



*Photo courtesy of Bob Snyder*

## Master Yaguchi Visits Mid-America

By Martin R. Schrager

On December 13, 2014, Master Yutaka Yaguchi, 9th *dan*, ISKF Vice Chief-Instructor, Technical Committee Chairman, and Founder and Chief Instructor of the ISKF Mountain States Region visited Mid-America for a clinic and *Dan* exam.

Mid-America showed its appreciation for this legendary master's visit by producing a huge turnout and showing an incredible level of spirit. Master Yaguchi was quoted as saying "I can feel the love in

this room." He gave an invigorating clinic that was highly technical, educational, and exciting. This was followed by our annual regional *Dan* exam.

This issue is dedicated to Master Yaguchi and all he has given us through the years. Articles from Sensei Vaughan and Sensei Oberschlake on the ensuing pages provide some insight into our performance and the lessons Master Yaguchi gave us.

## Thoughts on Yaguchi Sensei's Comments

By Martin Vaughan

Although Yaguchi Sensei was pleased with our spirit I think that he was a little disappointed in two technical points, "*kata* looks like application" and "no one blocks."

First, let me address Yaguchi Sensei's concern about *kata*. Many things in Japanese culture, including everyday tasks, have *kata*. This means that there is a precise way or method to perform a

task. Everyone is expected to perform *kata* the same way. To fail to do so is not *kata*.

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## Thoughts on Yaguchi Sensei's Comments

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Kata is one third of our training along with basics (*kihon*) and *kumite* (sparring). Our kata training can have many uses, such as the development of dynamic movement, timing, strength, the visualization of opponents, and self defense practice. The application of kata movements as self defense or in *kumite* often requires modifying the movements to more efficiently apply the techniques. This type of training leads to valuable knowledge of the application of technique, but this is not kata. Kata must conform to the form or movement, rhythm, power and line of performance dictated by the organizing group or instructor (ISKF). Therefore, everyone does the moves the same way, within the limits of body type. Unnecessary emphasis on the application of kata is to the detriment of real kata practice, and is not proper training. We have another portion of our karate practice that is dedicated to the application of techniques (*kumite*) so it is unnecessary to devote excessive, valuable class time to kata application in the name of kata practice. Remember that kata practice is not intended to produce uniformity, but to provide a way of doing that allows for the development of focus and intensity that permits the performer to achieve a high level of skill (DeMente, 1990. Japan's Secret Weapon- The Kata Factor).

Yaguchi Sensei's second concern was a comment shared with me during the exam, "no one blocks." There are many strategies that can be applied in *kumite*. All of these strategies can essentially be

divided into 2 categories, offensive and defensive. Both of these require some degree of timing to deliver an effective technique. Arguably an offensive strategy is slightly easier, but it must be applied as a true strategy and not just the attempt of a technique or two that is repeated over and over. In either strategy it is essential to make a strong technique. This creates a situation that Yaguchi Sensei calls "a chance." A strong attack can make a chance by being difficult to block or evade thus producing an effective technique. A strong block can create an opening in the opponent's defenses or cause a loss of balance producing a chance to deliver a strong, effective counterattack. In both cases a strong technique begins with a strong stance. As the body shifts forward toward the opponent, weight is transferred to the front leg and the weight 'drops' to the floor, firmly rooting the stance to the floor. At the same time the upper body squeezes to the center, on top of the stance, to produce a coordinated effort and a strong punch, kick, block or strike.

Sensei's comments suggest we have forgotten how to make a strong technique in *kumite*. So we must study how to make a strong technique and practice it, not only in *kumite*, but in all of our training.

## Body Connection

*By James Oberschlake*

I have had the honor of sitting next to Okazaki *Shihan* and Yaguchi *Shihan* during Mid-America Dan Testings. Listening to them, a common expression emerges: When commenting on a student, the Masters might say, "Oh, connection to body" or "connection problem." I want to explore what is meant by these comments. I believe they represent a major challenge to one trying to advance to any level of black belt. What is meant by body connection? Body connection is a good thing. It means your technique – kick,

punch, block, or strike – is connected to the synchronized, harmonious movement of the whole body and the whole body is connected to the ground. When you throw a technique, the striking surface may be the foot, hand, or arm, but it should feel like you are hitting the target with the mass of your entire body and your body is braced firmly against the earth. Power then is determined by the speed you can perform this whole body movement.

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# Body Connection

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There is a sequence to this whole body movement. Motion starts with an action of the hips, pelvis, and middle body. From here energy is transferred into the legs in the form of a stance, pivot foot, or support leg. Energy is driven strongly into the ground. This creates a reaction force that comes back up through the body and propels the technique toward its target at maximum speed. "Executed properly this action takes about .15 to .18 seconds to complete." (Nakayama, Dynamic Karate, 16) Okazaki *Shihan* says, "The moment you complete your technique, think power comes from *Seika Tanden*." In this manner, all techniques are connected to the dynamic, coordinated movement of the whole body.

If you have a connection problem, it means you are doing something that negatively effects the transfer of energy from the whole body to the target at impact. I will list some things that can cause problems with body connection:

**Concentration:** When doing karate, there is so much to think about. Sometimes we become introspective or lack confidence, and our eyes will drop and look at the ground. Look strongly at your opponent, and a concentration of mind and body energy will naturally flow in that direction.

**Stance:** At the beginning and end of your technique, you need to form a strong stance. A strong stance creates a stable position from which you can launch powerful techniques at maximum speed. At impact a strong stance locks the body into a single unit that is braced against the earth. In this way, the mass of the whole body is utilized. Skidding feet and wobbly knees are indicators that you have a connection problem related to a weak or improperly formed stance. Check the position of the feet and be sure the feet press evenly and firmly into the ground. Be sure your posture is good and that you maintain proper alignment of the four pairs of load-bearing joints: ankles, knees, hips, and shoulders.

*Makiwara* training is one way to test and develop a strong, properly formed stance.

**Movement:** Many karate students have a body connection problem during movement. They lean, step, and fall into their stance as they throw their

technique. This process involves very little dynamic muscle action. It merely uses gravity which has a constant rate of acceleration. Since it is physically impossible to generate greater speed by falling faster, we must use more than gravity when executing our techniques. The sequence of body movement described above is a process that generates greater speed by connecting to the earth and dynamically utilizing most all the muscles of the middle, lower, and upper body.

During movement students also need to maintain balance. The human body is symmetrical. A center line divides it into right and left sides. The two sides are opposite, equal, and complementary. They represent a natural balance to the body's design. During movement students should maintain this balance by equally activating the muscles of the right and left sides of the body. For example, the power of the draw hand should be equal to the power of the punching hand. Over emphasizing one side can adversely affect stance, posture, correct alignment, and balance; and this can cause connection problems.

During movement you also need to utilize the dynamic principle of expansion and contraction of the body. Consider the dynamics involved when performing a stepping-forward-downward-block: 1. Press into the front foot and anchor it firmly to the earth. 2. Contract the body's muscles strongly and squeeze the right and left sides of the body toward your center line. This action pulls the upper body into its ready position, and the knees brush as the legs are pulled together protecting the groin. (It is important not to stop your motion. The moving foot continues to accelerate forward. The block does not pause at its ready position). 3. As the moving foot passes the pivot foot, activate the body's muscles so that it feels like the right and left sides of the body expand away from your center line. This action propels you forward, and you focus the block the moment you land in a strong stance.

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# Body Connection

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Master Yaguchi, Sensei Vaughan, and Sensei Obserschlake conducting a *dan* exam for Mid-America Karate students

*Photo courtesy of Michelle Randall*

Beginning students fall into their stances. Intermediate students start slowly, pause at the ready position, and create power at the end of their technique. The most advanced students fully utilize the principle of expansion and contraction; they demonstrate an explosive starting action and continue to accelerate their technique from beginning to end.

**Breathing:** Breathing should mimic movement. When you are moving, you should be breathing, either inhaling or exhaling. The breath accelerates as the movement of the technique accelerates. At impact the body muscles contract strongly and lock the body into a single unit. This action naturally stops the breath as energy is transferred into the target at impact. Sometimes you will see students holding their breath during movement. This is bad for many reasons. Sometimes you hear a student exhale strongly at technique impact. This indicates less than maximum muscle contraction. Thus improper breathing can negatively affect body connection and the power generated by your technique.

**Body Timing:** Good body timing coordinates, harmonizes, and unifies all the aspects of good body connection listed above: sequence, concentration, breathing, stance, balance, and expansion and contraction. Poor timing creates connection problems that result in loss of power. Consider the following examples: 1. A student does a stepping in punch and hits the target with his back-leg heel off the ground. An instant later he pushes it firmly to the earth and creates a strong stance. Here the student does everything right, but poor timing does not allow him to take full advantage of a stance that is braced against the earth. 2. A student throws a reverse punch. He turns his hip sharply and locks into a strong stance, but the punching hand hits the target late. It lags too far behind the motion of the hip and stance to take advantage of the momentum power created by the middle and lower body.

The correct sequence of movement suggests that some very slight lag time may be appropriate, but remember the entire sequence is performed in a split second. For this reason when practicing correct body timing, I believe it is best to think, "Upper body, lower body, right side, left side – start same time; end same time." The slow movements in kata provide one of the best opportunities to develop body connection created by good body timing.

Thank you for considering my thoughts on body connection.



Master Yaguchi instructing Mid-America Karate students

*Photo courtesy of Kim Weber*

## Spring Camp 2015

### *Mid-America Welcomes Sensei David Jones*

*By Michelle Randall*

We are extremely fortunate to have Sensei David Jones as our guest instructor for Spring Camp at OSU this year. Born in England, where he trained with Masters Kanazawa and Enoeda, Sensei Jones immigrated to Canada in 1981, and has been practicing and teaching karate for over 40 years. A member of the ISKF Technical Committee, he is also the Chief Instructor for ISKF Alberta and Chairman of ISKF Canada. Sensei holds the rank of 7th *dan*, is a graduate of the ISKF Instructor program, a Class A Instructor, and a Class A Judge. A seasoned competitor, he was the Canadian National *kumite* champion in 1991, and a *kata* finalist in the 1990 Shotokan Cup.

Having had the privilege of attending Sensei's training sessions at Master Camp, I recall that his long, low stances and the power of his techniques were an inspiration to us all. He stressed the importance of stances and keeping one's connection to the ground. Sensei shared a personal story with us that reflected his commitment to karate and his own technical development. Being unhappy at one point with his movement on the floor, he decided that for six months, he would repeatedly practice moving from stance to stance, utilizing the basic movements of front stance, back stance, and side stance in order to make these stances work better for his body.

In addition to having a beautiful custom built dojo in Calgary with over 250 members, Sensei's club also has a great website where you can find, among other



Sensei David Jones, 7th *dan* of ISKF Calgary  
*Photo courtesy of ISKF Alberta*

things, an excellent article written by him entitled, "Guiding Principles to Develop Dynamic Karate." In this article Sensei emphasizes the "physiological components of movement," such as stance, posture, hand and kicking techniques, and power generation. We look forward to welcoming Sensei Jones to our region this coming April, as he reminds us all of just how fortunate we are to have such dedicated and talented instructors in our organization.

# Proper Use of the *Makiwara* and Bags

By Martin Vaughan

Karate is unique in the world of sports and physical activity in that it requires little, if any, equipment. To train one needs only enough clear floor space for at least one step. A uniform and a belt is nice, but not necessary. However, as with other sports and activities, the development and use of equipment can augment and enhance the karate training experience. Many of the pieces of equipment used in karate training are unique to karate while others are the same or similar to those used in other sports.

The most unique and characteristic piece of equipment used in karate training is the *makiwara* or punching board. The *makiwara* is a relatively flexible, tapered wooden board that is anchored in the ground or on the floor. The striking area of the board is covered by a traditional straw or foam rubber pad. Master Funakoshi referred to the *makiwara* as "the keystone of creating strong weapons." Regular practice with the *makiwara* results in the toughening of karate weapons and strengthening of karate techniques. While punching techniques are most often practiced with the *makiwara*, any striking or kicking technique can be applied. In addition to toughening the striking surfaces, regular practice develops proper muscular strength and application (focus or *kime*) as well as proper breathing and distancing.

When developing punching (or other thrusting) techniques with the *makiwara* it is important to contact the board and allow the technique to travel into the board. The punch should not "push" the board, but stop at a distance that produces a flexing of the wood of the board. The karate-ka then uses muscles of the hand, arm, shoulders, torso, and stance to hold the board in the flexed position for a brief time. In doing so the karate-ka develops *kime* by developing the muscles used in punching as well as strengthening the contact surface of the punching hand. With some creativity one can practice blocking and striking techniques with equal effect.



Traditional *Makiwara*

Photo courtesy of Martin R. Schrager

Snapping, striking, or kicking techniques can also be developed using the *makiwara*, but the clear application of muscular force is not as obvious as with thrusting techniques. This is because in the course of a snapping technique *kime* occurs in mid technique rather than at the end of the technique. There are two ways to practice snapping techniques on the *makiwara*. The first is to use the snapping action exactly, contacting the board solidly, but for a very short time. This builds strength and feeling at the contact surface, but produces less muscular development because of the short contact time. The second method changes the "snap-return" to a "snap-lock" technique. Instead of returning the striking limb to the start position, the striking surface is locked on the target by tensing the muscles of the joints involved. The "snap lock" makes the technique essentially a thrusting technique and thus useful for muscular development.

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# Proper Use of the *Makiwara* and Bags

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The heavy bag will to a certain extent develop techniques in a similar way as the *makiwara*. However, the heavy bag can be more easily used to practice kicking techniques and techniques in combination. The bag can also improve the angle of contact and be moved to develop timing and distancing. Generally, a smaller, lighter bag is used for kicking practice and a larger, heavier bag is used to develop punching/striking as well as kicking techniques. Beginning students, children, women, and older men may find that working with a lighter bag is more satisfying and productive. In either case, care should be taken to prevent injury and avoid altering the basic technique when hitting the bag. Avoid pushing the bag with the technique. It is important to use *kime* and drive the bag with your technique without following the bag with your technique. The bag should be driven away from the technique, as there is only a short contact time.

If the hand or foot remains in contact with the bag as it swings away, it becomes a “push” and does not develop proper muscle action, posture, or *kime*.

Bottom weighted, stationary, heavy bags like the Wave Bag can be treated essentially like a *makiwara*. Take care not to push the bag, but to use *kime* and stop the technique after penetrating the bag.

A variety of striking pads and targets that are held by training partners can also be useful in the development of karate techniques. They have an advantage over the previously mentioned equipment in that they can be used anywhere and are generally less expensive. These pads build strength, relation of the striking surface to the target, proper distance, aim, and reaction time.

The training partner must hold the target firmly so that the target does not twist or move when struck. The holder should assume a strong position, including a good stance (usually front stance). The attacker should hit the target just like the *makiwara*, maintaining good posture and being careful not to push the technique.

The use of the *makiwara*, bags and/or targets should be a regular part of karate training. Proper use of such equipment can forge strong karate weapons and build confidence in techniques. To gain all the benefits of using these pieces of equipment, maintain proper form, good posture, and avoid “pushing” your techniques.



*Traditional Heavy Bags*  
Photo courtesy of [pixshark.com](http://pixshark.com)

# Congratulations to Students Achieving *Dan* Promotions in December!

Name	Promotion Rank	Club
Dewi, Cempaka	Shodan	Columbus Shotokan Karate
Fadhlurrahman, Rafi	Shodan	Columbus Shotokan Karate
Grant, Lydia	Shodan	Shotokan Karate of Anderson
Lehmphol, Lukas	Shodan	Athens Karate
Merz, David	Shodan	Ohio State Shotokan Karate
Morgan, Camden	Shodan	Brown County Shotokan Karate
Snyder, Masumi	Shodan	Brown County Shotokan Karate
Waterbury, Myra	Shodan	Athens Karate
Abdurrahman, Sartono	Nidan	Columbus Shotokan Karate
Crouse, Tim	Nidan	Columbus Shotokan Karate
Frazier, Neal	Nidan	Columbus Shotokan Karate
Helsinger, Karl	Nidan	Dayton Shotokan Karate
Hornick, Rick	Nidan	Columbus Shotokan Karate
Kellner, Lawrence	Nidan	Indiana ISKF
Leeds, F. Stuart "Skip"	Nidan	Dayton Shotokan Karate
Mrusek, Mike	Nidan	Butler County Shotokan Karate
Bryant, M. Dan	Sandan	Swartz Creek Shotokan Karate
Kennedy, Jamie Lynne	Yondan	Swartz Creek Shotokan Karate
Weidele, Tom	Yondan	Creekside Karate

## Sensei Golden



### Chief Instructor, ISKF Mid-America Region

Sensei Greer Golden graduated from the Instructor Trainee Program in 1969 and was sent to Ohio University in Athens to begin sharing his knowledge with Mid-America karate students.

## Sensei Vaughan



### Assistant Instructor, ISKF Mid-America Region

Sensei Martin Vaughan has been training under Sensei Golden and Master Okazaki for over 40 years and has been our region's Assistant Instructor since 1999. He is also the Chief Instructor of Indiana ISKF.

### President, ISKF Mid-America Region

Sensei James Oberschlake has been training under Sensei Golden and Master Okazaki since 1974. He is also the Chief Instructor of Brown County Shotokan Karate Club.

### Executive Director, Mid-America Region

Sensei James Nelson is the Chief Instructor of the Swartz Creek Karate Club and has served as the Executive Director of the Mid-America Region since 2003.

## Calendar

### March 14, 2015

Regional training & kyu exam - Milton-Union Elementary School, West Milton, OH

### April 18-19

Spring Camp - RPAC on the campus of The Ohio State University

### May 2

Adult & Youth Regional Tournament - RPAC on the campus of The Ohio State University

## Contributors

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