



# 国際大山空手道連盟総本部

## World Oyama Karate

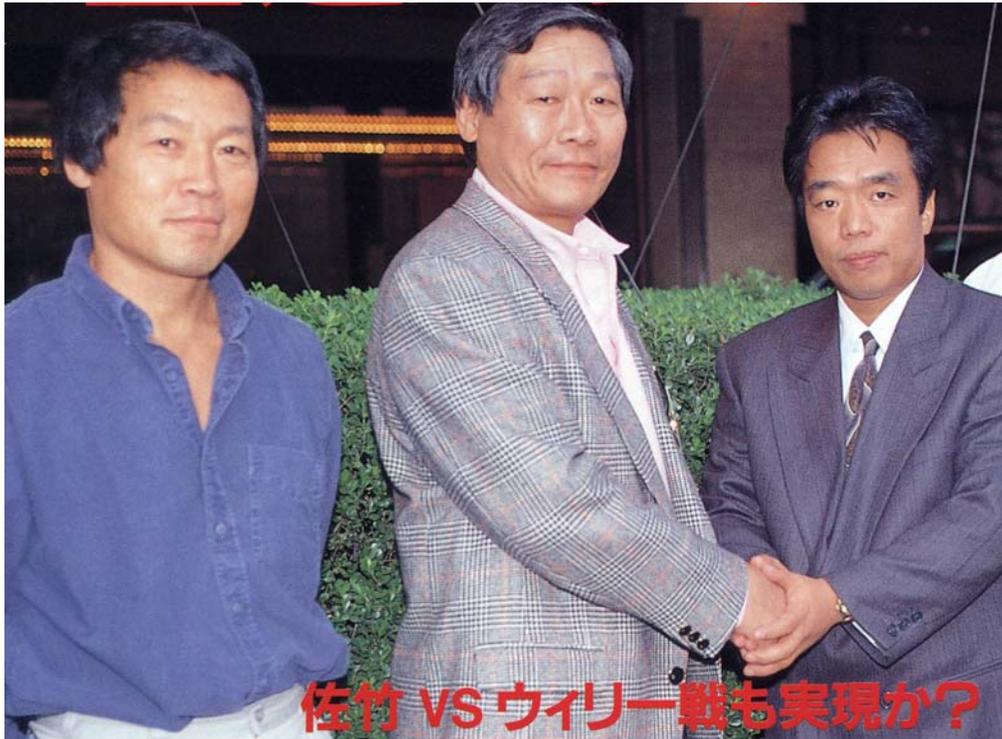
### Honbu Newsletter

Issue 4 - Spring, 2004

# K-1

By Founder Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama

## NEW WAVE IN KARATE WORLD



Recently I saw a K-1 fight on ESPN, and this reminded me of K-1's origin. These K-1 tournaments are very popular in Japan. K-1 competitions pack the stadium. Baseball stadiums fill with 50,000-60,000 excited fans for these tournaments, and the big show is always a major media event with live television network coverage. This sports phenomenon is the creation of KAZUYOSHI ISHI, the founder and producer of K-1.

I met Ishi in the Spring of 1990, about two years before he founded K-1. A long time ago, Ishi was a member of the KYOKUSHIN Karate Organization, but at the time of our meeting, he had already

Founders Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama    Soshu S. Oyama    K-1 Founder Kazuyoshi Ishi

founded his own organization called SAI DO KAI KAN 正道会館 . It was headquartered in Osaka. He was looking for the opportunity to move his organization to Tokyo. This would give him real credibility.

At that time I was writing an article every month for Full Contact, the number one Karate magazine in Japan. Each article was an essay on technique and also a story to illustrate fundamental points. I was writing the series of articles to build the name of WORLD OYAMA KARATE in Japan. It was a very busy time for me. I was well known even then because I was very high in the Kyokushin Organization. These articles made me even more famous. The Chief Editor of Full Contact magazine at that time was a man named YAMADA.

One day Yamada approached me about conducting an interview between Ishi and myself for the magazine. I didn't know Ishi at all then, but he certainly knew about me. The interview was all Ishi's idea, and he had convinced Yamada to talk to me about it. Ishi knew that if he could get this interview published in Full Contact magazine, it would be great publicity for himself and greatly raise the reputation of Sai Do Kai Kan. I agreed to at least meet with Ishi and listen to him. So Ishi and I met and discussed many points.

## K-1 New Wave in Karate World ... Continue

I was very impressed with Ishi's ideas and opinions. His way was very different from anyone I had ever met before. When other KARATE KA want to do something different, they almost never pursue the idea. Their action is stopped by the ancient traditions of Karate. They find it very difficult to break through this philosophy and successfully carry out the project. They are stuck in the old ways. Even when some Karate Ka would break through, their action would be very small. But Ishi was totally different. Whenever he had an idea that was in conflict with the tradition of Karate, he would not hesitate to cut off that thought and go forward with the project. He knew that his "new wave" way of thinking was great for business. We met and talked occasionally from then on.

### TOURNAMENT "LAST CHANCE"

Later when Ishi and I met, we discussed knockdown



K-1 Founder Kazuyoshi Ishi and Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama



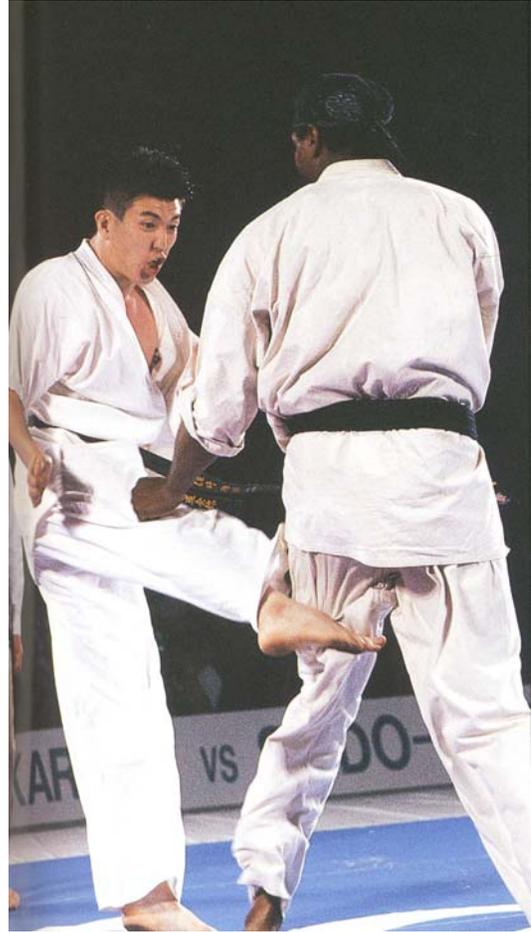
Sata Ke against Willie Williams

Karate tournaments. At that time, and even today, it is usual to start a Karate tournament in the morning and continue it all day long until the championship at night with almost no break at all. I told him that I thought a tournament would be much better if it lasted only 2-3 hours. The action would be more concentrated and dynamic, and the tournament would be much more exciting. He absolutely agreed. Then he mentioned that he would like to see a championship between Sai Do Kai Kan and World Oyama Karate. He wanted the tournament to be a bare hand, bare foot, knockdown tournament on the three-round system. Each organization selected five fighters. I think he wanted to use this opportunity to make one of his fighter a star. His name is SATA KE. He is over 6 feet tall and over 200 lb. He is big. He wanted to make Sata Ke's fight to be a mass media special attention. He didn't say it, but I knew his intention. I could feel it. He wanted to make Sata Ke a star. It was all part of his plan to raise the stature of his Sai Do Kai Kan Karate and make his style well known in Tokyo. He also asked me, Soshu S. Oyama, and Shihan Miura to do a demonstration. He knew that everyone would love to see this. He knew that this would be a sensational event for the mass media. It would draw the television cameras and all the attention he craved. We never discussed this, but I knew it was his plan. We had done the same in KYOKUSHIN KAI KAN under MAS OYAMA. Mas Oyama told us many times that in order to have a great championship, you must have a super star. This is the key to having a successful tournament. I don't know how many times he said this, but it was always his belief. This is still true no matter what the endeavor – sports, entertainment, business, politic – you name it. Just look at any sport. In golf it's Tiger Woods. In baseball there was Babe Ruth and today

## K-1 New Wave in Karate World ... Continue

Alex Rodriguez or Roger Clement. In boxing there was Mohammed Ali and George Foreman. All of these men were “headliners” who built their whole sport. Ishi understood this and so he wanted to make Sata Ke just such a super star in Karate. The tournament was designed to make Sai Do Kai Kan look superior. Ishi’s Sata Ke was to fight World Oyama Karate’s Willie Williams. Williams was extremely popular in Japan. Sata Ke was 25 years old, and he was a rising sun – physically and mentally. Willie Williams was 40 years old and just trying to hang on. His sun was setting. This would be the final fight - the headline fight. There would also be four preliminary fights. For one of these fights, Ishi wanted to feature his fighter, YANAGISAWA (two time All Japan Champion), who was 25 years old. He was paired against one of my students, Chuck Chisim, who was 43 years old. The oldest fighter in the tournament. Another preliminary fight featured Soshu’s student Jose L. Cotton.

So on June 6, 1991, the great championship knockdown tournament was held in Tokyo’s Olympic Stadium (Yoyogi Arena). It was called “Last Chance”. (I gave it this name.) The stadium was packed! At the end of the preliminary bout between Chuck Chisim and Yanagisawa, one of the judges ruled in favor of Chuck, but the Chief Referee called it a draw. In the Willie Williams vs. Sata Ke fight, Sata Ke won by unanimous decision. So Ishi accomplished his goal to make Sata Ke a major star in the world of martial arts. Ishi was very smart



**Rising Star Sata Ke attacking Willie William**

about this, though. After the tournament, when he was interviewed by the mass media, he said, “Since our team could not knock out the World Oyama Karate fighters, we actually lost this championship.” He recognized the fact that there was a great age difference in the fighters. But I believe another reason he said this was to keep good relations between his Sai Do Kai Kan organization and the World Oyama Karate organization. This is proof of what I knew from the beginning – Ishi is a very smart guy, both as a Karate Ka and as a business man. I was very impressed with Ishi’s style.

I remember another time that I was impressed by Ishi. It was in mid-March of 1991, before the “Last Chance” Championship. We were holding a World Oyama Karate Spring Clinic in Japan. Ishi, Sata Ke, and a man named KAKU TA, the number two guy in the Sai Do Kai Kan organization (and later the 2003 K-1 Grand Prix Championship Chief Referee), came to participate in the clinic. Ishi also brought his friend TANI GAWA,



**Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama and Chuck Chisim**

## K-1 New Wave in Karate World ... Continue



**Oldest fighter Chuck attacking Yanagisawa**

the editor-in-chief of a major sports magazine. They all came to this World Oyama Karate clinic. It was Ishi's way of showing respect and gaining the favor of our organization. Every day Ishi would talk to me about how important it was to train with gloves and prepare for face contact matches. At that time kickboxing MUI THAI with face contact was already very popular in Japan. These guys were lightweights or at most middleweights. But Ishi's idea was to produce a super heavyweight face contact championship. This had never been done before. He talked very passionately about this idea, and he knew what a tremendous success this would be. He knew it would be an explosion in the world of martial arts. Yes, Ishi was a very smart man.

### K-1, THE RISING SUN

So the "Last Chance" Championship of June, 1991, was a huge success, Ishi's Sata Ke became a super star, and K-1 was born. It is now the era of the mass-media martial arts spectacular.

I watched Ishi's operation from that time on as he meticulously built up Sata Ke and K-1. I noticed how he very carefully chose the matches for his fighter. Each was designed to build Sata Ke's winning record and to enhance his reputation. Ishi was not just a new-wave

business entrepreneur. He knew Karate very well, also. This is an important point. Ishi was so skilled that he could read a match before it took place. Just like a champion chess player, he knew the result of his choices for Sata Ke many "moves" (Karate matches) in advance. Very few Karate masters can do this, but I understood what he was doing. I used to be a TV commentator for major Kyokushin tournaments. I could tell after just a few body movements by each of the competitors who would be the winner of a match. It's impossible to predict this 100% of the time, but usually this was the case. Many Karate Ka can judge an individual fighter's quality – particularly if you see this fighter training every day in the dojo. But what I'm speaking of here is a special "vision". It is completely different. A great Karate master is a professional who can recognize a fighter's qualities – his character, his habits, his strengths, and his weaknesses – after seeing only a little bit of the fighter in action. Ishi had this ability. I recognized this and respect him for it even today. He is not just a good businessman. He is also a great Karate master with many years of training and experience.

Ishi carefully planned the rise of K-1, and he made

many smart moves to build it up. For example, in the beginning he did not just sit back and wait for great fighters to come to him. He would often fly around the world to talk with a famous knockdown Karate fighter. If the man was an outstanding fighter and extremely popular, Ishi would make him a very generous offer to come back with him to Japan to participate in a K-1 Championship.



**Jose embraced his opponent after draw**

He sometimes paid as much as \$100,000 to draw the very best. No tournament producer in the world paid as well as Ishi, not even the big Mui Thai producers. He was careful about the styles he invited, also, and considered which would draw the biggest number of fans. He knew that Kyokushin Kai Kan was

## K-1 New Wave in Karate World ... Continue

extremely popular in Japan so he often invited those fighters. Ishi was also the first to feature the super heavyweight fighters. Just as he had predicted to me back in 1991, this was a huge success. Until then, the fighters that most Japanese fans had seen were light- and middleweights, but Ishi brought in guys who were well over 6 feet tall, maybe as much as 6 feet 7 inches, and always over 250 pounds. The Japanese had never seen anything like this before. These men were mega giants, and their fights were powerful, dynamic and very exciting. Just one shot from one of these guys would knock an opponent out.

So, K-1 rose like a hot, brilliant sun over the sports world. It grew in popularity and prestige until soon it was the greatest media phenomenon that the martial arts world had ever seen. Now Ishi doesn't need to fly around the world seeking the best fighters. They all come to him.

Well, now Ishi is having some legal problems, and he has stepped down as the K-1 producer. He placed Tani Gawa (the former magazine editor who came to my World Oyama Karate clinic) in the position of K-1 Executive Producer. In the number two position, Ishi placed a man named Kaku Ta. To the fans and to the business world, these men seem to be directing K-1. But I am sure that things are different than they appear. Even though Ishi has officially stepped down, I believe he still controls the operation. No one makes a move unless Ishi says so.

### ALABAMA UCHI DESHI CHALLENGING K-1

Before the super heavyweight K-1 tournaments, there



Saiko Shihan, Sata Ke, Soshu, Kaku Ta, Shihan Miura, and Ishi



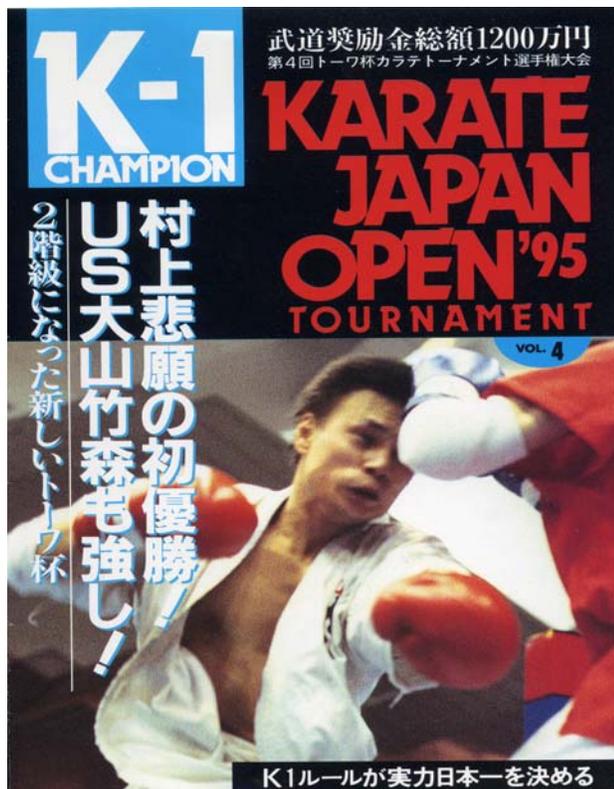
Tonfa and Bo demonstration

was another face contact tournament that was very popular. It was called TO A HAI. It was also a K-1 tournament produced by EIICHI KAMIMURA. When I was in the Kyokushin organization, he was one of my juniors. He is the one who opened the door for kickboxing all over Japan. A long time ago, I went with him to Thailand. Even in Thailand he was very well known and highly respected by the Mui Thai people.

After the 1991 "Last Chance" Sai Do Kai Kan tournament, Ishi, Kamimura and I would meet occasionally when I went back to Japan. They would always ask me to send a fighter. I remember one time in particular. In October of 1994 I went to Japan to teach a student clinic. On that visit Kamimura really pressed me to send a heavyweight fighter and a middleweight fighter. When I returned to the United States, I talked to Soshu about this, and we decided to send two fighters for the K-1 tournament to be held on January 22, 1995. We sent Jason, a heavyweight fighter from New York. For the middleweight division, I sent my UCHI DESHI, TAKE MORI.

You should understand that there is a big difference in the rules between bare hand, bare foot knockdown com-

## K-1 New Wave in Karate World ... Continue



Sensei Take Mori final match video cover

petition and face contact competition using gloves. If it is a bare hand, bare foot fight, you cannot use the hand to attack the face. This means that the fighting style must be very different. In bare hand, bare foot competition, the fighters KAMAE (fighting posture) is usually kind of open. But if you are using gloves and face contact is allowed, you absolutely cannot use an open body posture. If you do, you'll be like a sand bag. In a later article I want to explain to you more about the technical differences between bare hand, bare foot fighting and face contact with gloves. But now I want to continue with K-1.

If you wear gloves and fight with face contact, it is important that you get used to this different style. The easiest way to do this is simply to send the fighter to a boxing gym. However, we didn't have time for this. The decision to participate in the tournament was made in October of 1994 and the tournament was in January, 1995. We had less than 3 months to train and there was not enough time in the boxing gym. And besides, the boxing coach would do nothing to train for kicking. In Karate you must train for punch and kick, kick and punch. I knew the boxing coach would just confuse Take Mori, so I just started training him for face contact

myself using World Oyama Karate style. I believed that I could train Take Mori in the short time and make him a champion. We have the technique and we have the knowledge to do this. However, Soshu did send Jason to the boxing gym in New York. I had one student at my dojo who was an experienced boxer, so I had him spar with Take Mori. Our style is full contact and for this you must imagine everything from the top of your head to the bottom of your toes. You must understand everything. This is why I wrote PERFECT KARATE and WORLD OYAMA KARATE KYOTEN, VOLUMES 1-4. I have confidence in the theory of our style.

### TAKE MORI SWEAT, SWEAT, SWEAT

Take Mori came to the Southeastern Headquarters as an Uchi Deshi in September, 1992. He was a powerful fighter and a "south paw." His fighting style at that time was to use just his powerful left hand and left kick when facing a strong opponent. His stance was right foot forward so that he could more powerfully use his left hand. This was a problem because when he concentrated so much on using just his left hand, this caused his body to be very open and vulnerable. In the bare hand bare foot tournaments in which he had competed before, this was not so much a problem. Take Mori could afford to take a few body shots. But now he was training to fight in a face contact K-1 tournament. If he used this style for K-



Challenger Sensei Take Mori

## K-1 New Wave in Karate World ... Continue



**Champion Sensei Take Mori**

1, his face would look like ground hamburger in no time. I told him, “TAKE MORI, you think your left hand is strong, but guess what... Your left hand in K-1 fighting is a baby punch. Forget your left hand. Forget your left foot. You’ve got to use your lead right hand and your lead right foot!” This is much quicker. Also, most power fighters use a wide stance to deliver great impact with their reverse punch. But this makes the body more open. This was Take Mori’s style, and he could not survive a fight by K-1 rules, much less win the championship with this style. So I made him narrow his stance. Like most power fighters, Take Mori wanted to attack straight, but I changed this, also. I made him move in and out, left and right, and circle. It took a lot of work and breaking a couple of bamboo

sticks to change Take Mori’s fighting style, but he did change. During these sessions I was really excited and so was Take Mori. Training was always very intense.

One week before the big K-1 tournament, I sent Take Mori to Japan by himself. I couldn’t go with him because I had to take care of my dojo. But I sent 7 letters with him, one to be opened each day. In these letters I told him how to conduct his entire day, morning to night. I told him how to train, how to eat, how to drink, and even what to think and what to dream. The letters became even more detailed as the tournament drew near. Take Mori opened the last letter on the morning of tournament day. I simply said, “You are champion. Congratulations! You have done well. This should be

## K-1 New Wave in Karate World ... Continue

no problem.” That’s all I said.

The middleweight division is the toughest fighting division in Japan. This is because the Japanese people are usually not so big. This means that there are many, many fighters in this weight class. It really fits the Japanese body type. So this means that most of the great Japanese fighters will compete in the middleweight division. Many of the greatest Mui Thai and professional kickboxing fighters compete as middleweights. Take Mori had to face four tough competitors. The first he won by decision. The next fight he won by a knock out. His opponent was devastated by a spinning TETSUI. The third match was the toughest of all. He faced a professional kickboxer. Many said he couldn’t possibly beat this guy because he was so good. At the end of regulation time, the decision was a draw. At the end of the first overtime, it was still a draw. Then they fought a second overtime. This time there was no doubt. Take Mori was the clear winner. Now it was time for the ultimate final championship match. Take Mori came out with fire in his eyes. He knocked his opponent down twice during the match. At the end there was no question who won. Take Mori was CHAMPION! He had risen above all these great fighters. This was Take Mori’s first major tournament, and it was the first time he had fought by K-1 rules, and still he was champion. Jason took 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the heavyweight division.

At the K-1 tournament that day, Soshu sat ringside with the K-1 producer, Ishi. Soshu called me that night after the tournament was over. He called to tell me that Take Mori was champion. He also told me what Ishi had said. Ishi said, “Oyama Karate is strong.”

### TO BE A CHAMPION

I want to give you some important advice now. If you want to be a Karate champion, you must strictly obey the following important philosophies. First of all you must follow the instruction of your Karate Sensei (who has experience, knowledge, and history) completely. Your mind must be a blank sheet of paper that accepts the word of your Karate Sensei without question. You must have blind faith and simply accept what you are told. Secondly, you must be absolutely stubborn in your pursuit of this teaching and training. No exceptions. No excuses. And finally, to be champion, you must stay hungry. You must hold a burning desire in your heart.

Right now many K-1 fighters are from Eastern Europe. Most likely they are people who have had a hard life, and this has made them tough. In privileged societies, we are not so hungry. It is easy for us to lose our desire and challenging spirit. But you have the power to control this. I believe you should always challenge yourself. Raise your sight and aim for the highest possibility. Always be ambitious and dream great dreams. It is not easy to become a champion. To become a champion, you should sweat while others are playing. You should get up and run while others are sleeping. Do this not for one day and not for one week, but for many years.

Well, I feel a warm breeze blowing today. Spring will come soon. I think human life is like the flower seed that has held its dreams of possibility through the cold winter. As the sun warms the soil, it slowly unfolds and reaches up through the earth, pushing its way through to the light. Slowly, slowly it unfolds into a tall, beautiful bloom. May your spirit and your desire push you higher and make you stronger until one day you, too, are champion.

Dictated by Senpai Jean Johnson



Saiko Shihan and current champion Sensei Masa

# Champion's Road “Karate Monogatari”

## 空手物語

by 拳気 一

ken ki hajime

### Chapter 6

*Continue ...*

Toby says “Yes sir!”

“Just say ‘Osu,’” he replied.

“Osu!”

“Good.”



As the class progressed, there was a moment when Ken was working personally with Rachel, on a kick technique that seemed extremely difficult to me. Her moves seemed very powerful, although he blocked each one with ease and calculation. I hoped that someday I could kick like her. She was powerful. But definitely beautiful. Toby sees this too, and his mouth hung open. “Wow,” is all he could say.

### Chapter 7

When I first started training in karate, my body would ache for several days after each lesson. But after a couple of weeks, my body began to grow used to the workout. I had heard some of the other guys in class say that they’ve seen so many people quit after about three weeks or so. One day, after class, Sensei Ken talked about how today’s society is used to everything being simplified, computerized. Push a button, click a mouse, and suddenly everything falls into place. People are quick to walk away from anything that seems hard, especially the younger generation, those who have grown up with so much technology. “These kids need to turn off the TV,” he said simply in his broken English. “They are not used to anything physical. The physical and the mental sides of life are very unbalanced. A lot of ideas come into their minds, but when reality hits them, and something becomes difficult, they quit. So many ideas amount to little more than a big head, without hard work,” he told us.

The more I thought about it, the more I agreed with

Ken’s speech. I remembered once in high school when some friends and I took a trip to the state park. We went to hike up the mountain trails, all the way to the top. This was my first experience carrying a really heavy backpack. A couple of the guys wanted to quit at one point – I was one of them. My friends encouraged me to keep going, and I did, and we all made it to the top. It was so beautiful, the view, the experience, and the knowledge that I had conquered the mountain. I had conquered myself, my own fears, and had succeeded something truly great. We all looked over the cliff and could see the lowest clouds below us like an ocean. I thought of this moment while Sensei Ken spoke to us about not giving up.

I have to admit, karate is hard at times. So many days, when I would come home from training with aching legs, and then wake up with one sore muscle for a body, I would want to quit. But two months had passed. I had stuck with it, and now I was excited before every class. I was getting to know some of the other students, and had great conversations about technique, and other things too, of course. Sensei Ken’s eyes were still sharp and his presence powerful, but I felt comfortable now talking with him face to face. I could understand nearly everything he said in his strange combination of a Southern and Japanese accent. I began to feel my punches and kicks getting stronger with each class.

Sometimes I felt a little guilty, though. I felt that I put more spirit into the training than Toby did. Before we started taken karate, I used to jog three or four times every week, and lifted weights every now and then. But Toby was usually one to watch television during most of his spare time, or play video games. He’s always been sort of a couch potato. I’ve always been more excited by outdoors activities. I felt I had surpassed him slightly, but I still listened to his opinion on technique; we were still friends, of course. I think he got discouraged sometimes.

One day in November, we saw a sign on the wall of the dojo. “Promotion,” it said. They do this four times a year, once every three months. Students have three months to study and understand the first *Kyoten*, or textbook, and then can test for the blue belt (8<sup>th</sup> *Kyu*). I was kind of excited about the possibility of promotion – it was a goal, a target to attain, something to look for-

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

ward to. Toby was excited, too; I could tell. One day during the fall, it was unseasonably warm, an “Indian summer” I think they call it. My last class was cancelled, so I called Toby and asked if he wanted to go early to the dojo. We got there at 5:20, a good forty minutes before the class started. Ken was talking to some parents, whose kids stood beside them, looking up at their instructor.

Rachel was sitting behind the counter, typing something into the computer. Her soft blonde hair wasn't tied back like during training, and it reached down to her shoulders. I thought to myself, in that moment, that she looked like a beautiful flower that I passed while walking across campus that morning. When she looked up, I looked at her and greeted her with “Osu!” Her sharp eyes, with their noble boldness, looked into mine, and she smiled, showing a set of beautiful white teeth, and said back to us “Osu! You're early! Good spirits.”

These words sounded like music in my ears. My body felt full of power at the sound of her compliment. Toby's face was one enormous smile, as he said, too simply “I like training.” He must have forgotten that I had to drag him there. We both wrote our names down on the attendance record. I wanted to talk to Rachel for a little while before going in to change. As I turned to speak to her, a powerful and loud “Osu” at the door interrupted my words. We looked toward the sound, and there stood some guy I had never seen before. He was a little taller than I was, but he looked to be in great physical shape. I thought he was probably about my age.

Rachel said to him “Osu! Mike. Long time no see. How's it been?” She seemed pretty friendly with him. I guessed our conversation is over. He walked in front of Toby and me, paying no attention. He turned to talk to Rachel, ignoring us completely. I was pretty sure that I knew most of the students there, and I had never seen this guy before – I was sure of this. So we went upstairs to change, slightly disappointed.

In the locker room, we could overhear them downstairs talking. It was a very friendly conversation. Toby said to me, “What's up with *this* guy?”

“I don't know,” was all I could say, feeling a bit dejected.

We changed into our uniforms, and as I pulled my white belt tight, the door opened violently and Mike walked in, throwing his bag into a corner as he entered the locker room. He turned to us and said “Osu!” He took off his shirt and looked into the mirror at his washboard stomach and fixed his hair. He looked away from his own image for a moment and toward Toby and I. “How long have you two been taking lessons?”

“Two months,” I said. But then Toby, as I feared, opened his big mouth.

“Well,” he began. “I started taking this style two months ago, but I trained for a long time in a different style,” he continued and proceeded to pronounce the unrecognizable name of his childhood karate style.

“Never heard of it,” said Mike.

“Well, maybe they don't have it here in Alabama, but it's very popular up north.” I tapped Toby on the shoulder while Mike wasn't looking and signaled for him to calm down. I gave him a look that said, “Just end the conversation.”

Mike left the room, and Toby turned toward me to say “I don't like this guy.”

“Yeah. He's a big mouth.”

It was a beautiful day outside, and the cool air was blowing into the dojo's open door. The weather had me feeling excited and confident. “Are you guys going to try out for the promotion?” Rachel asked us, smiling. “Sensei Ken said you're getting better. You guys should go for promotion. You'll still have three weeks to get ready if you try.” Toby and I were both excited that Sensei Ken was talking about us.

Rachel said to Toby “Sensei Ken says your stance and balance are looking really good. We can see your experience coming through.”

“Really?” asked Toby, excited.

“Yeah, but you need to stretch more on your own, and work on your flexibility.”

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

“Yeah, that’s my weakness.”

“He say anything about me?” I asked, perhaps looking for a little confidence.

“Oh yeah. He said you’re catching on really smoothly – no bad habits. He thinks you’ll be really good in the future.” That made my day.

Suddenly, we heard a loud “Pow!” coming from a corner of the dojo. We turned quickly around and saw Mike kicking one of the sandbags that hung from the ceiling. Ken stood next to him and watched his kicks. “You’ve still got a good kick. But you always disappear in the middle of your progress. That’s why you’re technique comes to a certain level and then stops,” he said. Mike just smiled and said humbly “Osu!” He turned to face Rachel and us, and just shrugged, a bit carelessly.

Toby asked Rachel, “Who is that guy?”

“He and I started around the same time, but about eight months ago, he just quit, maybe to focus on some other sports. If you quit for six months, you have to go back to the white belt. He’s a good fighter, but sometimes he’s a little too cocky.”

At these words, Toby and I looked at one another, and both pronounced a hardy “Osu!” in agreement.

### Chapter 8

The class finally starts. Mike stood in the same part of the room as us, in the front row and to the left, wearing a white belt. His *dogi* made it clear that he was not a beginner, though. It was old and worn from experience. He almost seemed awkward standing with us, with the great imbalance between his belt and his uniform. We started off the class by practicing the *Seiken* punch technique and a couple of kick techniques. After that, we began the *katas*. Caroline is on my right side and Mike on my left. Sensei Ken commands “*Yoi!*” and we stood at attention, ready to begin the *kata*. “*Ich!*” We stepped out and to the left, into position, and delivered a left backhand and a right reverse punch. Mike’s punch sends a sharp pop through the air, a sound that was accompanied by a swift and powerful looking technique. He is definitely above the white belt level. His moves were very impressive, but the whole time I felt like say-

ing to him, “You show-off.” I was a little intimidated, but inside I thought to myself, “I’ll catch you sooner or later.”

After *kata* training, Ken left the white belts and the advanced students on the same mat. He grouped the students into pairs. To my surprise, he put Rachel and I together. Toby’s partner is Mike. I wasn’t so surprised when Toby glanced over at me with a little bit of jealousy in his eyes. I looked at him with a little bit of a shrug, as if to say, “I didn’t choose! I just let the instructor decide!”

I figured that Sensei Ken put me with Rachel because my technique is still so weak. He must have known that Mike would be too much for me. He told us to practice the roundhouse kick technique. “Try to keep good timing,” he said. “Kick chest-high. Don’t kick the face, and no kicking below the belt.” He pulled aside one of the brown belts and demonstrated the correct technique to us. “*Kamate Te,*” he said, and we got into the fighting stance. “*Ha Ji Me!* (begin)” I kicked first, with my right foot. I guess that Rachel probably weighed around 110 or 112 pounds. I didn’t want to kick too hard. I kicked about shoulder high. She blocked deftly with her left arm. When my foot returned to the ground, she smiled her beautiful smile and said, “Try to use a little more power.” She kicked me with her right foot, about chest high, and I blocked with my left arm, surprised at the force that causes me to step backward to absorb the blow. My eyes popped wide open with a little bit of disbelief.

I quickly returned the blow with a left roundhouse kick. She blocked and stepped to the right, ever so smoothly, taking nearly all the power out of my kick. She returned with a left-foot kick, which was even more powerful than her right. “I guess she’s left handed,” I thought to myself. As she returned to her stance, Sensei Ken stopped us. He looked at me and said, “You need to move more. Don’t just absorb the kick every time, or she’s going to kill you!” He laughed at me. I was a little embarrassed, but I smiled and answered “Osu.”

My timing was always late, so she controlled the timing of our melee of kicks. I was out of breath with trying to keep up with her pace, but still never managed to catch up with her timing. Her breathing was smooth and controlled, while she floated like a butterfly. Ken said

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

"Yamei!" which means stop, and we all relaxed. He said, "catch air!" and I took the time to breathe in the oxygen and catch my breath. Rachel looked at me and said "You're getting better." Even though I was out of breath, I felt great when she said this. I couldn't believe that she kicked me so hard. I guess I had always thought such a slender girl would be weaker than I was. But I guess not. "You need to kick harder though," she said.

I thought to myself, "You're such a beautiful girl! How could I kick you harder?" But I said "Osu!"

After we'd had some time to breathe, Sensei Ken said "Now we're going to kick the face, middle-section, and lower body. You don't necessarily have to return the kick to the same area as your partner kicks. But use only the round-house kick." Ken demonstrated the exercise with Mike. Sensei Ken's kick seemed unbelievable powerful, but Mike's seemed pretty good, too.

Rachel and I turned toward one another, and Ken said "Ha Ji Me." This time she kicked first. I blocked her kick to my face area and moved to one side. She blocked the kick that I returned to her waist. She kicked toward my right thigh, but I didn't manage to block it. Instead, my muscles contracted as they absorbed the powerful blow. I kicked my left foot to her face, and she blocked it easily. I blocked her kick to my middle-section, and she blocked my kick to the same area. She turned as if to kick my leg, and I dropped my hand to block the blow that I had missed earlier. Much to my surprise, I was struck against my right ear with a sudden impact. I fell down onto the mat.

*To be Continue ...*

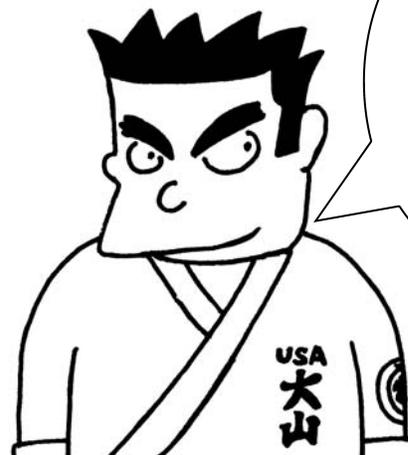
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