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World Oyama Karate

Honbu Newsletter

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TRAINING JOURNAL

By Founder Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama



Execute each technique with your whole body and spirit!

March 17th

I have to go to Japan tomorrow, but we finally finished the Take A Chance trailer. I suspect everyone's already forgotten about this, since it's been such a long, long journey. The image I had of the movie-making process before we started and the reality was so different. The kind of things I imagined required a very large budget. Our budget is small, which means we have to negotiate for all costs and that drags out the time needed further and further. It would be a different story if we had an unlimited budget. (That's why Sensei Dale, Sensei Stephanie, Senpai Tony, Senpai Paul and I always buy lottery tickets—but the total amount of our winnings over the past 5 years is only about \$10. Barely enough to buy lunch.)

I'm glad that the trailer is done, so that when I go to Japan, I have something to show the people who invested in the movie. In the beginning, the editors and I had very different opinions on how the trailer should look. We went back and forth for 2 months. The primary purpose of a trailer is to introduce the premise and characters, but also hook the audience and leave them wanting to see more. In preparation, I studied so many different movies and trailers. The industry professionals we worked with had their own ideas about how the trailer should look. But this was my story, and I felt my way of telling it was the most effective. The first thing that needed to catch the audience, I believed, was action! That's why the trailer opens with Sonny Chiba and I fighting with razor-sharp sword vs. tonfa.

After the opening shots and Sonny Chiba's nar-



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ration, we introduce the main character—Masa. He's a young kid without any ambition or goals in life. He's been privileged since birth and never had to fight or scrape for food and pocket money. He has no sense of direction or how to stand up on his own. The other main point of this film is the Uchi Deshi system. Even in Japan, this ancient training system is almost extinct. But at the time Masa came to America, it was alive and thriving in Alabama, in the American Deep South. The clash of cultures and locations is perhaps the most unique aspect of this film.

When I first presented what I thought the sequence of the trailer should be to Kevin, the editor, he sent us back something completely different. Everyone thought that I should just listen to the editors and professionals because they had more experience than I did. But, this was my story and I had passion for it, so I went with what I thought was best. In the end, the co-producer, Scott, agreed that my way worked the best.

Before Black Belt class one Friday night, I showed the trailer on a large projector in the dojo. Everyone seemed to really enjoy it. But the funniest comment came from Senpai Lee. After the trailer finished, he said, "Wow, that really looked like a professional movie!"

I jumped on him and said, "This IS a REAL movie!!" He nearly didn't make it out alive. But I'm sure he's not the only one with that reaction. Most people think that because I'm a Karate master, I don't have a clue about making movies or writing stories. But I have passion, so I listen to my gut and in the end, it usually turns out great.

March 18th

The weather has finally started warming up and changing to Spring. Sensei Karl picked me up and took me to the airport in the morning. Before I got out of the car I told him, as I always do, "Don't bonzai! You need to train and work hard when I'm in Japan. Don't goof around just because I'm not there!"

The flight to Japan was smooth, but I'll tell you a funny conversation I had with one of the people in Japan when I arrived. Being head of the World Oyama Karate Organization, I've done extensive travelling over the years to South America, Asia, Europe and across the United States. I hold the title of Saiko Shihan (Supreme Grandmaster). Given my status, one guy asked me, "Saiko Shihan, what airline do you use when you fly?"

"Delta," I replied. "It's the most convenient one."

"Oh. Of course, you fly 1st class, right?"

"I wish!" I laughed. "Just regular economy class."

"What??" he seemed surprised. "Why?"

I thought to myself "What a stupid question!" But I answered him, "You know what a 1st class ticket to Japan costs? \$8,000. An economy ticket is about \$2,000. \$6,000 different; that's big, big money. If I flew 1st class on my trips, that means all my students worldwide would need to pay \$500/month tuition. Yearly membership dues would have to be raised to about \$300 a year."

"Oh I see..." he answered. "Don't you get tired flying in economy class?"

"Well, from Atlanta to Tokyo is about 14 hours. But I still train and sweat so my condition is good. Also, I'm used to flying now. I get to my seat and relax by reading whatever books I brought along. I also eat the sandwich I bring from home. (I always pack my own sandwich for the plane. It's much better than the airline food. I mentioned this to Sensei Karl one time when he picked me up to take me to the airport. The next time he came, he looked at me with an expression of "where's MY sandwich?" So now, I give him one too when I fly.) I take a nap, or if I can't sleep, I write. I know how to kill time on the plane... but I have to have an aisle seat."

"Aisle seat?" he asked, "Wouldn't you rather sit by the window so you can see the clouds and look down at all the scenery? Why aisle seat?"

"Another stupid question," I thought to myself, "Don't realize that at my age I need to get up and pee all the time!? If I sit by the window, it will be a pain in the neck every time I have to get up." But I just smiled and said, "I just like sitting in the aisle seat better."

I hope nobody asks me again about if I fly 1st class or why I have to have an aisle seat. If any of you ask me, I'll punch you!

March 21st and 22nd

I conducted a clinic and promotion test at Himeji on the 21st and in Tokyo on the 22nd. Before we started training, I showed the Take A Chance trailer. All the students and parents had a great response and were very excited. They all wanted to know when the movie would be coming out.

"Soon," I said. "We've done all the editing and color correction. The only thing left to finish up is the sound correction, and that's it."

"So, in about a month?"



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Spring Clinic in Tokyo, Japan

"I wish," I answered, "But we'll get it out as soon as we can."
The visit to Japan was great and the sushi was fantastic!

March 21st

I came back to Birmingham. Whenever I'm coming back home, the trip seems to go much faster for some reason. I started focusing on the next big event—The April 25th American Cup Tournament.

April 21st

Sensei Masa arrived from Tokyo for the tournament. As I always do, I made a schedule for his stay in Birmingham. The schedule included: cutting the grass, digging in the backyard, walking the dogs, cleaning up after the dogs, teaching class, massaging my shoulder... I want you to know that it's a hard job telling people what to do all the time.

April 25th, American Cup Tournament

All Headquarters Black Belts and students and other Senseis, Senpais and students did a great job. The tournament was very smooth. No major complaints or accidents. I have a couple comments about competing in tournaments...

Whenever students fight in the dojo, their opponents are fellow students. They train together all the time and so know

each other's fighting styles, personalities and strengths and weaknesses. The mental pressure they feel is nowhere near as intense as it is in a tournament. The same is true for competing in the Kata division. Doing Kata in front of students during class and even during promotion is completely different from doing Kata at a competition.

One of my top Green Belts, Kelly, participated in the Kata Division. After the tournament, she told me, "Saiko Shihan, whenever I walked onto the mat, I got blocked up mentally. I couldn't feel my legs or arms. It felt so different than in the dojo."

I was glad to hear that. This type of experience is one of the primary benefits of competing in a tournament—to feel what it's like to actually do it. People without any experience competing believe that it's easy, that they could do it too, no problem. But that's all in their heads. When they really try it, and feel the eyes of spectators focused on them, see their opponent (if fighting), and feel that pressure, it changes everything. If they haven't trained enough, their mind and body become unbalanced and they lose the ability to function the way they had planned. Kelly, though, got 3rd Place. She didn't feel her arms or legs, but she had trained enough that her body still knew instinctively what to do. Even when you feel like a deer in headlights, if you can get your body to start moving, and



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you've trained enough, your mind and spirit will start to come back. This is a valuable lesson and experience and I strongly believe that all students who want to someday get to the Brown and Black Belt level need to compete in tournament.

Fighters also feel the same pressure and nervousness that causes them to freeze at the beginning. Whenever I taught Sensei Masa and then Sensei Karl, I had them practice 5 simple combinations over and over again, day in and day out. We worked every day for months to prepare for tournaments. But even then, because of the nature of tournaments, if they tried to do 10 things in a fight, but only managed to do 3 or 4, that was great! 5 would be outstanding.

The tournament fights in all divisions—children's, adult semi-knockdown and knockdown—reminded me of the importance of Kihon (Basic Techniques). There's a very common saying in the Martial Arts world that I discussed in Newsletter #12—"Kumite is the heart of Karate. Kihon is the heart of Kumite." I felt this very strongly after watching the recent tournament. There is a big difference in the effectiveness of Kihon techniques executed with correct form and body usage and those that are not. For example, in the children's divisions, the competitors are young and still early in their training and physical development. Often times, they are just moving their hands quickly rather than really punching. It's hard to tell what kind of kick exactly they are trying to execute. Each kick may look the same, like a mix of Mae Geri, Mawashi geri, and Soto Mawashi Geri. But this is natural because their bodies and coordination are still developing.

In some of the adult semi-knockdown and knockdown matches, I saw fighters hit their opponents with clean shots of various techniques—seiken, furi uchi, mae geri, hiza geri. In some instances, the opponent seemed not to notice when getting hit with a clean shot. Why? There are two possible reasons: either the opponent has good conditioning and guts and is able to

absorb the blows and continue fighting, or the technique was not done with correct form and sharpness, so that even though it made direct contact, it had only a minimal impact on the recipient. In the latter case, it becomes evident that the attacking fighter needs to spend more time practicing correct form and training themselves to use their total body harmoniously with each technique. Without correct form and total body usage, students become unbalanced in their upper and lower body; their Kamae is not right. This effects their timing, power and speed. Eventually, (I don't want to say it, but I have to) their techniques look good on the surface, but are lacking core elements that make them effective.

Why does this happen? During class we teach correct form of Kihon (basic) techniques and execute them repeatedly, whether in a stationary position, while moving, in Kata or during pad training. Students at the advanced level have done each technique millions of times during class. So why are they not sharp

enough to be effective during a tournament fight? The answer is because during regular class and daily training, they don't fully invest themselves mentally and physically in each technique, each time they execute it. During class, I sometimes see students performing basic techniques (whether by themselves or with a pad-holding partner) without any spirit, just going through the motions mechanically. Their spirit and mental focus are absent from the movement of their body. At that point, I jump on them, and tell them to fully imagine and get into each technique. That's my job. In that student's mind, he/she thinks they already know this technique so there is no need to apply all of the mental focus they needed when they first learned it. Wrong!

The beauty of Karate training is that it is a lifelong, daily journey. Repeating basic techniques like an aerobics routine, is better than nothing. But if you don't challenge yourself during class to really get into basic techniques and try to bring a fresh feeling to each execution, whenever you are in a high-pressure situation



Kelly: I got a trophy!

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CONGRATULATIONS TO ZAC !!!

Watch Up-and-Coming Comic Writer Zac Oyama's Work From College Humor



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFzUbgpWNf8>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8FUQYPfL0Pg>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twTtm7LvFXs>

like a tournament fight, your basic techniques may still look good, but they will be severely lacking in power, sharpness and effectiveness. I see this happen at every tournament and even promotion tests.

One of the reasons I ask my Black Belts to give advice to promotion candidates during testing is that I want them to see this distinction between "surface" techniques and "real" techniques. They often give some abstract, political answer like "Osu, she did good. Very powerful." Or, "He needs a little more sharpness in his punches." So, looks like I need to educate my Black Belts too! The importance of daily Kihon training is one of the main points I see at tournaments. The other is the way naturally coordinated and uncoordinated handle the pressure of a tournament fight.

Students with naturally good coordination and physical ability are able to catch the mechanics of basic techniques quickly.

They learn to do basic stances, kicks and hand techniques fairly quickly and effortlessly. As a result, they never have to really challenge and push themselves when learning, because their techniques look good on the surface in a short time. But Karate is not a team sport; each individual is different. The definition "pushing yourself past your limit" is different for everyone. I often point this out during promotion testing. For a naturally coordinated student, the technique/stance/Kata requirements are a piece of cake. Their natural ability allows them to quickly learn how to execute Kihon techniques and Kata that look like they're "supposed to". But for me, that's not enough. When I look beyond the surface, I can often times see that these students haven't really challenged themselves. They are capable of doing much more, but their coordination makes them lazy when it comes to putting their spirit and energy behind each basic technique. If I don't say anything, and just look at the surface, I am doing these students a



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A tournament is a big goal and a new beginning

great disservice. If they haven't invested themselves fully in their training, then when they face the pressure of a real fight, they will freeze and show a totally different side. The roots of their techniques are not deep, so they become easily rattled.

The vast majority of students have average coordination. Some a little less, some a little more. For them, learning each basic technique is a struggle. It takes time, patience and dedication. Along the way, their instructor is pushing them and screaming and yelling, so they learn while under pressure. It's a long, hard road, but once they finally master a technique, the roots are deep in their blood and bones. Even under pressure and exhaustion, they can rely on their techniques because there is a long history of hard training behind each one. In today's world, we judge a service or product on how much easier it makes daily life. The more a product saves us time, money and effort, the more value we place on it. But Karate training is the opposite. The more struggle a student endures, the better the quality of their technique in the future.

Don't misunderstand my point, though. Good coordination and natural physical ability is a gift and a great thing to have. But that gift can also pull your leg and subconsciously over-inflate your ego. That gift will tell you don't have to train as hard or as much as other people—don't listen to it! And uncoordinated/averagely-coordinated people still have just as much of a chance to master basic techniques as other people. It may be harder for them or take a little longer, but once they've got it, that technique will never leave them. A student's advanced rank can pull their leg just as much as a coordinated student's natural talents can pull theirs; green and brown belts especially are prone to think that since they are not learning any "new" things, they know it all already. But at that moment, they need to push themselves to bring a fresh feeling to every technique every class so that they can truly learn it.

April 27

Sensei Masa returned to Japan this morning. During dinner last night, he mentioned to me that we need more human

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Karate stories; not about super heroes with mystical abilities, but just stories about the average Karate student. He mentioned this to me because on the World Oyama Karate Japan website, I have been publishing short stories with illustrations about once a month. These stories are about the struggles and training journeys of average students—kids, housewives, young adults, middle-aged men, etc. I think he wanted me to upgrade my stories a little bit.

Coincidentally, I just had a conversation with my wife about how the future of publishing books and other materials is moving more towards eBooks and other types of downloadable written material. She said, "So you have Uchi Deshi in America for sale on Amazon, right?"

"Yes."

"How many have you sold?"

"Well... a few. We still get orders for books once in awhile."

"Why don't you make it available as an eBook that people can download?"

"OK, sure, you go ahead and do it," I told her. "After all, you are the senior advisor to the World Oyama Karate Organization."

"But, you're not going to pay me."

"Well, if it turns out to be a best-seller, then I will ask my accountant and attorneys and have a Black Belt meeting and Branch Chief meeting, and if everyone agrees, then I will pay you... enough to buy dinner or something."

"That's terrible!" she shot back.

"Well, that's reality," I told her. But her and my daughter worked on it, and now guess what? We have Uchi Deshi in America on Amazon.com available as an eBook!

"Do all of your students already have that book?" she asked.

"Well a lot of them say they do... But honestly, I don't think so. We have textbooks, Kyoten Vols. 1, 2, 3 and 4 and Perfect Karate that they are supposed to have. But most students have never opened them. Even if I tell them 10 times to read them, they don't listen. Even 100 times... 1,000 times. If I tell them 10,000 times and hold a shinai in both hands, then maybe they will open the books. After they blow off the years of accumulated dust on the cover."

Once in awhile I ask my students which Kyoten book has such and such technique, or which page in Perfect Karate has an explanation of a particular hand technique. They look at me blankly with their eyes open. They're dumbfounded, like a bolt of lightning just struck the dojo.

I told my wife that I would tell all you guys to visit Amazon.com and download Uchi Deshi in America TODAY. She said, "Didn't you make a bunch of t-shirts that say, 'put down the cell phone' and 'Don't text, just sweat'?" She had a point. So I need to change those t-shirts to read "Put down the cell phone and JUST SWEAT... unless you are downloading Uchi Deshi in America from Amazon.com."

So, I'm telling you guys now, you better start reading the Kyoten books, Perfect Karate and Uchi Deshi in America. Don't be surprised if at your next promotion test I ask you to tell me which page numbers in which Kyoten have explanations of certain techniques. Or to recite the lines of dialogue found on pages 117 – 118 in Uchi Deshi in America.



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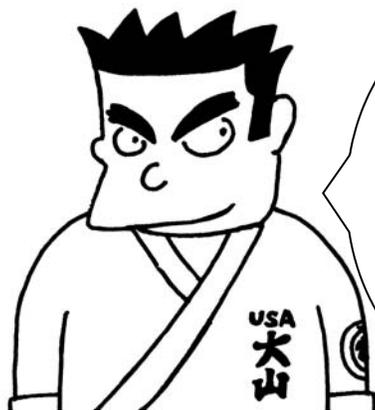
Sweat ! Sweat ! Sweat !

Sunrise Training

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- Basic, Kata, Fight

Sunset Gym Training

- Tonfa, Nunchaku, Shinai
- Weapons Fighting Technique



Summer
Camp 2015
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Editor-in-Chief: Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama
 Editors: Sensei Karl Julian
 Graphic Artist: Sensei Masa Takahashi
 Technical Assistant: Senpai Tony Ching

World Oyama Karate Honbu Dojo
 1804 29th Avenue South, Homewood, AL 35209
 Phone: (205) 879-4841 Fax: (205) 879-4849
 www.worldoyama.com

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