



国際大山空手道連盟総本部

World Oyama Karate

Honbu Newsletter Issue 18 - Spring, 2008

五輪書

Book of Five Rings

By Miyamoto Musashi

Translated By Founder Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama



地の巻

Chi no Maki *(Book of Earth)*

Chi no Maki (the Book of Earth) is the first chapter in Musashi's *A Book of Five Rings*, written in 1645. The book is divided into five chapters (Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Void), which correspond to the Buddhist concept of the five elements that make up the world. **However, *A Book of Five Rings* has nothing to do with religion.** Some historians believe that Musashi wanted to connect the five elements of the universe to his fighting strategy.

Musashi begins the book by explaining why he believes his original Ni Ten Ichi Ryu style is the superior method of sword fighting. He then goes on to lay out the practical process of achieving victory in any

This is a portrait of Musashi at age 13. He fought his first duel at this age, killing a samurai named A Rima. It's interesting to note how the artist portrayed him with hair standing up, a tough face, and a full beard. His arms and legs are so powerful, like he's already 30, instead of 13.

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situation. This is called *Hei Ho*. Musashi explains how to use all of the energy within you in a rational way in order to achieve your goal.

This type of rational explanation is the cornerstone of Musashi's book. He doesn't rely on deep philosophy, religion, mysticism, or any other methods to get his ideas across. The rationality behind his explanation of winning strategy makes his words just as relevant today as they were nearly 350 years ago.

***Hei Ho* (Winning Strategy) is the code of the *Bu Shi* (Samurai). Commanding officers should put this code into action, and soldiers should know this code. No samurai today understands the true meaning of *Hei Ho*.**

Hei Ho is the way to win in any battle. Musashi told samurai they needed to put *Hei Ho* at the core essence of their being. In battle, commanding officers need to prove their understanding of *Hei Ho* through action. Even the lowest-ranking samurai need to understand and follow this strategy.

The last line of this section is so interesting to me. He chastises the younger generation, telling them that they don't have a strong enough understanding of *Hei Ho*. It shows Musashi's human side. He's not some supernatural god. Of course he's an extremely important historical figure. His words command respect and send

shivers down my spine whenever I read them. But if I study them carefully, I can see a hint of his human side, which makes his words come more alive. Musashi wrote these words nearly 350 years ago, but this kind of generational gap is still present today.

When I began my Karate training as a teenager, my senseis would always tell me, "You young kids still don't get it. You don't train hard enough." When I was in my 20's, during college, they still told me I didn't get it. As I got close to middle age, they continued telling me, "You still don't understand it."

Then came the day when I found myself telling my kohai (juniors) the exact same thing. After I got married and had children, I told my kids, "You guys still don't get it. You don't understand anything." I tell my stu-



IE MITSU TOKUGAWA (1604 – 1651)—the 3rd Shogun. He was the Shogun in power at the end of Musashi's lifetime. He was responsible for increased oppression of Christians and the isolation of Japan from the outside world.

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CHRISTIANITY IN JAPAN

When the first Tokugawa Shogun (IE YASU) came to power in 1603, Japan had already been trading with merchants from Portugal, Spain, Holland, and England. These European countries had introduced Christianity to the Japanese people. Initially, the Shogun allowed the practice of Christianity to continue. According to some historians, however, traders from England and Holland later began to warn the Shogun that Portugal was planning to try and make Japan a Portuguese colony.



SHIRO AMA KUSA

So in 1612, Shogun IE YASU Tokugawa banned Christianity in ports reserved for foreign traders. Soon thereafter, he banned the practice of Christianity in the whole of Japan. Christians went into hiding. One way the government tried to find them was to force people to step on *fumie* (a small carving with the image of Christ). If a person refused to step on it, they were deemed to be Christian and thus executed.

SHIRO AMA KUSA (real name TOKI SADA MASU DA) led the group of 40,000 Christian farmers in the Rebellion at Shima Bara in 1637. He lived on the nearby island of Ama Kusa and was only 17 years old at the time of his death in 1638. His mother left behind an account of his life, which still survives today. As a young boy, he often travelled to Nagasaki to meet with local Christians and priests. Eventually he was baptized, taking the name JERO NIMO (this name coincidentally closely resembles that of the famous Native American warrior).

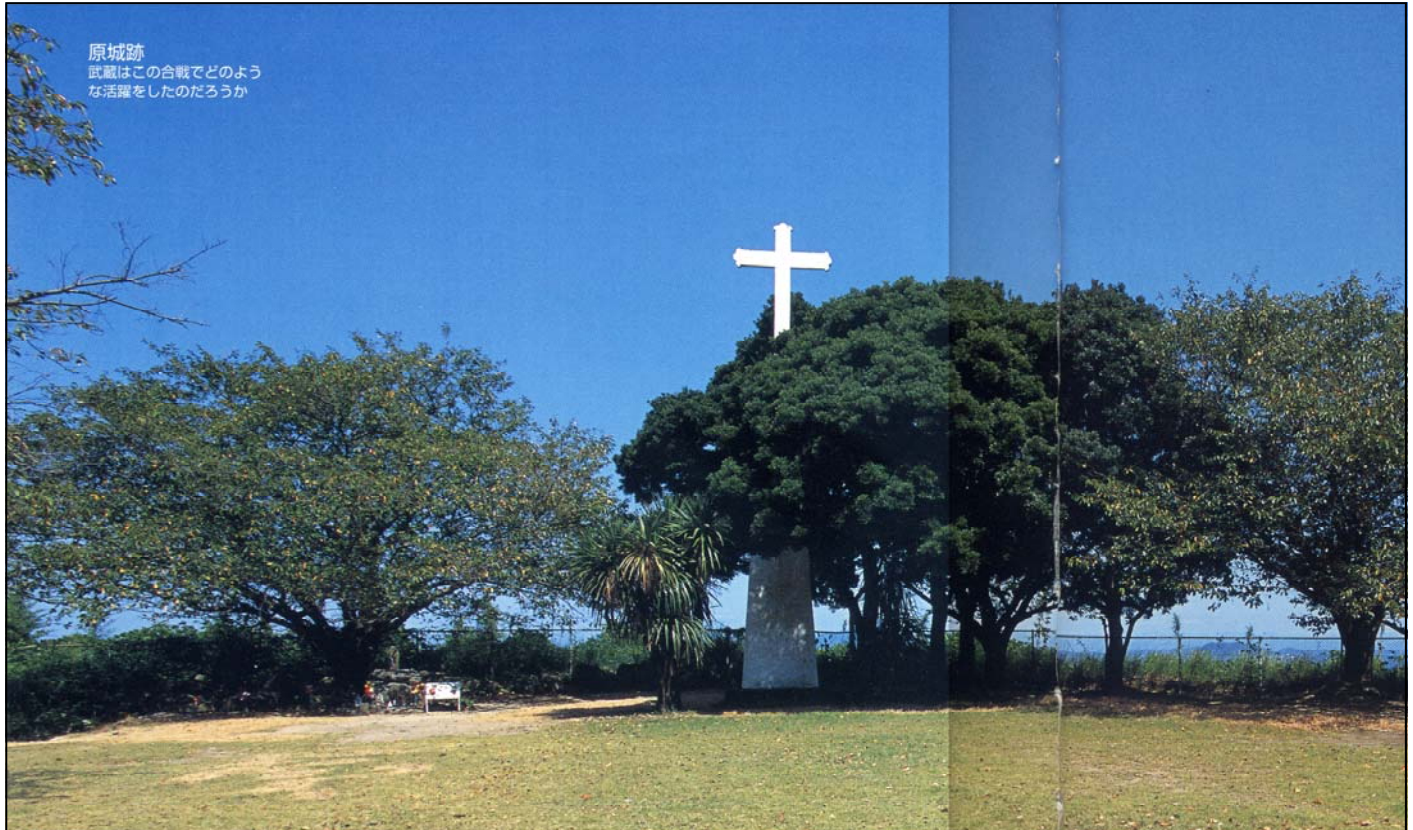
During the rebellion, he and his troops took control of Hara Castle, defending it against the soldiers that the Shogun had ordered. The Shogun believed that because his troops far outmatched the farmers in terms of munitions, equipment, technology, etc., they should achieve an easy victory. However this was not the case. When the Shogun felt that the commanding general, ITA KURA SHIGE MASA, was taking much too long to defeat the Christians, he announced he would be sending additional troops. General ITA KURA had a long history of military victories. But the Shogun's announcement of more troops was like a public disgracing of his abilities and honor. Having lost face, ITA KURA had no choice but to storm the castle before the reinforcements arrived. Once he entered, SHIRO AMA KUSA killed him, much to everyone's amazement. (I wonder how a 17 year old boy would do today in the same situation).



Fumie

In the end, the Shogun's forces laid siege to the castle, cutting off all food, water, and other supplies. But it took 90 days before SHIRO AMA KUSA and his forces could be defeated.

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Site of the ruins of Shima Bara Castle

dents at the dojo the same thing. So, I guess the samurai of 350 years ago in Japan and we here in the U.S. today have more in common than you might think. It's so funny to me how human beings across the world and all throughout history have carried out the same cycle of each generation scolding the one which succeeds it. Well, back to the *Five Rings*.

So, what prompted Musashi to say this about the younger generation? Well, some historical accounts suggest it might be his witness of the Battle of **SHIMA BARA NO RAN** (Rebellion of Shima Bara). In 1637, a group of Christian farmers on the island of Shima Bara staged a rebellion against the oppressive rule of Lord **MATSU KURA**. This was during a time that Japan was at peace under the reign of the Tokugawa Shogunate. In 1603, the Tokugawa Shogun came to power and united all of Japan under his rule. In 1612 he banned Christianity and burned the church in Kyoto. In 1622, a group of 55 Christians in Nagasaki, Kyushu were rounded up and executed. So, the Christians went into hiding. But in 1637, the oppression of Lord **MATSU KURA** had become so great that the peasants of

the land staged a revolt. Many were Christians who came out of hiding to fight.

The Tokugawa Shogun ordered the lords in the region to quell the rebellion. Musashi (along with his adopted son, **I ORI**) accompanied one of the battalions as a supervisor. When he got there, he was surprised to see that a lot of the young samurai didn't know what to do. Many of them were inexperienced and lacked a real understanding of strategy. So, many historians believe that this was what prompted him to say that "No samurai today understands the true meaning of *Hei Ho*" when he wrote *A Book of Five Rings* in 1645. I think that because they lived in an age of peace, most samurais were more concerned with climbing the social and political ladder than engaging in life and death combat. This meant that *Hei Ho* had become more of an ideological concept unconnected to daily life. But for Musashi, everything was life and death, and he thought it should be the same with all samurai. He couldn't stand people who saw *Hei Ho* as just some kind of ideological study. That's my opinion, anyway.

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There are many Paths. There is the Path to enlightenment through the teachings of Buddha, the Path of Confucius overseeing the Path of learning, the Path of healing as a physician, as a poet instructing in the arts of *waka*, tea ceremony, archery, or other arts and skills. Each person chooses the Path which fits their natural inclinations. Very few choose the path of *Hei Ho*. The warrior's Path has two parts: cultural arts and the sword. He should have an inclination for both. Even a man with no natural ability can be a warrior by diligently pursuing both divisions of this Path.

To better understand this passage, you need to know what life was like in Musashi's time. The country was in a time of peace, which allowed culture and arts to flourish. People could devote time and energy to doing what they really enjoyed. But the samurai had to study *Hei Ho* (winning strategy). Compared to other pursuits, study of *Hei Ho* at this time was rooted in the realm of ideas and abstract concepts. I imagine that it's similar to how some of our students might view **Kihon** (basic) training. Many students like to do **Kumite** (fighting), but in order to build up their fighting ability, they need to spend more time practicing basic techniques. Compared to fighting, Kihon training doesn't seem so exciting to most students.



Musashi Miyamoto as drawn by Utagawa Kuniyoshi

Most Karate styles will say that Kihon training is most important. But most likely, their Kihon training consists only of punching, kicking, and blocking the air. They stay in a stationary stance, (i.e. *Sanchin Dachi*, *Kiba Dachi*, *Zenkutsu Dachi*) and go through all their basic techniques. But in Kumite (free fight), they fight with contact. They don't stay in the same spot; both people move around and punch and kick each other. This creates a huge gap between basic training and a real fight. When an instructor says, "Practicing basic techniques is the most important part of training," the students don't understand why. It's hard for them to see any connection between the time they spend standing in the same spot, punching and kicking the air to when they face an actual opponent and have to fight with contact and step work.

Can you imagine if a pitcher practiced by just going through the motions of pitching, but didn't use an actual ball until the day of the game? Or a golfer who practiced his strokes by just swinging his clubs in the air? What kind of score do you think he'd get on the day of the tournament? In any sport, basic fundamentals are practiced with contact. Karate should be the same way.

Until you practice with contact, you're technique is only in your imagination. Contact training makes it real and gives you instant feedback. Each basic technique requires you to use your body in a different way. Without contact, you can't tell where you're stiff, or how to control

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your balance and breathing, which stance is most suitable, etc. When doing Kihon training, you need to execute one technique in one breath. This allows you to focus on getting correct form. Once you begin to feel how to use your total body for a technique, then you are ready to make contact.

After you train this way with basic techniques, you can more clearly see how to arrange them effectively for free fighting. You can feel how each technique requires you to use your total body in a particular way. Some techniques fit together well, others don't, so you need to make adjustments so that you can execute combinations smoothly. For example, if you miss the target with a roundhouse kick, you can feel how a back kick naturally follows. In addition to this, you need to practice techniques with *ashi no hakobi* (step work). This is how Kihon training should be.

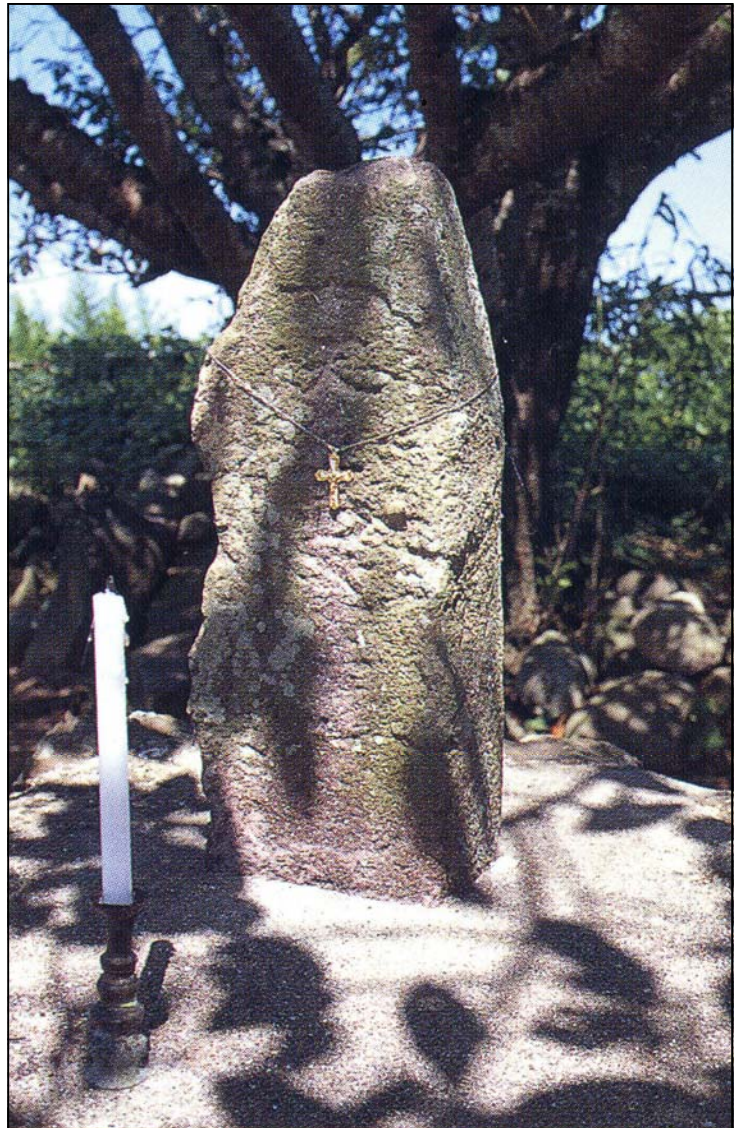
This training methodology didn't come from the *Five Rings*. It came as a result of dedicating my life to the study of Karate. But when I read Musashi telling young samurai that they don't truly understand *Hei Ho*, I can connect to that sentiment.

In the above section, Musashi said that a warrior should study fine arts, literature, science and culture. But the purpose is not to become a great artist or scholar. *Hei Ho* should be at the center of everything a warrior does. He should view the world through the eyes of strategy. It's my opinion that when Musashi was fighting as a young man, he didn't think about culture and art. He just thought about winning. I think that as he got older and began writing about winning strategy, he began to see the importance of studying culture and art.

To win a fight, of course the physical aspect of combat is important. But before that, you need to be able to see the big picture of your opponent and the world around you. To do that, you have to study culture, history, art, society, etc. in order to understand human nature on a deeper level. I believe Musashi is telling the reader that they need to see beyond the surface appearance of the world. When you look at your opponent, you see a person—that's the surface. But you need to read them beyond that: What lies beneath the exterior? What are their motivations? What are their strong and weak points? To build up the ability to see the world in this

way, you have to study nature, art, culture with the intention of better understanding winning strategy.

The point is that success comes not only from attacking directly. You also need to see from all angles, be open to indirect approaches as well. There are many examples of mathematicians and scientific researchers who toil endlessly to find a solution to a particular problem. They wrack their brains for long hours at their desks or laboratories, but the solution still eludes them. Then one day they take a break and go for a walk or to a museum, or listen to music, and suddenly the answer hits



This rock, inscribed with the name of Shiro Ama Kusa, was found in a farmer's wall. It now marks Shiro Ama Kusa's grave.

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them.

To understand *Hei Ho* more deeply, you have to suck the essence of everything around you and use it to build up your understanding. This may not sound logical, but it is. If you want to get better, you have to study more. There is nothing philosophical or mystical about it. That's why Musashi's words are still relevant today. They weren't influenced by any of the philosophies of his day; they go beyond that. *A Book of Five Rings* is a very calculated, logical work that explains how to win.

A warrior's acceptance of death is no different from that of priests, women, peasants who have been known to die readily out of a sense of duty or shame. What sets the warrior apart is his understanding of *Hei Ho*. It is at the core of all he does. Through victory in combat, singly or among many, a warrior gains glory and builds up the stature of himself and his lord. All this is possible because he understands *Hei Ho*.

I assume that Musashi was very familiar with the notion that a samurai's life was death. This was a very popular sentiment of the time. Many people believed that a samurai's preoccupation with death set him apart from other members of society. When they woke up in the morning, they thought about how they were going to die. When they went to bed at night, they thought about how they would die the next day. Many people thought this made them different than farmers, businessmen, merchants, etc. But in this passage, Musashi looks at society in a rational way and questions if this distinction really is true. I think he believes that it's not that simple.

In 1716, a very famous book came out in Japan called *Ha Gakure*. It's a very philosophical work devoted to the notion that a samurai's life is death. You can find this idea romanticized in countless books, movies, and TV shows. In one respect, this is true. A samurai had to be ready to die at any moment for his lord. If he focused on life, too many temptations would arise for him. But by accepting death and being ready to die at any moment, he could concentrate 100% on his duty. Maybe this is true.

In this passage, however, Musashi states that being

ready to die at any moment out of a sense of duty or shame is not unique to samurai. You cannot define a samurai by this characteristic alone. Any number of people throughout history have given their lives willingly for reasons of honor, duty, shame, etc. What makes the samurai different is that he understands *Hei Ho*.

Samurai = Death is a very abstract and idealized philosophy. Musashi says that connecting every moment of their life to *Hei Ho* sets the samurai apart from other people. The success of a samurai depends on the extent to which he understands winning strategy and the amount of time and energy he devotes to its study.

Some people say that *Hei Ho* has no place in the daily life of a peaceful society. But real *Hei Ho* works in every aspect of human life.

Many people see *Hei Ho* (winning strategy) as only applicable to war and battle. During times of peace, such as when Musashi wrote *A Book of Five Rings*, most people consider it necessary to study and focus on other areas of society (i.e. politics, economy, governance, etc.). They view *Hei Ho* as out of place in a peaceful world.

Musashi says that when you learn and understand *Hei Ho*, you can apply it to **every** aspect of daily life. He strongly states that if someone thinks *Hei Ho* has no place in day-to-day activities, it's because they haven't studied enough. I always tell my students that when they study Karate, they should try to connect it to their daily lives, not think of it as something they only do in the dojo. This is especially true for Black Belts. Once you reach Black Belt you can really start to appreciate the affect your training has on your "ordinary" life.

I always say that stance is most important. If you watch any sports or martial arts, you'll see how stance and body posture determine what movements an athlete can make. For example, when hockey players skate, they never raise their hips. They keep them low so that they can move forward quickly and powerfully. 100-meter dashers always run on the balls of their feet and keep a low center of gravity. However, marathon runners most likely will raise their hips and roll their feet, touching

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At the age of 17, Musashi fought in the *Battle of Seki Ga Hara*, 1600. This was a famous decisive battle in the civil war between the East and West of Japan. Most historians agree that Musashi fought on the side of the West, which was defeated. Even at this young age, he had ambitions of one day becoming a powerful commanding general.

the heel before the ball. Any sport you look at, you can see how athletes set up their body posture and stance before they move. If they start getting weak below the waist, their body begins whispering to them. They no longer have the spring in their ankles, knees, and hip joints. Their legs and lower back start talking to them, “Hey, maybe it’s time to take it easy now. Let’s take a trip to the beach or go fishing.” At this point, they can still train and instruct, but competing is a whole other story.

When you watch the Olympics this summer, pay attention to the athletes before they compete. Are they nervous? Of course, but they have to control their breathing and emotions. It’s like when you compete in a tourna-

ment or go up for promotion. I always encourage students to compete because that’s when they have to face themselves and find a way to control the pressure they feel. These are just some examples of how you can take what you learn in the dojo and apply it to the world around you.

Training never stops—that’s human nature. We make mistakes, but we keep going and learning along the way. I have a confession to make. I make mistakes every day, even Senpai Karl knows it (my wife *really* knows it). But that’s why I keep training—it’s the only way forward.

Tournament Report

Whenever you have an opportunity to compete or push yourself, don't wait—grab it. When you got a chance to fight and face yourself, don't pass it up and say “maybe next time”. There might never be a next time. Whenever it gets close to tournament time, people come up with all kinds of excuses as to why they can't compete. Suddenly, they're skilled authors, dreaming up elaborate stories. But for those who face the challenge, the lifelong rewards are tremendous. Here are some highlights from our American Cup Ultimate Challenge Tournament held here in Birmingham on April 26.

Men's Middle-Age Semi-Knockdown—Mike Bailey (2nd Kyu, Honbu Dojo) took 1st place in this division. He fought hard and showed a lot of improvement since last year. But I was also really impressed by the performances of Rick Bearden (4th Kyu, Trussville Dojo), Jerry Schnader (4th Kyu, Trussville Dojo) and James Mann (4th Kyu, Honbu Dojo). These guys showed some real guts and fighting spirit. They didn't have much fighting experience, but they went out and tried anyway. I'm sure they were nervous and anxious, but

afterwards I'm sure they felt a great sense of accomplishment (as well as some sore joints and muscles). I think that if they continue to go in that direction, they'll make great Black Belts someday.

Women's—Some of the competitors from other styles fought really rough, swinging wildly. I was glad that they were wearing headgear, otherwise they'd taken a lot of direct punches to the face. Champion Sue Kamikawa (Atlanta) won 1st place, but at the party in the dojo afterward, she looked like she had an extra cheek. The final match in this division between Makiko Nakagawara (San Francisco) and Sue was really exciting. Both fighters had great spirit and I look forward to seeing them in the future.

Senior Knockdown—Steve Geng (2nd Place, Atlanta) and Senpai Paul Speyer (1st Place, Honbu) did great in the final match. I was thinking we'd see defending champion, Sensei David Sorrells (Honbu) in the finals, but he injured his left hand in the first match. Sometimes, that's how tournaments go. But it was good to

see Steve Geng finally competing. He showed great fundamental in-fighting, nothing flashy, but very solid. I know he could've easily done some jump spin kicks or flying drop kicks, but he stuck to the basics and gave a solid performance.

I was also surprised by how well Isaac Wilcox (Atlanta) did. He's over 50 years old, but still has killer instinct with his left hand punch. I'm sure he'll make a great Black Belt in the future.

Knockdown (Lightweight)—Senpai



Men's Middle-Age Semi-Knockdown Champions

Tournament Report . . . Continue



Thanks to everyone for another

Karl Julian (Honbu) won first place and fought hard. But Jared Ramsey (San Jose) did a great job. He showed tremendous fighting spirit. He's still a green belt, and I'm sure that in the future he will only get better. I was not only impressed by his technique and stamina, but also his attitude. I think that in the future, he will go far.

37 years old, past the age when most fighters retire, but he wanted to fight just one more time. He won first

Knockdown (Heavyweight)—Kerry Wright (Honbu) made his debut at this tournament. He has a Black Belt from another style and has only been training with us for a few months. He's dedicated and learns quickly. It will be interesting to see how he improves and passes each challenge in the future. Daniel Brown (Honbu) also did well, almost getting to 1st place. I was impressed with Sensei Naoi Yasutaka (Japan). He's



Kid's Champions

Tournament Report . . . Continue



successful Tournament !



Sensei Takahashi and his Champions

place with his counter-fighting strategy. He showed a lot of guts and determination.

Kids—All of the fighters in the Children’s Divisions did a great job. Some of them won, others didn’t, but they all showed great spirit. That’s the point, to move forward in a positive direction. For those that won, they shouldn’t get a big head, but rather see where to go from here. For those that lost, they need to bounce back and keep training and know that they’ll get there if they keep trying. It’s important for parents to reinforce their child’s experience in a positive way. Sometimes the children cry. That’s OK, it’s all part of the larger process of training and growing stronger.

Remember, **action** is important. Don’t just talk or think about it; you have to step forward! That’s the only way to make your life richer and deeper.

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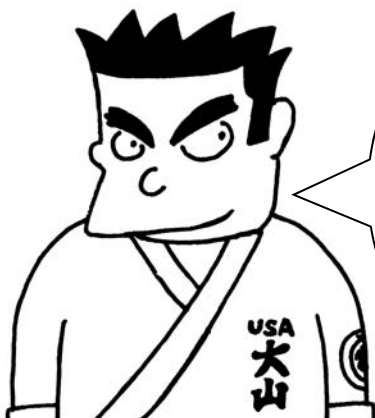


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Summer
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Issue 18 - Spring, 2008

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