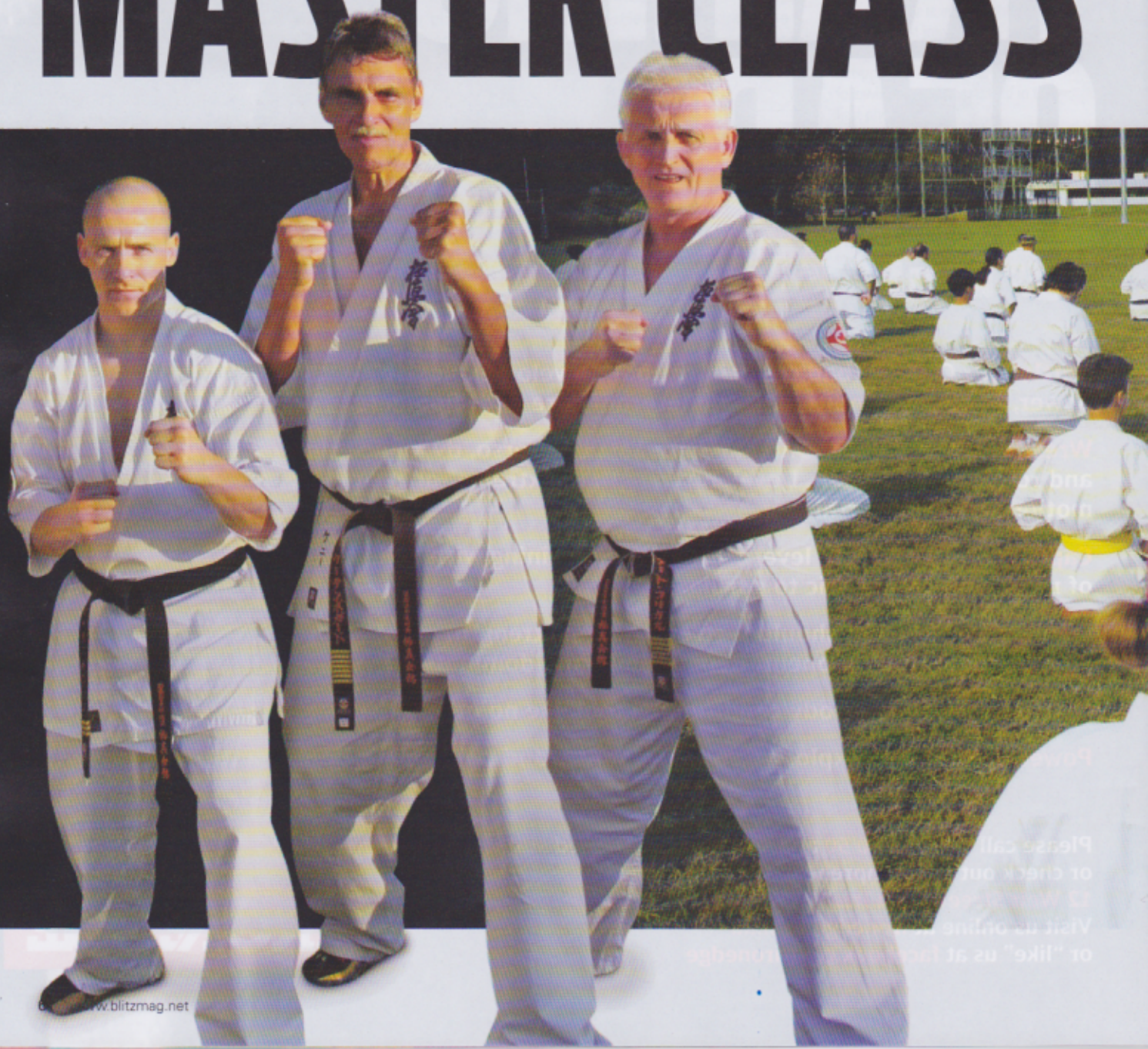


KYOKUSHIN MASTER CLASS



A conversation with three karate greats

Recently, several international luminaries and leading Australian sensei from the world of Kyokushin karate led a throng of students through a weekend-long International Gasshuku (training camp) at the Sydney Sports Academy. Organiser Shihan Trevor Tockar had a chat with South African IKO Committee member Shihan Kenny Uytendogaardt, Canada's Western Regional Branch Chief Shihan Stuart Corrigal and Brisbane-based full-contact karate legend Sensei Garry O'Neill, who was off to coach Aussie fighters at the All-Japan Championships shortly after.

INTERVIEWS BY TREVOR TOCKAR & BEN STONE



Students attend a *mokusō* (meditation) session at the recent gasshuku

SENSEI GARRY O'NEILL
Sensei Garry, you are one of the most famous names in Kyokushin karate in Australia. How is it that you seemed to go off the radar for a number of years?

I guess once I finished fighting it all became a question of 'what next?' Because I didn't have any tournaments or competitions to prepare for, I found it difficult to get motivated. However, I have now regained my motivation and am back in training.

Your tournament record is very well known to most readers of *Blitz*. What do you regard as your main achievements in the fighting arena?

I guess, for me, the 6th World Tournament in 1995 was probably one of my best tournaments [placing fourth in the world, the highest ever achieved by anyone from the South Pacific region].

What was your fighting weight at that time and how did that compare to your opponents?

About 73-to-74kg. I think everyone that I fought was probably 20-to-25kg heavier than me.

Am I correct that at that stage your fourth place was the highest ever achieved by any Westerner at the Kyokushin World Tournament?

No, Andy Hugg was the runner-up in the 4th World Tournament and a Canadian, Jean Rivierre, took third place at the 3rd World Tournament. Michael Thompson of the UK also placed very highly in the 4th World Tournament.

I understand that you also obtained some excellent results in the All-Japan tournaments. What were your best efforts?

I fought in the All-Japan Tournaments in 1996 and 1997 and was lucky enough to take second place on both occasions.

To my knowledge,

that was the highest placing by any Westerner in the history of the All-Japan tournaments, and was only superseded in 2011 when the current world champion, Taneli Nikoleishvili of Russia, became the first non-Japanese to win the All-Japan tournament, is that right?

Yes, I believe so.

You say that you lost a little bit of focus in recent years, but that you have now come back to karate. What are you doing?

I have started my own dojo and my goal is obviously to build up the club, but also to give a little bit back to the Kyokushin community. I have always been lucky in that I have met great people through karate and they have always treated me well. I have trained in lots of different places with different people and learned lots of different stuff along the way, and I would like to give some of that knowledge back and to share that with everyone in our organisation. I would like to help the fighters as much as possible, so that Australia again becomes a real force on the world stage.

How has your time in Kyokushin changed you personally?

That is a hard question to answer, as I've been doing it from such a young age. I could only guess where I would be now if it wasn't for karate. I know I owe everything I have and am now to Kyokushin karate and the people who helped me and supported me over the years. It has given me the focus and discipline I've needed to succeed in everything I've done since I started training, whether that is full-contact fighting or doing my job at work.

SHIHAN KENNY UYTENBOGAARDT
Shihan Kenny, how long have you been involved in karate?



Uytenbogaardt (centre) gets the gasshuku under way

Since January 1965 when I started practising Goju-ryu. I changed to Kyokushin in October 1966 and have been involved with Kyokushin karate ever since, but only really started training in a determined way when I joined the Sea Point dojo in Cape Town run by Shihan Len Barnes and yourself [Trevor Tockar]. This was in 1974.

Let's talk about your tournament record. I believe you were the South African Open Champion for five years running before retiring undefeated?

That is correct.

We were both in the South African team that participated in the 1st World Open Karate Tournament in Tokyo



Sensei O'Neill

in 1975. What is your memory of that event?

It was an absolute eye-opener. We had never experienced full-contact fighting before and had mainly participated in point-scoring competition. We soon learned the difference!

Well, it seems that you learned fast, as I know that Sosai Mas Oyama rated you as one of the top three contenders for the 2nd World Tournament in 1979, together with Willie Williams of the USA and Makoto Nakamura of Japan. That was after Sosai Oyama saw you in action in the British and International Tournament in London in 1977, where you comprehensively defeated the likes of Jeff Whybrow, Frank Clarke and Eddie Frazier and where you gave Howard Collins the fight of his life, eventually losing on a controversial weight decision. What happened at the 2nd World Tournament?

Well, when the South African team arrived in Japan, we were stopped at the airport and were made to sign an undertaking that we would not compete in any sporting or cultural activities in Japan. That was a result of the sports boycott then in place against South Africa, and which stayed in place for many decades. I was accordingly not able to take part in the tournament, but I must confess that South African fighters managed to sneak in under the radar in subsequent tournaments by registering as fighters from other African countries!

You did then fight in the 3rd World Tournament at the Budokan in January

1984, did you not?

Yes, I did, and managed to reach the last 16 after beating the well-known Japanese competitor, Takayama, who had previously spent much time teaching karate in Australia.

Yes, I remember that fight well. It was described by Sosai Oyama as the outstanding match of the tournament. I also remember that you were in your late thirties and that you were fighting with some broken bones in your foot — which didn't stop you from recording the fastest knockout of the entire tournament!

Now that you are long retired from fighting, what is your role in the [Matsui] Kyokushin organisation?

I am the Branch Chief for South Africa and I am also a member of the International Committee of the Kyokushinkaikan, IKO Honbu. In South Africa we have something like 143 dojos and have 37,000 registered members. We also have approximately another 7,000 members from Seychelles, Mauritius and Reunion.

I understand that you also have authority for the rest of Africa?

That is correct, and there are a large number of countries in Africa that have participated in the All-Africa tournaments and in the World Tournaments. Communication with these countries is sometimes difficult, but we are doing our best to develop the incredible talent that lies dormant in Africa.

My understanding is that on the international

stage the IKO is bigger than ever. Is that right?

I may confirm that as being 100 per cent correct. The effort and energy that Kancho Matsui has put into the organisation has borne fantastic results, and what really impresses me is that he has done this at the same time as insisting upon much tougher grading criteria and making it very hard to obtain high grades. He refuses to compromise and it is noticeable how general standards have improved worldwide under his leadership.

What is happening on the international scene?

Eastern Europe is extremely strong. The Russian organisation has something like one million members. As regards Western Europe, when some senior European instructors left the organisation, some people thought that that would make us weaker. In fact, their leaving the organisation caused a very large number of practitioners to return to the IKO. The IKO is also doing very well in North and South America and all over the world.

What should someone starting Kyokushin look for in a teacher or dojo?

Normally the dojo one first joins is more often than not a matter of convenience rather than one of considered reasoning. The visual aspect of dojo/instructor presentation would be the first encounter and its importance is not to be discounted. One should determine if the instructor is internationally qualified/recognised and that he is a reputable person belonging to an organisation that is highly regarded. It then becomes a matter of ongoing assessment

THE MASTERS' TIPS

What's the secret to longevity in a physically tough martial art like Kyokushin?

Shihan Uytendogaardt: Not all martial arts are conducive to longevity. Unlike many other styles which practice snapping/locking movements, Kyokushin techniques are performed in circular, flowing and supple movements. Practitioners are trained to move with and to absorb impact, resulting in low shock to major joints. A holistic approach is adopted in Kyokushin teaching and techniques are performed in a way that promotes anatomical and physiological wellbeing, despite the full-contact style that is practised. Practising Kyokushin karate affects many other areas of your being, which is advantageous to

longevity, such as awareness of posture, diet and constructive reaction to stressful situations. Kyokushin becomes a way of life, and not simply the practise of a martial art.

Do you have any tips for full-contact fighters for avoiding injury?

Sensei O'Neill: Two things I would recommend are diet and recovery. Diet is vital; removing all processed food and eating lean meats and lots of fresh fruit and veg' will go a long way to improving performance. I follow two particular diets, the Zone and the Paleo. Secondly, ensure that there is a sufficient recovery. Rest is just as important as training. Things like massages, stretching and trigger-point therapy go a long way to helping the recovery process.

and decision. One needs to evaluate whether the instructor communicates well, whether he actively participates in training, and whether he projects arrogance or humility regarding his knowledge and willingness to share experience. The instructor should also be assessed in respect of his involvement in encouraging youth and community development. As a practitioner, you will be aware of what you want and what you do not want, and you should not hesitate to move on until you find a dojo and instructor that meets your requirements and fulfils your needs.

My experience has been that studying Kyokushin karate with a mature and accredited instructor will generally meet all the requirements of the genuine martial artist.

SHIHAN STUART CORRIGAL

Shihan Stuart, when did you start your life in karate?

I started training in 1968 in Vancouver, BC, Canada. I have only been a Kyokushin

karate person, and have never trained in any other style of martial arts for any significant periods of time.

I understand that you have some 40 dojos under your control, is that right?

Most of the dojos under my control are in Alberta and British Columbia, where we presently have 38 dojos.

You also have an important role in the international hierarchy. What is your position?

I have been involved with officiating for many years and am presently the Executive Referee in charge of the International Tournament Committee.

You have something of a tournament record yourself, is that right?

Yes, but that's a few years ago! I did represent Canada in the 14th All Japan Tournament and in the 3rd World Tournament in January 1984.

What are your impressions of the Australian organisation?

The first time that I came to Australia was in 1988

for the 1st Commonwealth Tournament held at the Sydney Town Hall. At that time, Kyokushin in Australia was very strong. Then, of course, with the splitting of the organisation into various different factions, it was difficult to maintain the very high level that had been established. However, from what I've seen, it is apparent that our organisation is in very good hands in Australia and I have no doubt that it will not be too long before it will regain its rightful position in the world of Kyokushin. More important than the number of students, or the number of champions, is the attitude, manner and decency of the teachers and students in the organisation, and I can only say that I am hugely impressed by what I have seen. Although the IKO under Kancho Matsui is by far the biggest Kyokushin organisation in the world, I know that Kancho is not all that concerned by the fact that the Australian and New Zealand organisations are not as big as they once were. He would far rather have in his organisation people of merit, rather than concern himself with adding up numbers.

What is happening on the international scene?

Eastern Europe is mind-boggling. I know many of the Russian branch chiefs and when sitting with one of them in Japan a few years ago, he casually mentioned that he had 35,000 students in his one branch!

I understand that in Russia today you can get a university degree majoring in Kyokushin karate. Do you know anything about this?

Yes, that's right. In Russia they are very advanced in terms of their sports technical committees and sports science and things like that.

How has your time in Kyokushin changed you?

I consider myself very blessed in Kyokushin. I enjoyed very good rapport and a great relationship with

Sosai Mas Oyama. The mere presence and stature of this man changed people. I am one of those individuals who was changed by him. All the Kyokushin principles that he stood for, I have embraced to the best of my abilities and they have become part of my life.

I was also very fortunate many years ago to befriend Shihan Bobby Lowe, the most senior Kyokushin member worldwide. His friendship and mentoring has made me a better person. He is the true embodiment of what a Kyokushin practitioner should

"The mere presence and stature of Sosai Oyama changed people. I am one of those individuals who was changed by him."

- Shihan Corrigal



O'Neill teaches full-contact sparring tactics

be. I strive daily to follow the examples he has shown me.

Kyokushin and the people I have met through this martial art has changed the way I view the world as a whole.

In your own martial arts study, what are the three most important lessons you've learned that you believe karate students would most benefit from knowing sooner rather than later?

Focus on basics; have respect and courtesy; and give life and training everything you can on a daily basis.



Corrigal leads the class

the time required to do the work on the fundamentals.

If, as you say, martial arts is a journey, this is an important lesson to understand. Students are drawn to Kyokushin for its renowned history of 'knockdown' or full-contact fighting, but tournament competition is over in a flash. A lifelong commitment to training Kyokushin and the understanding of the fundamentals involved requires a far greater commitment of time and energy to truly fulfill the journey of a person's martial arts career.

Respect/courtesy: Kyokushin etiquette from the earliest days and time of our founder, Sosai Mas Oyama, demands respect and courtesy as a maxim of our training: "The Martial Way begins and ends with courtesy. Therefore, be properly and genuinely courteous at all times."

The world is a different place with the advent of the internet. With this new technology, it is ever so important that all Kyokushin members understand the etiquette, respect and courtesies inherent to Kyokushin.

Give life and training everything you have: Pretty simple. At the end of our time, we should have no regrets, no 'should have done this'. *Osu no Seishin.* ■

Basics: Kihon and basics are the building blocks of any student's journey in Kyokushin. To be a complete karateka, it is vitally important that the concepts and understanding of basic kihon is an essential part of a student's training right from the beginning.

The step-by-step progression of a student through the ranks is predicated on the understanding of basic kihon. Too many times junior students want to jump ahead to be a world champion fighter without spending