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## WAR ARTS OF THE PHILIPPINES

The islands' deadly ancestral combat systems

## JOINT LOCKS 101

Control your angle, control your outcome

## BRIDGING THE GAP

Can Wing Chun handle the stick-and-move fighter?

# HOLDING COURT

KYOKUSHIN KARATE MASTER & BARRISTER **TREVOR TOCKAR**



NOVEMBER 2015  
AUS. \$9.95 Inc. GST  
NZ. \$10.95 Inc. GST

VOLUME 29 No. 11



www.blitzmag.net

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# HOLDING COURT

Kyokushin karate's Shihan Trevor Tockar

At 64 years old, Shihan Trevor Tockar has been both a barrister and a Kyokushin karateka for most of his life. The similarities between the courtroom and the dojo might not be immediately apparent to some, but for Tockar they are in perfect parallel. With 46 years of training in 'the hardest karate' under his 6th Dan Black-belt, and a near-death experience behind him, the South African-turned-Sydneysider reflects on battles fought in both realms and what it means to live in the karate spirit of *osu*.

STORY BY JARROD BOYLE | STUDIO IMAGES BY CHARLIE SURIANO

"It's a fight," says Tockar of the legal process. "The night before a trial, butterflies are going. It's very important not to show what you're thinking and feeling. You have to maintain discipline, focus. You have to know when to side-step."

Tockar was introduced to Kyokushin at home, in his native country of South Africa.

"When I was a school kid, I was interested in boxing. I started a boxing club at the school I was at in Capetown, South Africa, in 1968. Just before I turned 18, I found a karate class not too far from

where I was living. I had no idea what it was about. I was really lucky the instructor was Len Barnes, a 3rd Dan Black-belt in Kyokushin."

Since boxing, Tockar has only ever trained in Kyokushin. "I went there and never stopped."

A significant part of the reason Tockar stuck with Kyokushin was the exceptional quality of his instructor. This was especially important given that Kyokushin, in the 1960s, was such a young style.

"Len had a background in boxing," Tockar says. "He was from Scotland originally, and had been the number-

one Scottish middleweight contender. He also [joined] the army, and did all that commando sort of stuff. When he came to South Africa, he got a Black-belt in judo.

"Then, he met some Japanese sailors in Cape Town and trained with them. They gave him Mas Oyama's book, *What is Karate?* After that, Len went down to the docks whenever he could."

The practical efficiency of Kyokushin resonated strongly with Len given his grounding in both boxing and the military.

"Len stayed in contact with Mas Oyama, learning

from books in the early '50s. He opened a dojo for Oyama, which was the first [Kyokushin] dojo opened outside of Japan, aside from Bobby Lowe's [in Hawaii]."

As one of Barnes' loyal students, Tockar was present when Barnes met Oyama for the first time.

"Len was the senior man in South Africa. He trained with Goju and Shotokan, but had refused to lead their styles. Oyama and Len met at the 1975 world tournament for the first time."

While Barnes and his pupils maintained a fanatical

# KYOKUSHIN COMBO: SWITCHING IT UP



1 As Shihan Tockar's opponent enters into striking range...

2 ...Tockar fires a round-kick to the inside of the leading thigh, taking his opponent's attention low...

3 ...then immediately follows with a reverse punch or rip to the midsection on the other side...

4 ...in combination with a punch from the opposite side, keeping his opponent's attention in this area, side to side...



dedication to the style, it was difficult to absorb the technical subtleties of practice from books.

"We called our stuff Kyokushin. Shotokan was particularly strong in South Africa, but it was non-contact. We fought 'all-styles' rules, which at that time was dominated by Shotokan. I went to train with them to test myself. I got my [Kyokushin] Nidan [2nd Dan] in the early '70s and went to Johannesburg to do Shotokan classes...to get punished."

Kyokushin is known as 'knockdown' karate — and for Tockar, the real litmus test was coming.

"In late '74 or '75, a letter arrived from Oyama, inviting us to come and fight full-contact rules [at the First World Tournament, held in Japan]," Tockar recalls. "We'd never seen knockdown rules; we had no clue. We thought we could wear helmets."

This ignorance gave some indication of the eventual outcome.

"We went across and got smashed," he says. "Everyone who hadn't been to Japan was cannon fodder."

Full-contact fighting is integral to the Kyokushin syllabus for a number of reasons, not least of all because



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...before following with a round-kick to the opponent's head on the side where he dropped his hand to parry.

Training with Wing Chun master Rick Spain



it makes the style cohere in its true practitioner.

"We learnt a huge amount in a very quick time. I got KO'd... [it was] time to change my ways. I thought I was good. I caught [my opponent] with everything, but I didn't know how to finish him. We got a draw.

The referee was Tadashi Nakamura, the eventual founder of Seido. He made us fight an extra round. I was trying to make distance when [my opponent] caught me with a kick under the jaw. I woke up on a stretcher."

The outcome of the tournament may have been a shock for the fighters, but their

sensei was ahead of the curve.

"Len never believed in the non-contact way of fighting," says Tockar. "I realised that he knew what real fighting was all about. Two years later, we went to the British National Tournament, held in 1977 at the Crystal Palace.

"Training was still guesswork, to a certain extent. After the Nationals, I stayed in the UK, training with Steve Arneil. He had trained with Tatsuo Nakamura and learnt the proper syllabus from scratch. I was the first to bring the thing back to South Africa — intact — in 1977."

By then, Tockar was well and truly hooked.

"In the early days, [fighting] was all we wanted to do. If we had to do anything else at training, we were disappointed."

Len Barnes brought the breadth of his superior understanding and experience to bear on his eager young charges.

"He put the boxing gloves on us for sparring. We'd do it kneeling; he'd tie us together so we couldn't get away, or we'd have to spar in a confined area, like three or four mats. [These were] drills he'd brought in from boxing. Sometimes, anything would go — no rules. It was quite testing. New people weren't allowed to watch the senior class [or] we'd lose everybody."

Barnes' senior grades were the embodiment of crazy zeal.

"You'd finish training with your gi ripped; we looked like hell. Then, we'd go out and have a few beers and go back to the training hall at one or two in the morning with nothing but streetlight [and fight each other] until the neighbours complained."

When the 1979 World Full-Contact Karate Tournament rolled around, the South African contingent was well prepared.

"The Second World Tournament was held at the Budokan in Japan. We were convinced the world was going to see South Africa."

Unfortunately for them, the United Nations had enforced a boycott of South Africa because of apartheid.

"The customs officials made us sign a form that said we wouldn't participate in any cultural activities; they even made us cover our badges. They refused to let us fight. At the tournament, everyone stood and Mas Oyama apologised to us."

The disappointment was keenly felt. The South African fighters took it to heart, especially given that their own tournaments at home were multicultural.

"In South Africa, Kyokushin was colour blind. In 1977, our first national knockdown

tournament had mixed teams. When things started happening, the police tried to close us down. It was disappointing that we still got banned [in Japan]."

Tockar and his compatriots found ways around the ban, however, in order to compete.

"In the World Tournaments after that, we all said we were

part of other countries — satellite countries — so we could participate, until Mandela was released [from prison] and South Africa was taken off the banned list."

Tockar's last fight was in 1981, at the South African National Tournament.

"Oyama came to South

Africa for the tournament; I wasn't going to lose in front of him. Makoto Nakamura was the world champion. Aoki was an instructor that came, too. I became good friends with him. He came back and lived with me for the next year and a half, becoming the resident instructor. He was the most educated karate man. He spent eight hours a day training, with one day off per week, which he spent practising his calligraphy."

Unfortunately for Tockar, his career as a fighter was about to draw to an abrupt close.

"I stopped in 1981 after I suffered a volvulus. It's best described as a twisted gut. [The knotted section] cut off the mesenteric artery, cutting off the blood supply. It all went gangrenous and the surgeon had to cut off all the dead parts."

Karate was not just instrumental to Tockar's recovery; it was fundamental to his survival.

"The doctors were surprised that I could withstand the shock and pain to my body. They cut out 16 feet of small intestine; they thought I'd be a cripple. Then, six months later, they cut out the large bowel. Six months after, I was back at training. My doctors came and joined the karate club because they couldn't believe I'd survived."

Until that point, Tockar hadn't much considered an occupation outside karate but found he was forced to contemplate his options.

"I decided I needed to go back to the office because I couldn't rely on my body the rest of my life," he reflects.

Lyle Adel, also a lawyer and 5th Dan Kyokushin karateka, has known Tockar since they were training together in South Africa.

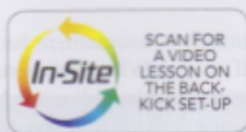
"We met at karate; we've been friends for a long time. I'm also a lawyer. We met in Cape Town, in 1978. He was a lot more senior than me. I was afraid of him! It wasn't a real fear; sometimes, when you meet people and don't



**"WITH KARATE,  
THERE MUST BE  
REAL FIGHTING.  
Without real fighting, there is no proof.  
Without proof, there is no trust. Without  
trust, there is no respect." — Mas Oyama**

Shihan Tockar and son Anthony

# KYOKUSHIN COMBO: BACK-KICK SET-UP



**1** As his opponent steps forward into range...

**2** ...Tockar blasts off a combination beginning with a reverse punch to the midsection...

**3** ...and throws a second as his opponent parries. With his force being redirected across...

**4** ...Tockar flows with the motion into a spin, which takes him out of punching range for the split second his back is turned...

**5** ...and into a powerful back-kick, driving it up into the solar plexus or rib cage.

**"You get there, do your best, and SHOW RESPECT FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR OPPONENT."**

know them, you give them an exaggerated respect," says Adel.

"I started in Goju-ryu and Shukokai; we became involved through university. I had a different coach, and [Tockar] was the coach for the university team I was in. We went away with university competitions and I got to know him a bit better."

Adel immigrated to Australia some time before Tockar.

"I came to Sydney in 1995, and started the Shukokai karate club in Rose Bay. When [Trevor] came out, I'd been running the club for five years. I decided I wanted to do Kyokushin because I wanted to continue training with him. It was the friendship that brought me across, not the style."

Like Adel, Tockar decided to immigrate to Australia.

"I came to Australia, looked

around, and I liked what I saw. It was a great country to come to. I had a young family, and I was worried about their futures. I was happy in South Africa; I had a fantastic dojo, I was working as a senior barrister, and was an acting judge in the supreme court."

That aside, the prognosis for his family's future in South Africa was cloudy at best.

"I was worried...was there a future? Economically? My wife is a doctor; there was the risk of AIDS. I spoke to an immigration agent and told him 'I'm a lawyer', but there were no points for that. 'My wife is a doctor', which was minus 10.

"He asked if there was anything else and I explained that I ran karate clubs. He was interested in that, so I gave him the background. I had letters from Steve Arneil and Mas

Oyama [to support my case]. 'Come on in,' I was told, 'you've got special skills.'"

Those special skills are probably best defined as the ability to teach.

"Every student is unique, but the student has to fit into the class," Tockar says. "You can't expect everybody to be the same, [but] students have to have the same kind of attitude; the same kind of respect, courtesy and manners.

"When they are doing basics, for example, everybody is doing it in a uniform way. There's one [correct] way and everybody tries to achieve that. We don't all get there, but that's the beauty of it — we all keep trying."

Adel offers an insight into Tockar's attention to detail.

"He's quite demanding. His instruction is quite a lot more technical than many others.

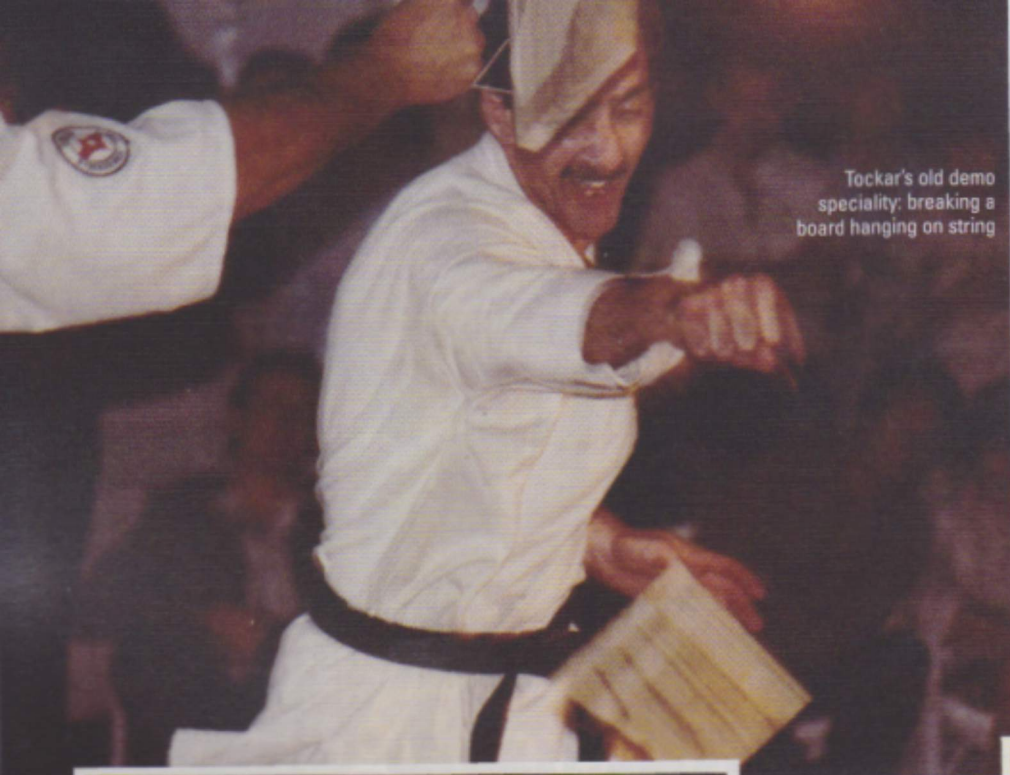
He spends time assisting people with changes to strikes or blocks; getting them to rigorously practise correct technique rather than simply [performing] high repetition.

"He says that 'if you practise bad technique, you'll perfect it', or something along those lines. Trevor is quite demanding; he seeks perfection. He's looking to get people to improve — to get the best out of them."

Getting the best out of a student means that technique becomes more refined as each student progresses.

"You make concessions for those who don't have the flexibility or constitution, but within that, they do it in a uniform way. You start adapting [technique] for fighting, particularly."

Fighting is at the very core of Kyokushin as a style. When



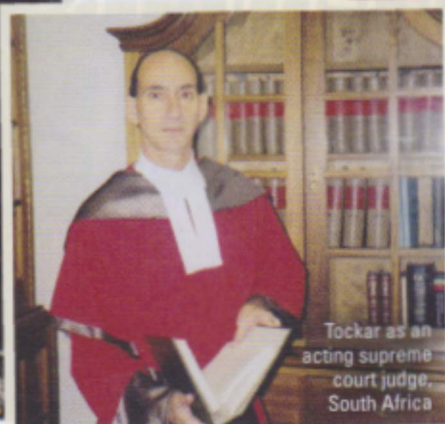
Tockar's old demo speciality: breaking a board hanging on string



With Shihan Len Barnes



Tockar (rear left), and Len Barnes (centre) with Sosai Oyama (front) and Makoto Nakamura in Cape Town



Tockar as an acting supreme court judge, South Africa



Tockar and Oyama in 1981

asked about the importance of kumite, Tockar quotes Mas Oyama:

"With karate, there must be real fighting. Without real fighting, there is no proof. Without proof, there is no trust. Without trust, there is no respect."

While that's true, Tockar's view of MMA is complex.

"Nothing can be harder than that; there's a lot of skill," he says, "[but] I get upset when I see them jumping up and down on the cage, badmouthing their opponent. Mas Oyama said, 'Same face in victory and defeat.'"

"You get there, do your best, and show respect for yourself and your opponent. Get something positive out of it that develops us [as people] instead of something that's negative."

A few years ago, Sigung (Grandmaster) Rick Spain, a long-time Wing Chun kung fu exponent, began training in Kyokushin with Tockar. Although Spain had already been a full-contact kung fu world champion, kickboxer and bodyguard with countless fights behind him, his experience of Kyokushin as a teenager stayed with him and was enough to eventually draw him back.

"I met Trevor through my great friend Graham Levy," he says. "I was invited to the Bondi dojo as a guest and fell in love with Kyokushin again."

Spain returned to training in Kyokushin with the intention of working up to his Black-belt. His own considerable experience gives him a distinguished perspective on his

own instructor.

"Trevor is a superb coach," he says. "He is old-school for sure; you can't do this for over 40 years without the culture affecting you or you having an influence on it. Trevor is very loyal to Sosai's teaching and is a great ambassador for Kyokushin."

That loyalty to Sosai's teaching is essential to Tockar's perspective of martial arts. In fact, the qualities that distinguish Kyokushin from a sport like MMA are the roles of community and tradition.

"If you take out kata, you can't call it karate," says Tockar. "Oyama's attitude was that traditional practice is the soul of karate. If you take away traditions, if you take away protocol, then we're

just fighters.

"That's what distinguishes us. All the great fighters... what happens when fighting finishes? We have a culture and philosophy that sees us through until we depart this mortal coil. I get as much out of karate at 64 years old as I did at 18."

"Because of the culture and philosophy, it improves us as human beings. If you take that away and it just becomes a kind of fight, we're going backward towards being savages."

As far as getting out what you put in, Tockar is very clear.

"Oyama said, 'The only magic is sweat.' You pride yourself as an instructor that you do the training on the floor with the students. You do the warm-up and then *kihon*, or basics. I do everything; I stick to the tried-and-tested way."

"To achieve the spiritual reality, you have to go through the physical part." ■