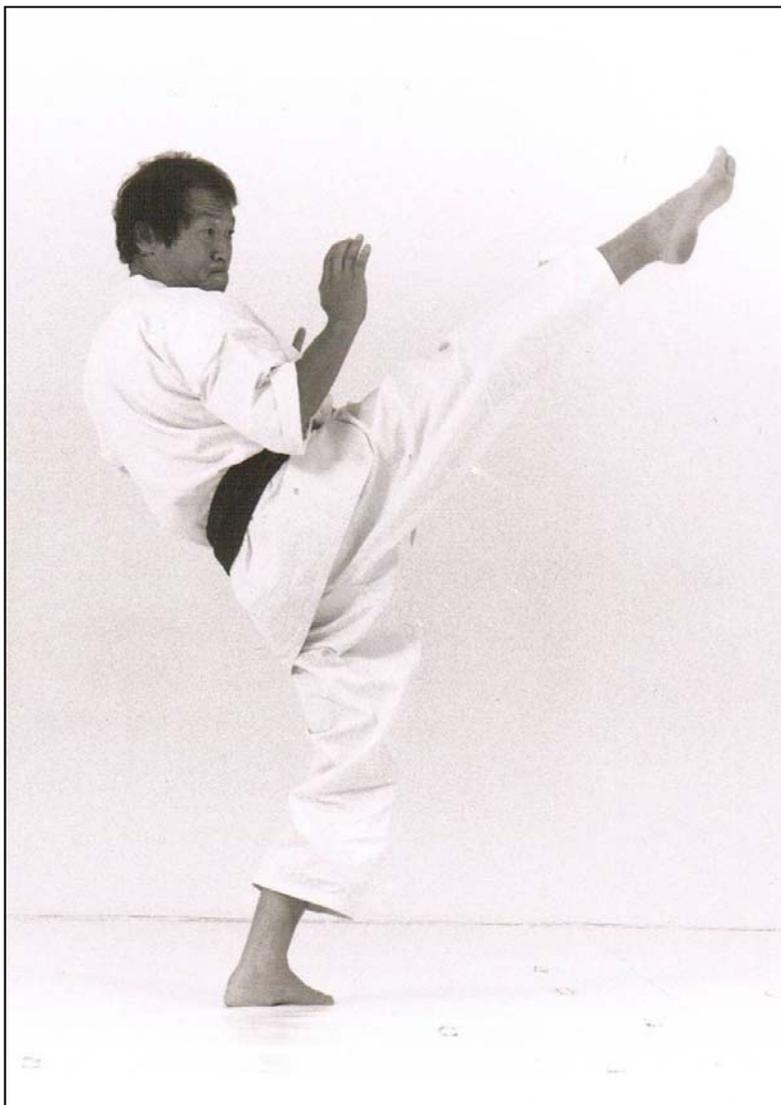
World Oyama Karate

Honbu Newsletter

Issue 37 - June, 2014

SECRET TIP ??? (FOR BECOMING CHAMPION)

By Founder Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama



Little Efforts Produce Big Results

June 1st—Fighter's Cup—San Francisco

I flew out of Birmingham the day before. I met up with Shihan Dai Takahashi on the connecting flight from Atlanta to San Francisco. I enjoy travelling with someone more than travelling alone—makes it easier to kill time. The flight went smoothly and Sensei Saito picked us up at the airport around 6:00 p.m. and took us to the hotel. As always, he had a big smile on his face.

The Fighter's Cup Knockdown Tournament almost marks the end of the first half of events for the year 2014. The only remaining one is the Japan Branch Chief Camp at the end of June. After checking in, we went to Sensei Saito's house for dinner. He lives in a nice area. I saw his 2 lovely kids and his wife, Sensei Yoko. Her nickname is "Boss". It's the same at my house—my wife is boss. Same with Shihan Dai Takahashi, and even with Sensei Karl.

Sensei Motoi from San Jose joined us for dinner, as well as a couple Black Belts from the San Francisco Dojo. Dinner was great, as it always is at Sensei Saito's house. I've mentioned before that Sensei Saito is a great cook. Also, San Francisco has a great selection of fresh fruits and vegetables, seafood, wine, and sake. My primary reason for going to San Francisco every June is to help build up the tournament and make it a great success, but honestly, eating Sensei Saito's cooking is a close second. His food is fantastic!

After Black Belt class on the Friday before I went to San Francisco, I talked to some of the Black Belt about the Fighter's Cup. I talked a little bit about the tournament, but went on for a long time about Sensei Saito's cooking.



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2014 San Francisco Fighters Cup Champions

The Black Belts started drooling—especially Senpai Paul. "It's too late to buy a ticket for this year," he said, "but next year, I'll go and fight in the tournament, but can I eat dinner at Sensei Saito's house too?"

A little over 100 people competed in the Fighter's Cup. It was a very exciting tournament. I watched from the V.I.P. table, seated next to Consulate General from the Japanese Embassy in San Francisco. On April 26th, in Birmingham, we had the American Cup Knockdown Tournament. All the Branch Chiefs, Black Belt Association and students help make it a tremendous success. We were able to raise almost \$10,000 to donate to Children's Hospital of Alabama. It was such a successful tournament because all of the dojo members and volunteers began working months in advance to organize this event.

It was evident to me while watching the American and Fighter's Cups just how important tournaments are to students' development. In Newsletter #14 "TAI KAI" I talked about how a tournament is a big goal in training, as well as a new beginning in one's Karate journey. Fighting in a tournament is a completely different situation than fighting in class or even at a promotion test. The tension in the atmosphere increases dramatically when it comes to tournament fighting. Even before tournament day, a fighter must first win the battle within themselves; the battle against self-doubt, the urge to take shortcuts, the countless daily barrages of whispers enticing him/her to take it easy, not train so hard. The training process combined with the pressure of fighting in the tournament shows a student who they really are—the hard truths about

themselves, both the strengths and weaknesses, rise to the surface. By competing, students discover themselves and see the world differently. The seeds of growth are planted, but it's up to each student to nurture these seeds, water them with their sweat, after the tournament is over. This invaluable growth opportunity is something every student should try to experience at least 3 or 4 times. Age and experience level doesn't matter. There are divisions for everyone, from "pee-wee" to "Super Senior". However, in order for competitors to have a positive experience, the quality of the judges and chief referees is essential.

Oyama Karate Branch Chiefs, Black Belts, Senseis, Shihan Dais, comprise the judging teams at Oyama Karate tournaments. In order to be a good tournament judge, one must have a discerning eye and knowledge about what to look for in a tournament match. For example: Young children fighters wear headgear, gloves, shin pads and chest guards. Ideally, children would fight against someone of the same age, weight and rank. However, in reality, age is usually the overriding factor in determining children's divisions. Children of the same age often have different weights. Sometimes during a match, the larger kid will use both hands to push his/her opponent back. There is no technique involved, just pushing. In Sumo wrestling, pushing an opponent out of the ring is one way to win a match. This is called Oshi Dashi—Oshi (to push) Dashi (out).

But this is Karate, not Sumo. To an untrained eye, a larger child that is pushing an opponent back and off the mat seems to be winning. But there is no technique involved—just push-

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ing and using a size advantage. The other fighter has no chance to use their techniques because they are constantly being pushed. When the match is finished, judges/referees who declare that the kid who was pushing is the winner because they looked more aggressive have made a terrible mistake. In essence, that fighter won only because they are bigger or did more pushing—none of which has anything much to do with Karate techniques.

Besides deciding who wins and loses (and understanding the reason why), judges and referees are responsible for keeping fighters safe as possible. By strictly enforcing rules against illegal techniques, (i.e. kicking the groin, punching the face, directly kicking the knee joint, grabbing the dogi or head while kicking/punching, etc.) judges minimize the risk of serious injury during a fight. Sometimes, though, judges overlook the importance of awarding Ippon (full point) for clean kicks to the head in semi-knockdown matches. Because children and other semi-knockdown fighters wear protective headgear, they are able to remain standing after receiving a direct blow to the head, which would otherwise knock them to the ground. Because of this, if a fighter takes a clean kick to the head, which causes the head to move, a Wazari (half-point) should be awarded immediately. If the kick causes the head and body to move, or causes the fighter to stop their movement, an Ippon (full point) should be given. Even though a fighter may remain on his/her feet, if they stop their movement, it is because their brain has been shocked by the impact. If they were to continue fighting, their coordination and mental focus would

be compromised, putting them at a high risk for further and more serious injury.

The head and brain are extremely fragile and so merit a high level of protection. This can be a difficult balance for a judge—trying to protect a fighter but also not being so overly-protective that they stop a fight too soon. For example, a kick that deflects to the head, such as a roundhouse kick that first hits an opponent's shoulder, then glances to the head, should only be a Kouka. Of course, if the indirect blow causes the head or head and body to move, then it would still be a Wazari or Ippon as explained above. Judging is extremely difficult to do well. Even judges for professional boxing matches or Olympic events make errors or controversial decisions. Even so, I want World Oyama Karate tournament judges to be held to the highest possible standard. That means it is extremely important for students to gain as much experience as possible competing, so that they can have a deeper knowledge for the future.

When I came back from the Fighter's Cup, I met with Sensei Karl and we reviewed the official tournament rules and judging manual. "Pushing" should have been listed among the illegal techniques, but it was not. It is now! A tournament fight is a chance for students to use the techniques they have been training against someone—not simply push another person around the mat. Some knockdown fighters used pushing too. These pushes were well-timed and sometimes followed up with techniques, but pushing nonetheless. My point is that for a tournament to be successful, everyone needs to fully understand the rules and the reasoning behind them.

I've always maintained that Oyama Karate Brown Belts are comparable to Black Belts of any other style. Some people may disagree, but that's what I think. We have Perfect Karate and Kyoten Volumes I, II, III and IV. We have a clear and standardized curriculum in place for students to follow as they progress in their training. Beginning at the Brown Belt level, students need to read and study the Kata and Kumite Judging Manuals to gain knowledge about what to look for in tournament competition. This will make their Karate deeper and richer.

From watching these two tournaments, I was also reminded of how important correct form for basic techniques is in Kumite and Kata. A couple days after the American Cup, one of my students knocked on my door before class. He is a very huge, nice and intelligent guy. Unfortunately, he didn't win 1st place, but he worked very hard preparing for the tournament.

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He stepped inside my office door and said, "Osu! Saiko Shihan, may I talk to you?"

"Sure," I said, "I have a minute. But only a minute." My office isn't really small, but this guy's body took up about half of it when he walked in. "I hate to lose," he said.

"I understand. Me too. Your friends, family, the whole United States, the entire world, and even aliens on Mars—all of them hate it when you lose." We both laughed.

"Saiko Shihan, what do I need to do?" he asked. This guy loves to fight. Kata and Kihon, not so much. Whenever we practice basic techniques like Seiken, Zenkutsu Dachi, Kiba Dachi, Kokutsu Dachi, Yoko Geri, Mawashi Geri—suddenly he complains about his knees hurting. Or his arm. Or wrist, or nose or chest or that it's sunny, it's rainy, it's cold, it's hot... When it's time to fight, he's fine, but when I push him to correct his stance or technique, suddenly he has a bunch of excuses.

I told him that to improve, basic techniques are important. His

face was saying, "OK, thank you," but his eyes said, "C'mon Saiko Shihan! Give me some special technique. You have magic, don't you? Special powers? Just share a little bit with me!" He is a very adorable, sweet guy, but sometimes he gives me a massive headache. I could read what he was thinking. I told him that people think that Karate has some kind of mysterious secrets, but really it's very scientific and practical. His eyes were not satisfied. He answered, "Ossuuu..." still wanting secret knowledge.

"Basics!" I shouted, "That's it! You lost the tournament but you are now at a new beginning. Back to basics." He wanted to say more, but I cut him off with, "Time's over now. If we talk anymore, I'm going to charge you \$100 per second."

During class later that night, we started with Sanchin Dachi and Zenkutsu Dachi with Seiken. The big guy's knees started to raise up in Sanchin Dachi. That meant he couldn't use his leg power in his punches. He lost sharpness. When we did Zenkutsu Dachi, his front knee should have been bent over his toes, but his stance was sloppy and he didn't pull his other



Former Uchi Deshi Class Reunion

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hand all the way back when punching. I jumped on him. "You need to bend your knee sharply and pull the other hand back! That way you can put all 280 lbs. of your body into the force of your first two seiken knuckles. That's the point and you are missing it because your stance is weak and you don't pull your hand back enough! You know why I'm jumping on you?"

"Uh, osu..."

"If your Hikite (pull hand) isn't sharp enough, your punching hand loses speed and power. A sharp Hikite means that you rotate your hips and shoulders—your punch explodes. Everything is connected, Damnitt!"

Then we practiced front snap kicks. He would kick and let his kicking leg fall back to the ground. There was no sharp snapping motion, just a slow pushing of his foot. "You don't snap your leg," I told him, "so, your power is dulled and when your leg falls to the floor, your next movement is too slow. That makes it easy for your opponent to read you. You don't pay attention to these points, that's why your techniques don't work. That is Saiko Shihan's secret tip!" Many advanced students don't concretely imagine an opponent when the practice basics. They think they already know it, so their kicks just look like exercises because they don't get into it. Their Kamae gets sloppy, which makes it impossible to reserve power and speed. For Mae Geri, it's important to bend the knee of the kicking leg sharply in order to develop a sharp, powerful kick. The big guy wasn't focused on correct form, so his Kamae was sloppy and hips too high. This meant that he didn't bend his knee the way he should. "You have a sloppy Kamae," I told him, "your eyes have no excitement in them. They look like you're just wandering what to eat for dinner. The only time your eyes are excited is when it's time to fight. You need to get excited about Kihon and Kata too!"



All of our students and Black Belts made fundraising a great success!

The same thing happened when we did side kick. He didn't use correct Sokuto (Kyoten vol. III pg. 82). He also couldn't make a good Chusoku because he jammed his toe. Most every student has to pass through that and continue practicing to get good form. Chusoku, Sokuto, seiken all take a long time to develop. In order to do it, you have to practice throughout the day, outside of the dojo. If you just make a little effort, a couple minutes a day, you will see improvements. You can practice these things anywhere—in bed, watching TV, sitting in a chair, driving a car. The point is that if you want to someday become a World Oyama Karate Black Belt, you need to put in effort outside of the dojo, make Karate part of your daily life.

One common mistake students make when trying to use Chusoku (ball of the foot) is that they bend back their toes as well as the ankle. Correct form for Chusoku is that the toes are bent back while the ankle remains straight. If you execute front snap kick and try to use Chusoku with the ankle bent, the result is that the trajectory of the kick slides upward against the target rather than piercing straight in as it would with the ankle straight.

When I started training Karate, one of the Senior Black Belts at the dojo had great, powerful kicks using the Chusoku. He was

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a small, skinny guy, but he could generate tremendous power with his kicks because all of the force was focused into the ball of the foot. He had large calluses on the balls of his feet from all the training he had done. One day I asked him, "Senpai, were you born with feet like that?"

"No," he laughed, "I just worked on it a little every day. I'm a little guy, so I have to use the ball of my foot when facing opponents. Most people don't like to use the ball of the foot because they jam their toes and stop trying to use it. But Chusoku is a very powerful weapon to have." So I started practicing making Chusoku a little bit every day—at home, school, on the subway, in the bath. Eventually I could do it. If you just put in little efforts throughout the day, you can build your Karate stronger and deeper. It doesn't have to be a major task, just 5 minutes during some part of the day.

If you focus on getting correct form, the technique will talk to you. Every punch, kick and block requires you to use your body in a specific way for the technique to be effective. For example, in roundhouse kick, you need to bring the knee of the kicking leg up close to the ribs before kicking. But if a person is stiff in the groin and hips, they cannot do it. So, they need to stretch more. That was the case with this big guy. So I stretched him as he held the bar. I held his knee and raised it into position. He tried to move his head to lessen the pain of the stretch, but I told him to keep his head straight. After stretching him, he tried kicking the pads. His eyes popped open as he felt his power was totally different. "See," I said, "basic techniques are important!"

Not paying attention to correct form causes bad habits in your basic techniques. If you have good form, you can arrange your techniques in a variety of different ways. It also makes it harder for your opponent to read your movements, which makes them confused. Additionally, practicing basic techniques with correct form repeatedly allows you to better read your opponent, to see instantly what attack they are planning based on how they move. This is why most people say that, "The heart of Karate is Kumite and the heart of Kumite is Kihon (Basics)".

People say this, but often shortcut their Kihon Training. They don't spend enough time practicing correct form for all techniques. This limits the skill level they can reach in their Kumite. There are numerous ways to arrange the same basic technique for different situations. For example, in Perfect Karate pgs. 40 – 43, there is a detailed explanation of how to execute Mawashi Geri in a variety of ways depending on the result you want to achieve. If you add Ashi no Hakobi (footwork) to this, you can also deliver the same technique numerous ways from

a variety of angles. In addition to Kihon training, Kata training is important to learn how to use Hyoshi (tempo), power and speed in fighting, as well as how to put different techniques together in an effective fighting strategy.

Many students miss this point about Kata training. They think Kata is just something they have to memorize or something that they do for exercise. They don't imagine an actual opponent when they practice. One time, the same big guy I mentioned earlier had a promotion test where he made many fundamental mistakes in his Katas. His fighting was good, but only his fighting. During the test, I asked him to show me Zenkutsu Dachi, Kiba Dachi, Kokutsu Dachi. I then added Nekko Ashi Dachi. When I said "Nekko Ashi Dachi" he just stared at me blankly. His eyes seemed to be saying, "What are you talking about??? Is that Karate? Or politics or something else?"

"You never heard of Nekko Ashi Dachi?" I asked him.

"Uh,... um... no, osu..." He answered.

"Do you have Kyoten volume 1?" I asked.

"Osu, yes I have it."

"You read it?"

"Osu..."

"So, you're a green belt now. That means you have Kyoten Volumes 1 – 4 and Perfect Karate, right?"

"Osu. I have them."

"Good. You read them?"

"Osu, sometimes."

"Good. Kokutsu Dachi is explained in which Kyoten volume?"

He just looked dumbfounded back at me. Then he looked up, down, left, right, at his wife, at the Black Belts at the promotion testing. Finally he answered, "Um, Kyoten 3."

"Is that your final answer?"

"Osu, yes final answer."

I slammed my hand down on the desk and shouted, "Damn it,

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KYOTEN ONE! I bet you've never opened it!" I asked him another question. "Which volume has side kick and Kiba Dachii Tetsui?"

He went pale and looked like he was about to throw up. I could see the other green belts next to him getting nervous and pale too. "You have Uchi Deshi in America?" I asked.

"Yes, I loved it," he said.

"Good. What page did Masa eat Sanma?"

"Uh... uh..."

"That was a joke," I said. But side kick and Kiba Dachii Tetsui, that's not a joke. You better answer!" By that time, I could feel that everyone in the dojo was getting nervous. Even the Brown and Black Belts who were assisting with the promotion and not actually testing. During promotions, I always test the knowledge of the assisting Brown and Black Belts by asking them to give feedback to the promoting students. Often they will give abstract advice like, "Uh, good Kiai. Need a little more sharpness in the techniques." If I'm grouchy that day, I'll shoot back with, "That's so abstract! You need to give concrete advice!"

"Oh, well, actually I was watching that guy over there."

"OK, so give advice to him."

"Um, well, I couldn't really see him."

"I knew it! You're just standing there with your eyes open but thinking about other things, like what you're going to have for dinner."

Again, if you want to reach the next level in your fighting skill, Kihon training is vitally important. When you get into Kihon training, the technique talks to you and tells you what you need to work on to improve—conditioning, flexibility, strength, etc. This is how you challenge yourself both mentally and physically. That's what makes the Chi in the dojo come alive. So remember, there are no shortcuts. Rome wasn't built in a day. If you want to get a Black Belt or be champion, you need a humble/open spirit and need to challenge yourself to get correct form. You need to feel both feet sucking the power from the floor with knees bent in Sanchin Dachii. In Zenkutsu Dachii, feel how the sharp bend in the front knee allows all of your power to go forward. In Kiba Dachii, the rotation of your hips generates power, and in Kokutsu Dachii, your weight shifts to the back so you can easily use your lead foot when attacking. And so on. Paying close attention to all of these important details will make your Karate sharper and more powerful.



2014 American Cup Champions

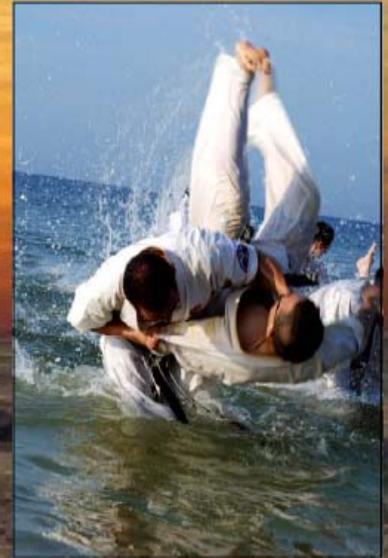


SUMMER CAMP 2014

Orange Beach/Gulf Shore, Alabama

July 17th - July 20th, 2014

Sweat! Sweat! Sweat!

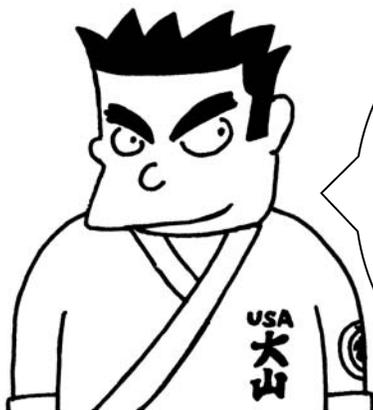


Sunrise Training

- Special Take Down Technique
- Basic, Kata, Fight

Sunset Gym Training

- Tonfa, Nunchaku, Shinai
- Weapons Fighting Technique



New Tonfa
Kata at
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