

In this article I am planning on examining Karate training from my perspective spanning 3 decades. This will include the changes, structures, class styles and tournaments as they have been since I began studying in 1978. We will break it down into class structure, training mentality and philosophy. Perhaps this will help students to see the progression of martial arts in America. The final section will be on training in Okinawa with my Sensei, Takanami Sensei.

1978 - 1982 - Karate was very different than it is today. Classes were typically two hours long and held twice a week. Here is what a typical class structure looked like back in this time.

- Bow In Procedure / Meditation / Inner Conditioning
- 20 Minutes of Calisthenics / Body Conditioning
- 20 Minutes of Kihon Waza (Techniques such as stances, punching & kicking)
- 20 Minutes of Kihon / Jiyu Kumite (Arranged or Freestyle Sparring)
- 20 Minutes of Kata practice
- Bow Out Procedure / Meditation

Mentality/Philosophy: During this time the mentality of wanting to learn martial arts was for gaining real life self defense skills and the mindset of instructors were to prepare you to defeat any attacker. The training was much rougher and you typically received jammed fingers and toes, bloody lips and quite often a bloody nose or two. The conditioning includes Taiso, or body strengthening exercises designed to increase one's ability to take a strike. We did Taiso by punching or kicking each other in the body extremely hard while learning how to properly breathe out when being struck. We would normally do 200 jumping jacks, 100 push ups, 100 sit ups and about 10 minutes of stretching just for conditioning. The Kihon included over 100 reps of the same techniques over and over again. In the first few months of training one would typically tear the skin off their feet from all the kicking reps. The only way out of class without shame at this time was if you were seriously injured or passed out. If you could not handle the training you were ignored by the Sensei and senior students until you earned the right to be taught.

Quite often when you walked into a Karate School back then the Sensei would simply state "It costs XXX \$'s per month you pay first of every month and must be here twice a week for classes. If you are late I will not teach you. You will follow the rules on the Dojo board and listen to me intently. Failure to do any of these will result in you being escorted from the Dojo and no longer allowed to train here." It was a time where Sensei did not want to waste time on students who were not there to learn. Just wanting to try Karate people would typically only last about a month. As a student you set in awe of the black belts. Not just because they were perfect at their karate skills but also because they commanded respect. People at this time feared the black belt around the waist because they knew you have to be excellent to earn one. Sensei would not answer questions and many of the beginner classes were taught by the best Green belt at the Dojo. If the Sensei walked onto the floor to teach it was a rare honor and privilege for all the students and the class would have to be extremely respectful or they would end up doing knuckle pushups for hours on end.

1982-1992 - Karate was going through some major changes at this time due to the popularity of the Karate Kid and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle movies. There was a huge insurgence of children into Karate schools across America and many a Sensei found out that they could make a living teaching what they loved. This is the era where Karate became main stream in America and tournaments sprouted up in every state along with there no longer being a single world circuit. You could now win titles at State, Regional and National levels...not to mention how many world champion events there were now. Class structures also changed as did the mentality and philosophy of martial arts training. Some attest this to the Sensei wanting to make money, others to the fact that a new crop of under trained black belts were emerging on the scene. Regardless of what the reasons were it was clear that America had accepted Karate as a way of training much like going to gym or day care facility. In the late 1980's Kickboxing re-emerged on the scene as a major attraction and many teens and young adults began kickboxing at local karate schools with hopes of getting into movies or making lots of money. Many of these kick boxers had their dreams smashed when the mid 1990's rolled around and with it came the UFC. A typical class structure at this time period was about 1.5 hours long and focused more on developmental karate than actual martial arts training for self defense. A class would look like this:

Bow In Procedure / Meditation
15 Minutes of Calisthenics / Body Conditioning
15 Minutes of Kihon Waza (Techniques such as stances, punching & kicking)
15 Minutes of Kata practice
25 Minutes of Kihon / Jiyu Kumite (Arranged or Freestyle Sparring)
Bow Out Procedure / Meditation

The conditioning was much less important and was more like a gym class with around 100 jumping jacks, 30 pushups and 30 sit-ups, some stretching and little or no body condition. Kihon dropped in reps to around 30 each technique and Kata was no longer the main focus of karate. Kumite became the best way to keep students interested in training so more schools began to focus on sparring and point sparring in classes to end the day. Many old schools Sensei say it was because they were losing kids that they shortened class time and reps on techniques...other say it was because they were lazy. Regardless of the reasons it now was possible to earn a black belt in 1 to 2 years where it had taken 4 to 6 years before because they no longer demanded perfect technique and abilities. Many believe it was the desire to have money coming in that they moved people through belt ranks faster and made classes easier so that more people would stick around through the training. No matter what the reasons, Karate classes changed forever in this era and it laid the foundation for future million dollar schools to pop up across the country.

Kickboxing began making a comeback from its early years (1968-1975) and many people flocked to both the gyms as well as the events. Most Karate schools offered Kickboxing training at their schools to increase their income, but few ever made it to Pro status unless they sought out promoters on their own. A typical school could throw a Karate tournament and make around \$500 to \$2500 in one day, or they could throw a Kickboxing event and make around \$1200-\$6000 in one day. It was during the late 1980's, mostly around 1988 that many Karate schools began to lose focus on their traditional martial arts and refocus on Kickboxing or sport Karate. IF their school had good competitors in both realms they increased their publicity in the newspapers which increased students. The problem is that somewhere along the line we forgot what and why we taught the martial arts.

The early 1990's saw an insurgence of franchise schools, mostly with the American Tae Kwon Do Association, or ATA for short. The ATA made training easy and earning a black belt part of a money hierarchy instead of blood, sweat and tears. In the 1990's the ATA had around 500 schools in the USA. Today they have over 3,600 worldwide and have mass produced black belts like Spangler Candy does Dum Dums. Although the ATA does produce some quality black belts, they have produced far fewer ones in the terms of what it means to be a black belt. The ATA has shown that a good business man can teach Karate and make millions, but at a severe cost to the quality of martial arts as a whole. I personally know that I would not be able to sleep at night knowing I was teaching watered down martial arts to my students just to make a buck.

All in all this decade was interesting. More and more tournaments and schools opened than ever before. More schools and Sensei failed than ever before. Kickboxing made it back to TV and movies were everywhere. One thing I did not mention was the US Military and Police forces across the country began widespread integration of martial arts in to their training during this era. That led the way to some of the best Defensive Tactics Courses we have ever seen.

1992-Present Day - This is a special era for me because I opened my own dojo and began trying to make a living teaching martial arts while maintain the integrity I began with. The early 1990's, I stated before saw a huge growth among these franchise schools and unqualified black belts. There were more and more traditional schools where you had to earn your black belt closing down. It was a tough time because the economy was bad, people were out of work and most Karate Sensei had become so disgusted with the current status of the quality of black belts that they quit teaching altogether and went back to their day jobs. Classes were shorter but most schools offered classes 5 times a week now and the emphasis on teaching martial arts was no longer the main focus. Most schools began teaching "life skills" in their classes which included programs to use at home for parents to build responsibility and

character in the students. The funny thing is that these programs are part of becoming a black belt. The life skills schools began to focus more on being a day care center than an actual martial art school. This is the era that we first see programs for children as young as 3 pop up. These programs look like a gym class with some punches and kicks. They no longer look like karate and students were rarely discipline but rather given a time out or spoken to in a "positive" manner. The focus of running a disciplined and set hierarchy within the dojo was quickly declining and Karate was becoming more of a hobby than a way of life for many of its students. It was a tough time for me, but my schools flourished and it that is because I mixed "life skills" training with actual Karate training. We produced some great black belts and our training remained hardcore...to a point.

In the mid 1990's there was a school opening on every corner in every town. Some of these were legitimate schools with good black belts, but the majorities were opened by some disgruntled student who bought a black belt and went out and claimed to be this and that. I can remember one particular school that opened in Butler, Indiana with a 19 year old kid who had studied Jeet Kune Do and Wing Chun from Keith Wetosky of Waterloo, Indiana. This kid, called Dan, made outrageous claims about his skills and abilities. He bastardized all other school including my own...as well as me. After about three months of his bragging I decided I had enough. First I spoke with Keith, a long time friend of mine, about this kid to find out what the real scoop was on Dan. Keith informed me that Dan had trained with him for about a year and was arrogant and had many difficulties learning the materials. Eventually Dan had quit coming to classes but not before Keith had heard he was telling everyone that he was a black belt and instructor. After my discussion with Keith I went to Dan's school (which was in a garage at his parent's house) during one of his classes. As soon as I walked in he was immediately nervous and began to stumble in his teaching of the four kids, they were all teens that were there. I never said a word and just watched intently. As the class was winding down he approached me and asked me to leave. I told him that I am here because of his mouth and his boasting and that it was to end. I also informed him that he was not allowed to teach and I had spoken with Keith who said he was not even a black belt, nor any good at the martial arts. I did this loud enough so his students could hear me. Dan began to become upset and acted liked he was going to get physical with me so I stepped up the conversation and got in his face. I said and furthermore you have disgraced my honor as a martial artists and black belt and I am here to put you in your place. Dan turned white. There was silence. Then I stepped up again and asked to spar with him. He agreed but wanted his students to leave. I said no, right now, let's go. The matched ended in less than 10 seconds with Dan on the ground in pain and crying his eyes out. At this time I turned to his students and said you need to be more careful on believing bullshit and really check into who you train with (which would be something many of students who come from other schools have heard). I turned and walked out. Two days later I heard Dan had closed his school and he went back to Keith to train. Keith being an excellent instructor told him that he would not train him until he grew up and to come back in a few years. To this day nothing more has been heard about this Dan guy.

In 1996 we saw Kickboxing becoming popular again with many matches being held in the area. Most schools began teaching Kickboxing as a way to make extra income, but I choose to stay a true martial arts school. Kickboxing was great to watch and I was a certified trainer, official and judge by the World Kickboxing Federation at the time so I was always at matches helping and judging. I have kickboxed in the late 1980's and early 1990's, but it wasn't what I believed in as a martial artist. I preferred the tournament scene rather than kickboxing. When I quit training I had an amateur record of 5 wins and 1 loss and a pro record of 2 wins and 0 losses. It was fun but was not what I was into. The funny thing is that some of my students fought in the ring to try it out and they won all their matches...many times against fighters with pretty good records. James Lockhart, Jerney Bowers and Shaun Hatlevig...all black belts of mine, fought in a few matches as fill ins and they each won...every time. By 1999 Kickboxing had given way to the "mixed-martial arts" cage fighting thanks to the UFC events on TV. I will discuss my feelings on the MMA in another article later except to state that MMA is in no way a martial art, mixed or not.

In 1999, after running a successful set of schools I decided I needed a break and wanted to go back into training to earn my 7th degree black belt and Kyoshi license. The school in Auburn, Indiana was

turned over to Jermei Bowers who still runs it to this day. The Kendallville, Indiana school was given to Ton Somkit but he moved it to Avilla, Indiana and eventually closed it down due to having lost his job in the recession of 2004. The Hicksville, Ohio school was given to Kristi Rodocker (Bowersock) who ran it very well up until she moved to Columbus, Ohio in 2002. There is more information on these students of mine under the Black Belt Profile sections in this website.

In 2000 I traveled and trained all over the US, again. I got to meet and train with some incredible masters of the arts such as Joe Lewis, Mike Stone, Jhoon Rhee, Jeff Speakman, Steven Seagal and Hee Il Cho to name a few. While I was in New York I visited Tiger Schulman's schools on a daily basis and learned a lot about the business side of owning a school (which has articles in this website). I was fortunate enough to spend time with Takanami Sensei again and we trained together for about 5 months on Goju Ryu and Naha-Te Karate at his dojo in Okinawa. Training in Okinawa taught me that students must push themselves rather than the sensei being responsible to push them. The ones that truly strive to perfect the skills and are dedicated to their training will move on into new rank. The others will either quit or eventually begin to become dedicated. The training was much like in early 1980's but they did very little contact Kumite. When I asked about this they said they have more pride in a student's ability to strike with precision and control than they do in the student's ability to kick the crap out of people. It was a wonderful time of training, but something was still missing...being a Sensei.

Franz Karate was opened in Bryan, Ohio on April 1, 2004 in the basement of my house on Mulberry Street. I only intended on teaching privately but one student turned to ten then to twenty and I had to open a commercial school once again. On November 1, 2004 we opened at our current location in East Hub Plaza. We struggled through until around September of 2005 at which time we blossomed into a dojo with 55 active students enrolled and over 89 total. Teaching has given me many wonderful things in life such as a great sense of accomplishment and pride in my students. It will never make me rich, but helps to pay the bills. It lets me focus on the only thing I have ever truly been good at in life...martial arts. With God's blessing and the support of the students we will be around for many years to come.