

From 1980 to 1992 I had primarily trained with Randy Duhamell in Tae Kwon Do. Duhamell was a strict sensei and was very demanding of his students. His entire training philosophy was geared around fighting. Not sparring but actually fighting. His classes were long and tough and you would often leave very sore. He was one of the best realistic fighters I have trained with and was fairly good at his martial art skills, but as an instructor he left much to be desired for.

I still have much respect for the ability he gave me to defend myself with his "no punches pulled" training attitude, but since I had been trained in Goju Ryu and Aikijitsu, I realized there was much more to the martial arts than his sensei had bestowed upon him. This caused major problems between him and me over the years that I ran his school.

I left his school in December of 1992 and shortly after opened my own. The event occurred at a black belt test of one of my students, Brooks Fetters. Brooks was an incredibly talented martial artist. He had achieved Indiana State Champion in fighting three years in row and was regarded as one of the toughest competitors in the advanced division. He achieved all this all before the age of 12 when he had earned the right to test for his black belt. Brooks was excited and scared because he heard all the war stories about our black belt tests. The eight hour long pounding we had taken. The soreness that lasted months and the blood that had been spilled to get that little piece of cloth around our waist that said we were something in the martial arts world. So his test was scheduled to take place in December of 1992, along with Kelly Kelley, an adult testing at the same time.

During the pre-test meeting I was assured that he would be handled as he was, a child and would not be subject to any full contact strikes at any time. Duhamell did tell me his test would be just as hard as the adults, but he would not be hit as hard. Throughout the test Brooks performed wonderfully. He demonstrated proper technique, skill and spirit needed to be a black belt. He amazed everyone including me. Then it came time to spar. This is not a big deal, except at Duhamell's black belt testing's. You see, you fight one on one a few times with different black belts then you fight five on one to simulate being attacked in the street by a gang of thugs. During the one on one I felt Brooks was being hit too hard and was told several times to shut up and not to worry about it. I knew Brooks could take it so I unwillingly obliged to subject my student to this type of fighting. Then during the five on one they opened it up by really loading the strikes up on him, as if he were an adult. Throughout the entire time he fought five on one I would grab and pull him away from the hardest strikes, often covering him with my body and taking the hit for him. I focused more on his survival than I did on testing him in the manner that they were. Eventually Duhamell had me step out as he typically does. He puts one out at a time until no one is left but him to fight you. While I was sitting there I constantly prodded Brooks on, often yelling for him to get his hands up and to counter. Deep down inside I felt this rage forming in me against what was going on. I saw a child out there as well as a future black belt getting his ass kicked by a bunch of adults, not to mention higher ranked / more experienced black belts. All of which I was told would not happen at the pre-test meeting. Then it happened with a big KAPOW. Brooks was hit with a spinning side kick that sent him flying across the room and slammed him into a wall. He was on the ground unable to breath and trying to grasp it. This was the final step. I launched off my chair and ran to him to help him out. After a few minutes he was ok but I could tell he had a cracked rib. I had enough at this point and said he is done.

Duhamell was quick to point out that if Brooks did not continue he did not get his black belt that day and had to test again. I was not about to let him continue and told Duhamell that this was a bunch of crap. At that point I was asked to leave the test and he said he would deal with me on Monday. I said deal with me now and he refused so I stood up, grabbed my stuff and left after I said a few choice words to all of them about how they were wrong and this was nothing more than a gang beating and had nothing to do with true martial arts instruction. I never went back to his school nor did I ever teach for him again.

Later that month I opened my own school in Hicksville, Ohio. I made a promise never to put one of my students through that kind of test and never have. We have had a few students that loaded up on us on their black belt test and were knocked around or out, but the majority of my students who took the test

from me were sincere enough in their training that they never were seriously injured on their test like Brooks was. The rest is still history in the making.