

A man in a white karate gi is captured in mid-air, performing a high kick. He is wearing a white gi with a black belt. His right leg is extended horizontally to the right, and his left leg is bent at the knee. His arms are in a dynamic pose, with his right arm extended forward and his left arm bent. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

## Fists, No Fury

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Various types of wrestling are among the earliest forms of official competitive combat sports, introduced by the Greeks in the 7th century BC. The events - along with boxing - came to be among the most popular at the Olympic Games, though rules were rather less stringent than today with pretty much anything allowed except for eye gouging, groin grabbing and biting. Competitors would often battle for hours, until one surrendered, passed out, or even died.

Every continent has, at some point in history, spawned its own form of martial art, though the practice is most widely associated with the Far East. Chinese martial arts, commonly referred to as kung fu, is known to have been practised since at least the 5th century BC, though, according to some legends, is as old as 4,000 years.

The basic meaning of kung fu actually has more to do with the state of mind, and can relate to any undertaking that requires immense study and discipline, a befitting description of a practice that requires mental and physical prowess in equal measures.

"By pushing yourself beyond your limits and testing your resolve, you learn to know yourself, to achieve insight into your own weaknesses and strengths," says Trevor Tockar, an internationally acclaimed master instructor of karate, based in Sydney. "Only when you recognise your own weaknesses can you improve and develop. Kyokushin karate means 'the ultimate truth'. This does not mean we think we're the best. It means that we train in a way to discover the truth about ourselves. This is the true reward of karate training."

Verve caught up with Trevor and some other martial arts practitioners to find out more...

**TREVOR TOCKAR, SHIHAN (MASTER INSTRUCTOR),  
AUSTRALIA | DISCIPLINE: KYOKUSHIN KARATE**

Karate comes from the Japanese for 'empty hands'. The art was honed on the islands of Okinawan, but a popular legend has it that karate was brought to Japan from China, having been introduced there by a visiting Zen Buddhist monk from India. Kyokushin, developed in the 1960s, is the most difficult style of karate, incorporating full contact fighting.

**What attracted you to karate?**

As a schoolboy I was always interested in boxing and martial arts, but karate was still in its infancy in South Africa where I grew up. The dojo (training hall) I attended after leaving school had a remarkable chief instructor by the name of Len Barnes, a Scottish-Irish immigrant who became known as the 'Father of Karate in South Africa'. Len Barnes practised the Kyokushin style of karate under the legendary master, Masutatsu Oyama. What attracted me most to kyokushin karate was its adherence to traditional 'budo' karate and its emphasis on hard training coupled with strong moral values (humility/respect/courtesy).

**Do you see karate as much a spiritual endeavour as a physical one?**

Through the physical demands of hard training and the relentless repetition of techniques and routines, the mind and the spirit combine with the body to achieve realisation and insight. The discipline, focus, control and commitment that is required in training in the kyokushin style of karate elevates the endeavour to way beyond the physical dimension.

**Are you ever afraid before competition?**

I have reached an age where I no longer compete, but I certainly recall being extremely nervous before taking part in them. In 1975, Masutatsu Oyama hosted the 1st World Open Karate Tournament in Tokyo allowing full contact kicks to the legs, body and head and full contact punches and strikes to the body. There were no weight divisions and no protective equipment was permitted. Knockouts were plentiful, and it was necessary to re-define the whole approach to competition. Importantly, it is necessary to prepare the body and to program the mind to endure punishment and to develop true fighting spirit.

**How do you feel about striking someone else?**

In kyokushin karate, we punch, kick and strike our opponents with as much force and power as we can muster, with the intention of knocking them down or out. The beauty is that this is done without malice, anger or ill-will. Competitors have the highest respect for each other and this is only increased when they find themselves in the toughest of fights. As Masutatsu Oyama said: "The heart of our karate is real fighting. There can be no proof without real fighting. Without proof there is no trust. Without trust there is no respect. This is a definition in the world of martial arts".

**Have you had to defend yourself on the street?**

As a young man, there were some occasions (few and far between) when I was obliged to rely on my karate training in the street. However, a true martial artist will seek to avoid such situations. Training should teach one to be aware and to be alert, which, in turn, should assist one to avoid confrontation.



Trevor with sons David and Anthony, both Aussie champs

*"Training should  
teach one to be aware  
and to be alert"*

**How has karate enhanced your character?**

By pushing yourself beyond what you thought to be your limits, and by testing your resolve, you learn to know yourself, to achieve insight into your own weaknesses and strengths. Only when you recognise your own weaknesses can you improve and develop. Kyokushin karate means 'the ultimate truth'. This does not mean that we think we are the best. It means that we train in a way to discover the truth about ourselves. This is the true reward of karate training.

**What are the biggest misconceptions about karate?**

There are many about the martial arts in general, and karate in particular. The fact is that through training, you will improve and will become better than you were. This does not mean that you will become better than the person next to you. There is no magic. There is only hard work. Masutatsu Oyama was an incredibly powerful man who was able to defeat all-comers in battle and who was able to smash bricks, stones and tiles with his bare hands. When asked what was his secret, he pondered for a while and then simply answered: "Sweat."

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