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NEWS & EVENTS

KYOKUSHIN LEGENDS KICK IT SYDNEY-SIDE

Shihan Trevor Tockar's Kyokushin Karate North Bondi dojo played host to renowned sensei Artur Hovhannisyian, the chief instructor at the *hombu* dojo of the International Karate Organisation Kyokushinkaikan (IKO), for seminars in December 2012.

Sensei Hovhannisyian is recognised as one of the top Kyokushin karateka in the world; in addition to his stellar competitive career, the sensei has also completed the gruelling 100-man kumite against some of the best fighters in the art.

Drawing instructors and students from around Australia, the Bondi seminars spanned three days and included an outdoor session overlooking the famous Bondi Beach. Sensei Hovhannisyian and world-renowned Aussie fighter Sensei Garry O'Neill also took part in the Tockar dojo's year-end grading.

The first session focused on *kihon* (fundamentals) and *kata*, with special attention given to using technique over strength.

The second session's training covered exercises designed to strengthen muscle groups to improve technique and power, as well as partner-work aimed at activating the *tanden* (centre) of practitioners, to assist in fluidity of movement. The outdoor class covered fighting combinations

and footwork.

On Sunday, a five-hour grading test took place, with two students grading successfully to 1st Dan Black-belt. Both students had the honour of fighting with Sensei Hovhannisyian and Sensei O'Neill in the final rounds.

"It was a wonderful seminar and holiday; I felt that I became a part of the Bondi Dojo family," said Hovhannisyian of his trip to Sydney. "[There was] great

training, impressive exams and a relationship between students... Everything [was] just perfect."

Shihan Tockar praised the sensei's work at the seminars and expressed his desire to bring him to Australia again soon.

"It was a privilege and an honour to have Sensei Artur spend time with us in Australia, and I will certainly be inviting him to return for further seminars and events," he said.



Below, from left: Sensei Hovhannisyian, Shihan Tockar and Sensei O'Neill; above, the seminar group



Apache soldier brings knife skills to Oz

Apache knife-fighting and battle tactics master Mr Snake Blocker will visit Australia for the first time for seminars on 5-6 May. The Military Combatives Personal Safety Training school in Sydney will host the seminars.

On his first ever visit to Australian shores, Blocker will cover knife grips, angles, combinations, multiple-opponent scenarios,

stealth tactics and battle applications.

Snake Blocker is a former muay Thai champion and has studied numerous martial arts including Sil Lum kung fu, Kempo karate, taekwondo and BJJ. The Lipan Apache Tribe member and US Navy veteran has taught Apache knife-fighting since 1995.

For more information and bookings, visit www.militarycombatives.com.au

KUMITE LIFE

Kyokushin's Sensei Artur Hovhannisyan

The 100-man kumite is not for everyone. In fact, less than 20 people in the world have ever partaken in this brutal test of karate skill, endurance and, most of all, spirit. But Sensei Artur Hovhannisyan knew from his very early days in karate that this would be the ultimate test in his search for his 'ultimate truth' — the way of Kyokushin. In this exclusive interview, the Armenian-born former karate champion, talks about his 100-man kumite experience, his career as a full-contact fighter and how becoming a head trainer at IKO honbu in Japan has changed his life.

INTERVIEW BY BEN STONE | IMAGES BY CLIVE GIRDHAM



AFTER

THE



Sensei Artur, why and how did you first come to get involved in Kyokushin karate?

In 1990, by the recommendation of a friend, I was allowed to attend training in the Sensei K. Manukyan dojo (branch chief of Armenia). This was after the lifting of the ban on 'the practice of karate' in the USSR; therefore, every child wanted to do karate. It was a boom time for karate.

Is it now a popular art in your homeland of Armenia?

First, Kyokushin was not very popular, but thanks to the work of the Armenian Federation, year by year Kyokushin became better known to people and is now strong.

Is the Armenian way of training karate different from how things are done in Japan?

No difference at all. Almost every year Japanese instructors conduct training camps in Armenia. Also,

Armenian instructors come to Japan to study karate, as it is taught in the Japanese honbu [headquarters].

How long have you been living in Japan and how have you adapted culturally to living there?

It has been eight years since I moved to Tokyo. The first two years were difficult. I did not speak the Japanese language, I did not properly understand Japanese customs and I did not understand the mentality of the Japanese people. For example, it was at least very strange for me that Japanese does not use word 'yes' or 'no'. When I was asking students after my explanation, "Do you understand everything?", they just answered "Daijūbu desu", which means 'everything is fine' or 'I am okay'. But Honbu accepted me as a member of the family, and all the guys helped me to adapt to my new place of residence.

Across several of the major Kyokushin organisations, it seems the Europeans and South American fighters are starting to dominate, even over the Japanese. Why do you think this is? What is different about the European way of training or fighting that's working so well? Or what are the Japanese perhaps not doing?

I think this is quite simple. Life is like 'sinusoid' — sometimes we go up, and sometimes we go down — like yin and yang. [Editor's note: the sine wave or sinusoid is a mathematical curve that describes a smooth, repetitive oscillation].

As a European, it is unusual — and a particular honour — to be given the job of a head instructor at a Japanese honbu dojo. Do you think you have been enlisted to teach at Honbu in part to bring some of the European Kyokushin methodology back to the home of the art?

Yes, it is unusual and yes, it is a great honour for me and for all Armenian and European Federations of Kyokushinkai. However, I can only guess the main reason for my invitation to the honbu. An ability to learn, big potential and the ability to transfer karate tradition to the next generation — perhaps this is what Kancho Matsui saw in me eight years ago.

What has this appointment meant for you in terms of personal satisfaction, and your development in Kyokushin?

For me, it is above all an opportunity to train with the great masters of karate Kyokushinkai; to learn [karate] from them, as well as the philosophies of martial arts and Japanese culture.

What would you consider to be your greatest achievements and toughest challenges in your karate career so far?

FRONT-KICK COUNTER



1 Sensei Hovhannisyanyan squares up with his opponent with his hands up ready to attack or defend.



2 As the opponent fires a front-kick with his rear leg, Hovhannisyanyan parries it across on the outside while sweeping his own front leg back...



...forcing his opponent to expose his blind side, from where he cannot attack or defend well without repositioning himself.

Without any doubt, the 100-man kumite was the most difficult challenge of my karate career.

Harking back to that 100-man kumite in 2009, it's said that you went out with a particularly hard approach rather than minimising punishment and counter-fighting, as others have done, in order to survive the 100 rounds. Was there any reason for taking this 'harder road' — were you out to prove a point, to yourself or others? Or do you not think you approached

it any differently to other fighters?

Everyone who has done a 100-man kumite chooses his own path, and it is different from the others. I went through mine.

How did your training for the 100-man kumite compare to your preparation for major tournaments? Did you do anything differently, and can you describe your regimen leading up to it?

The entire process of my training was under the control of Sensei Ryu Narushima. He adjusted the training

schedule, the amount and time of the exercise. Of course it was different from the usual preparation for a tournament, because I had to fight for at least three hours. So my daily training sessions were also three-to-four hours, sometimes even five-to-six hours.

One of the exercises that Sensei Narushima made me do was one hour non-stop of *roppon geri* [Editor's note: this is a variation on Kyokushin's well-known *gohon geri* five-step kicking combination, with one additional kick in each combination. Those practitioners who have perhaps done *gohon geri* for 10 or 50 minutes will understand the extreme demands of one hour of *roppon geri*!]

Why did you want to do the 100-man kumite? Why was it important to you?

It's a really difficult question. When I first started karate, I watched the video of Kancho

Matsui completing the 100-man kumite. I was only a White-belt, but something in me was born: the idea to make the 100-man kumite. From that moment I wanted to make the 100-man kumite, but why, I do not know.

Can you describe your mental state going into the kumite? What it was like towards the end, and after you'd accomplished it?

Determination to do it and 100 per cent concentration. After my last fight (the 100th fight was with Shihan Francisco Filho), there was complete absence of thoughts. A little later, all the feelings came rushing along at once: gratitude, joy, sadness, pain, satisfaction, pride, respect, patience, compassion, regret...

What was the toughest moment for you during the whole event?

Fights starting at about 73 and going through to 90. Those fights I cannot remember.

Hovhannisyanyan teaching in Bondi



MY WHOLE BODY WAS BRUISED AND SWOLLEN.

[I suffered] dehydration and loss of more than five kilos of weight. My every movement caused me pain. I could barely move.



4 Before his opponent can reset, Sensei Hovhannisyán slams a round-kick into the thigh...



5 ...then, in one move, switches stance and plants his kicking foot to the ground as he launches into a crescent-kick...



6 ...bringing it over his opponent's shoulder and rotating through for full impact as he strikes the head with the inside of his heel.

What was the final toll on your body — what injuries did you sustain and how long did it take you to recover?

My whole body was bruised and swollen. [I suffered] dehydration and loss of more than five kilos of weight. My every movement caused me pain. I could barely move.

Sensei Joji Hihino took me to the hospital, where I was checked for broken bones, internal bleeding and other serious injuries — thank God, everything was fine. I was put on an intravenous drip and after a while they let me go home.

How do you prepare mentally immediately before an event like that?

If I remember well, I did not do anything special. I tried to stay focused, but not to think much about the fight.

Who has been your toughest opponent in your full-contact career?

Alejandro Navarro — not physically, but mentally! We are like brothers, and to be able to fight with him I had to fight with myself first.

And your toughest fight outside of the 100-man kumite?

For the reason I mention above, fighting with Alejandro at the 38th All Japan Tournament in 2006.

BODY-SHOT COUNTER



1 As Sensei Hovhannisyán and his opponent move around...



2 ...his opponent throws a left to the body but Hovhannisyán deflects it with his forearm using a roll of the shoulder...



3 ...and follows through with a round-kick to his opponent's inner thigh, while covering the punching arm.



4 Hovhannisyán then rotates back into a left body-shot as he brings his kicking leg back to the floor...



5 ...and steps back to the outside of his opponent, out of the firing line...



6 ...and into position to unleash a knee-strike to the opponent's chin.



Sensei Garry O'Neill (L), Hovhannisyán and Shihan Trevor Tockar lead training in Bondi, 2012

Who has had the greatest influence on your journey?

Kancho Shokei Matsui.

We understand that this has been your first visit to Australia. What is it that brought you to Australia?

By invitation of branch-chief Shihan Trevor Tockar I visited Australia. Shihan Tockar's goal is the same as mine as a representative of the Japanese Honbu. It is to share experiences, exchange new information and work on small possible mistakes.

Due to the diligence and working capacity of the students, we conducted a successful seminar and were able to work on all aspects of karate Kyokushinkai training.

Did you enjoy your stay in Australia, and do you

intend to come back at any time in the future?

Very, very much! And of course I would like to come back to Australia to train with my 'Australian Kyokushin family'.

We understand that Sensei Garry O'Neill was in Sydney for the seminars and grading conducted by you at Shihan Tockar's dojo at North Bondi. Did you enjoy working with Sensei Garry and do you think that his unique style of fighting would still be effective in today's tournaments?

Sensei Garry has always been an example for me. And, of course, for me it was an honour to work with him, to share experiences and to learn from him. His perfect technique, accessibility to



THE FIGHTER'S TIPS

Sensei Hovhannisyán on how to avoid injury in martial arts: Always listen to yourself!

On the only must-have equipment for strength and conditioning sessions:

The most important exercise equipment is 'you and your will'.

everyone, clear explanations and great attitude to karate can motivate anyone, from White-belt to Black-belt.

About the fighting style of Sensei Garry, of course, no one will do it better than him, but we have a lot of young and strong fighters who took over the style of Sensei Garry, modified it for themselves and to the needs of the present day,

and have met with considerable success fighting in tournaments

What are your impressions of what you have seen of Kyokushin karate in Australia?

Only one word: Family.

Do you have any particular message for karateka in Australia?

Keep training hard. Set goals and achieve them. ■

HEAD-KICK COUNTER



1 As Hovhannisyán's opponent comes forward in southpaw stance.



2 Hovhannisyán moves to the outside and parries the punch with his lead forearm.



3 As his opponent lifts his leg to follow with a high kick, Hovhannisyán steps left...



4 ...and round-kicks into his foe's support leg, leaning back to evade the high kick.

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