

SEIZAN®

Newsletter of the American Amateur Karate Federation

June, 2012

Volume 3, Issue 2

Editorial Staff:



Alex Tong



Anjali Krishnan



Bradley Webb

Inside this Issue:

Letter from the Editor

Current Events: National

Seminar in Milwaukee

AAKF Member Spotlight

Q & A with Sensei Alex Tong

Perspectives: Friday Training

at Milwaukee National

Seminar

Photo Gallery

AAKF National Championship

Flyer

Editorial: Fifty Milliseconds From Greatness

"As with all great players, it was mere instinct (honed, naturally, by dedicated training). For the rest of us mortals, perhaps the only consolation is that we have always been just 50 milliseconds from greatness".

The Economist, 2012.

In about 2 weeks from the release of this newsletter, competitors across our nation will gather at the Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles to participate in the celebrated AAKF National Championship. Whether the challenge comes from within (as in *kata*) or without (*kumite*, *kogo*, *enbu*), athletes and judges alike will seek that moment when a technique is executed in perfection, a seemingly out of body experience for the athlete as if he or she is watching one's own *gyaka-zuki* or *mae-geri* from afar; when, momentarily, time seems to stand still and

the practitioner enters the coveted mental state of *mu-shin*, or absence of conscious thought.

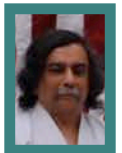
With that in mind, the above quote comes across with personal resonance in, of all places, the April 23, 2012 issue of the Economist! This article appeared in the Game Theory column under the title of "In the Blink of an Eye – decision making in cricket". The columnist B.R. (full name undisclosed) expounds on the greatest mystery in cricket to "mortals", a term collectively assigned to non-athletes in the audience stand: how does the top batsman play against a fast bowl (cricket equivalent of the fast pitch in All-American baseball)?

Continued on page 3

Current Events: AAKF National Seminar

Milwaukee, April, 2012

By T. P. Ravichandran, M.D., Chief Instructor, Shotokan Karate Association



The AAKF National Spring Seminar took place on April 27th, 28th, and 29th at Mount Mary College campus, Milwaukee, WI. It was the first AAKF National Seminar in the Great Lakes region since the demise of Sensei Hidetaka Nishiyama. Every athlete who participated gave a very positive feedback on their experience, from Mount Mary College campus as the seminar site, parking facilities, and the proximity of campus to their place of stay. The National Seminar started with Sensei Robert Fusaro. His legendary athletic ability was breathtaking, and his teaching was presented in such elegance and simplicity that all kyu and high dan ranks members could follow and benefit. His knowledge to improve our core muscle dynamics was remarkable. It is imperative to keep in mind to constantly practice this understanding of body dynamics on a daily basis. Without his lecture, you may be missing a literacy guide on the foundation muscles involved. By strengthening and

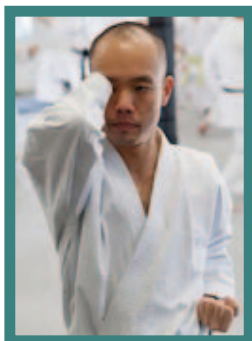
conditioning them, it will make a remarkable difference in maintaining body stability during combat.

Sensei Mahmoud Tabassi's session emphasized the ability to promote directional force/power with body stability during transition. Most athletes who are good in *kumite* defeat themselves by adapting wrong stances and would have problems accelerating forward or sideways during transition, thereby becoming frustrated by their inability to reach target. His guidance will help us make the necessary changes. Sensei Alex Tong used *jiyu ippon kumite* drills to review the fundamentals of free sparring, including effective distance (*ma-ai*) in reference to the opponent, appropriate positioning of guard arms in *kamae*, and basic strategies to create an opening for attack. Sensei Albert Cheah stressed that weak stances beget weak discipline and form.

Continued on page 3



AAKF Member Spotlight: Taichiro Kajima, Western Region



Taichiro Kajima

Born in Japan, Taichiro started karate training at the age of 15 at the JKA Headquarters in Tokyo. He learned from various renowned JKA instructors such as Kagawa, Izumiya, Hanzaki and Naka, and received *Sho-dan* at the age of 18.

When Taichiro moved to Los Angeles in 1993 to attend college, he was hesitant about continuing karate training, thinking that there was no quality karate outside of Japan. But the moment he saw an instructor demonstrating a technique at a local *dojo* he realized that he was wrong. This instructor

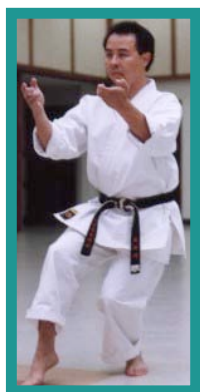
was Sensei Avi Rokah, and Taichiro started training under him regularly, soon taking a role as an assistant instructor at his *dojo*. Within a couple of years he naturally started going to Master Nishiyama's *dojo* as well. Taichiro began competing in local and national tournaments, winning 1st place in *fukugo* at the 1999 AAKF Nationals and then 1st place in *kata* in 2000. Despite his desire to remain in the country, Taichiro returned to Japan in 2000 since his student visa expired.

[Continued on page 4](#)



Q & A with Alex Tong

Seizan turns its microphone inwards to Alex Tong, General Editor and President Elect of AAKF. The following is his response to questions posed by Anjali Krishnan, Productions Editor.



*Sensei Alex Tong
demonstrating Unsu*

S. Your approach to training and teaching is very scientific, how have your karate training and education in science been intertwined over the years?

T: I started JKA/*shotokan* training under Sensei Robert Graves in 1971, when I was a college sophomore majoring in biology in the University of Oregon. His karate prowess and charisma have up to this day influenced my teaching style. According to Sensei Graves, Nishiyama Sensei was faced with a dilemma when he introduced karate to the US in the 1950s. We Americans then and now have always been an inquisitive lot, a people not satisfied just with the "whats", but also the "hows" and "whys". As a result, Sensei Nishiyama had to modify his karate teaching from the traditional, Japanese "dogmatic" to a more American, "didactic" approach, along the way incorporating biomechanical findings that served to explain the incredible power and speed of JKA/*shotokan* techniques. His demystification approach has amassed a tremendous following, and many of us still consider Nishiyama Sensei to be the greatest teacher of traditional karate-do.

The scientific process identifies, analyzes, predicts, ultimately leading to mastery of the entity or phenomenon that is adapted or improved for the human good. I find this stepwise, reductive approach to be highly beneficial in understanding Sensei's concepts of technique execution. By breaking down each technique to key components, Nishiyama Sensei was able to impart how biomechanics can be improved for each

variable. Most of my curriculum is an offshoot of Sensei's teachings, embellished here and there by minor epiphanies that I came to realize over time.

I have taught karate at the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) for almost 30 years now. The strength of the campus is physical and computer sciences. By default most of our club members major in these disciplines or are alumni engineers. To maximize the students' understanding of the dynamics of motion that we muster from this "giant Swiss Army knife" that we call our body, I often resort to everyday physics analogies to stimulate imagination and to enhance self-confidence.

S. How do you think karate fits in with modern day society and its values?

T: In this informational (and mis-informational) age, our lives are constantly bombarded by sound bytes and overnight "phenoms" that disappear equally quickly. Traditional karate training is a life-long endeavor that incorporates bedrock values: honor, respect, commitment, and personal responsibility. It is a time-tested "do", or path towards attaining physical and mental potential and spiritual enlightenment. When I was young, I was drawn to the sheer physical exhilaration of training. I have also come to appreciate the mental counterbalance that karate training offers as daily life becomes increasingly hectic. I expect that traditional karate will continue to attract people of all ages and all walks of life.

[Continued on page 4](#)

"To maximize the students' understanding of the dynamics of motion that we muster from this "giant Swiss Army knife" that we call our body, I often resort to everyday physics analogies..."
Alex Tong

Editorial: Fifty Milliseconds From Greatness Continued

B.R. quotes from "Wait", a new book by Frank Partnoy yet to be released in the United States. In a chapter devoted to "super-fast sports", Mr. Partnoy explains that pros and amateurs alike require approximately 200 milliseconds to react to the incoming bowl. The best batmen are set apart by what happens in the next 200 milliseconds, which the book calls the "preparation stage" (deciding on the shot, moving into the correct position and swinging the bat). "A cricket batsman who is just fifty milliseconds slower than an average professional-in other words, someone who is slower by just a fraction of the time it takes to blink - simply has no chance of competing with the pros"; the book quotes Peter McLeod, an Oxford professor. Mr. Partnoy continues that the fastest reaction times of all sports are in fencing, for which one must beat the opponent to the bit by just 40 milliseconds to score an epee.

Well perhaps one of us should invite Mr. Partnoy to visit our National Championships.

Although we don't carry stopwatches to quantify the perfect technique, it comes from personal experience that fifty milliseconds could be a slow differential even for a less than perfect technique! Those of us who have studied under Nishiyama Sensei over time would consider that the above espoused ideas are old hat. I fondly recall attending the ITKF Masters Class, with the fencing coaching staff of UC San Diego listening intently from the stands, while Sensei explained the intricacies of technique timing.

In another less charitable time and place, 50 milliseconds could mean the difference between survival or death. In the upcoming National Championship, we will have the opportunity to witness Sensei's teachings being put into practice. I strongly urge you all to attend.

Alex Tong
General Editor

Current Events: AAKF National Seminar Continued

We went through exercises to better understand how to maintain appropriate stance pressure biases between the front and back leg for various stances, and the control of our center of gravity. Sensei Cheah emphasized that practicing these techniques on a daily basis is key. His flexibility and control is outstanding. During the self-training sessions both Sensei Tabassi and Sensei Kageyama constantly noticed our weaknesses and would provide personal instructions to improve our techniques. This approach opens eye and thought process in a new direction. Sensei Kageyama detailed dynamic flexibility in combination with *keri-waza*. Finally, the Q&A session offered ample opportunities for everyone to direct questions to the AAKF Technical Board.

My take home message is that karate and self-defense cannot be mastered over a brief period of time. Consistent training will help us make the difference that we need to make these critical changes of self-development. Till his last breath Sensei Hidetaka Nishiyama taught and trained all of us. I thank AAKF Technical Board of Directors. I thank all AAKF members and new members who have made this event successful.

"When precise and accurate reach of the moving target is achieved effortlessly, the real combat begins."

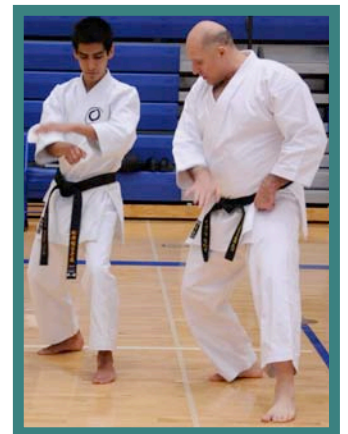
T. P. Ravichandran, M.D.
Chief Instructor
Shotokan Karate Association



Hosting instructor (Dr. T.P. Ravichandran, third from left) and AAKF Technical Committee Members (from left, Alex Tong, Mahmoud Tabassi, Robert Fusaro, Albert Cheah, Richard Kageyama).



"... Someone slower by just a fraction of the time it takes to blink, simply has no chance of competing with the pros..."
Analogy with cricket to explain the mental and physical state needed in karate.



Sensei Mahmoud Tabassi explaining back leg pressure in kokutsu-dachi (back stance) during AAKF National Seminar.





Q & A with Alex Tong Continued



Sensei Tong (middle) with his two senior students (now instructors) at JKA Dallas: Sensei John Bell (left) and Sensei Bradley Webb (right).



"... Keep the quality and standards of the dojo, and the students will come..."

Sensei Nishiyama's advice to Sensei Tong.



Kajima competing in the 2010 ITKF World Championship, Brazil

S: What are your thoughts on how discipline and respect are interpreted and expressed in dojos today?

T: Our multicultural society has produced students who come into our *dojo* with preconceived and distinct notions of dignity and respect. My opinion is that the *dojo* instructor should be aware of these expectations (though not catering to them), and at times, make minor allowances.

Sensei Nishiyama has always emphasized the importance of leading by example: his instructors should answer to the same high standards of technical excellence that are demanded of students. Instructors should also conduct themselves according to *budo* principles that incorporate basic tenets of perseverance, commitment and mutual respect. As the saying goes, respect is earned. As coveted titles become easier to attain, the character of the instructor becomes more relevant for maintaining a strong *dojo*. From my experience, if one treats a student decently and is responsive for his/her growth, respect is usually reciprocated.

S: How did you, as a *karateka* and an instructor, help create *dojos* in Texas, many of which have retained its original students for more than 25 years?

T: When Susan and I first came to Dallas in the 1980s, we started the UTD club not so much of vision but because of our need to continue training in the Nishiyama way. Though there were *shotokan* practitioners in

the area, there was no JKA/*shotokan* *dojo* in the Dallas metroplex. We started with ten students, one of whom, Brad Webb still serves as senior instructor of our organization, JKA Dallas. Many of our members know Mr. Webb for his wealth of competition honors including AAKF *kata* and *kumite* champion for multiple times and also ITKF Pan Am Champion. He and his wife Elizabeth, who moved from the Great Lakes Region by way of Florida and Dubai, as well as instructors that JKA Dallas produced over the years, are the major forces that help spread the art in the Southwestern region. Because of the prospering economic status of Dallas Fort Worth, we also benefited from black belts who moved from other regions and joined us in Texas and Oklahoma.

Sensei Nishiyama always inquired about the progress of the region during his annual Southwestern region visits. I was often embarrassed to tell him that we have not produced more *dojos*. His refrain, as always, was "keep the quality and standards, and students will come". I take it to heart that this is the key ingredient for the long-term growth of the art. In meeting with students and instructors who have trained in other *dojos* or other styles, there is always this common desire for the pursuit of excellence. The expectations for JKA Dallas instructors are no more or less: lead by example, seek constant improvement, and be responsive to the individual needs of students.

Continued on page 5

AAKF Member Spotlight: Taichiro Kajima Continued

His motivation to continue training karate under Master Nishiyama grew stronger while in Japan, and he was finally able to return to the US as a permanent residence in 2004. His dream of competing at the international level drove him to give up his Japanese citizenship and to become a US citizen in 2006.

Influenced by karate training, Taichiro became interested in learning about human body. He returned to school to earn Master's degree in Physical Therapy. Taichiro continued training under Master Nishiyama until his passing in 2008, receiving *Yon-dan* from him in 2005. He also worked closely with Master Nishiyama in producing a series of 3 DVD's that captured the last 3 international training camps (2005-2007) that

Sensei taught at UC San Diego. These DVD's are still available at <http://www.amazon.com>. Taichiro joined the US National Team in 2010 and took 3rd place in *fukugo* at the World Championships that year, then took 2nd place in *fukugo* and 3rd place in *kata* at the Pan American Championships the 2011. In 2011 he opened Valley Martial Arts Center in North Hollywood (<http://www.valleymac.com>) with 2 partners, where he serves as Chief Instructor of the karate program (Valley Traditional Karate). He continues training and teaching at the National Karate Institute as well, which a group of Master Nishiyama's students inherited after his passing. He currently works full-time as a Physical Therapist at a local medical center while instructing and training 6 days a week.



Perspectives: Friday Training at Milwaukee National Seminar

By Celiane Labouret, 4th Kyu, Shotokan Karate Association, Milwaukee, WI



Sensei Joel Ertl at the AAKF National Seminar.

At 8 AM, Friday morning of April 27, 2012, the doors of the gymnasium at Marymount College, Milwaukee, opened for the AAKF Spring National Seminar. Dr Ravichandran, Chief Instructor of the Shotokan Karate Association of Wisconsin, was host and coordinator of the event. He had invited the senseis from the AAKF Technical Committee and taken care of all the necessary logistics. When the seminar started, the scene was impressive: Of the more than fifty who attended, most were black belts, bowing before the five senseis who hailed from California, Minnesota, Texas, and Washington, DC.

The first day of the three-day seminar was devoted to *kata*. One sensei after another taught the sessions. Although each had his

own style of explaining stances and movement, all focused on the essential fundamentals of karate. Each sensei in his own words emphasized the importance of a good basic stance: aligning the hips, squeezing the inner thigh muscles, lowering one's center of gravity, connecting to the ground from the heel up, practicing compressing one's breathing in the *tan t'ien*. After the theory came the practice: time after time, a student stood in front of the sensei. The sensei gently pushed him - very few could keep their stance. Second and third chances were given, and slowly, the students learned to find his/her structure to sustain a truly strong stance. I felt that I could now practice my stance with confidence, being aware of the appropriate connection to the ground with proper breathing coordination.



"... Take the time to understand the expectations and abilities of your student..."

Sensei Tong's recommendation for a new instructor.

Q & A with Alex Tong Continued

S. What advice do you have for young instructors from start-up *dojos* with new students? How do you think they should introduce the concepts of karate as an art that unites body and mind?

T: As a graduate school professor, I am acutely aware of the learning attitudes of the contemporary US students. They refuse to be intimidated or pushed into submission (not that these approaches ever work consistently), but will respond with enthusiasm when properly motivated. Also, their reasons for learning martial arts are more diverse; my experience is that few are interested in the "blood and guts" training of olden days. Coupled with a less physically inclined youth population (attested by the US

army recruit physical performance data), these factors present challenges for aspiring instructors.

My recommendation is for the young instructor to exercise a certain level of "personalized instruction" for each student without deviating from the tried and true curriculum. Show students the "way" by demonstrating what they can accomplish through consistent and focused training, encourage camaraderie, and find every opportunity to increase the energy level of the class. Take the time to understand the expectations of the student, and modulate your expectations based on their physical ability and potential.



Sensei Robert Fusaro emphasizing torso to hikite (pulling hand) connection during group discussion at AAKF National Seminar.

Photo Gallery



Sensei Richard Kageyama discussing ma-ai (effective distance) for technique execution during AAKF National Seminar.



Sensei Albert Cheah explaining the fine points of choku-zuki (straight punch) during AAKF National Seminar.



AAKF National Seminar, Milwaukee, WI, Great Lakes Region, April 27-29, 2012.



**American Amateur
Karate Federation**

National Office
445 S. Figueroa St.
Suites 2600 & 2700
Los Angeles, CA 90071

Phone:

(888) 939-8882

Fax:

(888) 939-8555

E-Mail:

siezan@aakf.org

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.aakf.org

*Become a fan of the American
Amateur Karate Federation on
Facebook and receive
notices when the website is
updated.*

**Photographs
published courtesy of:**
John Bell (Southwestern
Region)



Look for a detailed account and photographs about the
AAKF National Championships in the
September, 2012 issue of *Seizan*!