

# THE MAKIWARA

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE AOKA

## Where Are You?

By Grandmaster Mitch Kobylanski, AOKA President

The summer has come and gone, vacations are over and everyone is back at school. This is the time of the year that dojos start to increase their enrollment or at least that has been the norm in year's past.

The economy has taken its toll on everyone. Times are hard but we are all survivors. Whether the classes in your dojo fill back up or stay small, the one thing that goes without saying is that Isshinryu continues to grow with its excellent instructors and up and coming future black belts.

This is the time to step up to the plate. I have seen tremendous growth in the leadership abilities of some of the future Master Black Belts. This trend needs to continue and hopefully spread across the gambit to as many areas as possible.

Over the years, I have seen a great many Isshinryu Black Belts and Instructors. One of the things that I tell all of my Black Belts is that all Black Belts fall into one of three categories.

The first category is the one that I say is to the right. They are the Black Belts that are the most knowledgeable. When a student asks a question, it is always answered with authority in a manner that gets the point across and helps to answer the inquiry. This is always the go-to group that everyone seeks. This group consists of the most confident seasoned Black Belts that have put in the time and effort to stay on the top of the game.

The middle category Black Belts answer most questions correctly and are continuing to aspire to get into the group to the right. Students look up to this group because not only do they wear a black belt but in the eyes of everyone they deserve the respect that comes with the belt. This category consists of Sho-Dans to San-Dans for the most part but can also have higher ranking Black Belts.

The final category is all the way to the left. They are the Kmart specials. Most students wonder how they made their rank and do everything possible to avoid this group. This group consists of anyone that just barely made rank and then stopped learning and honing their skills. Although our students are expected to initially respect all Black Belts, respect is ultimately earned and not demanded.

These three categories do indeed exist. Working diligently to increase our skills and knowledge keeps us all in the center group and gets us eventually to the group to the right.

Isshinryu is only as strong as its leaders, masters, instructors, black belts and kyus. The way that I see it is that it is strong and continues to grow. Continue the dream of Master Shimabuku and keep it prospering.

**September  
2009**

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*Please send questions, comments or contributions to the Newsletter Committee to have answered in the next edition:*

[newsletter@aoka.org](mailto:newsletter@aoka.org)

## Personal Impressions of a Kyu Tournament

By A First Time Participant

It was show time! Saturday, July 11, Weddington, NC, site of the Isshin Ryu Kyu Fest. My first karate tournament.

Feeling the same excitement I felt as a teenager when preparing for a dance performance, I put on my stage makeup that morning; feeling I needed all my powers at my disposal. I thought it could only help to look my best. I ran through my checklist—didn't want to forget my *obi*!

Check in was easy, and I was early. I found Ring 6, and practiced my kata as the gym filled with kids and adults in *gi*. My stomach fluttered. I asked my *sempai* if he were nervous. "No," he nonchalantly replied. Nervousness was for newbie's like me.

The tournament began, and the waiting began. Being hearing impaired, I struggled to understand the amplified announcements. "Wuha, wuha, wuha," my high-tech hearing aids could not distinguish the words embedded in the triple-digit decibels of the crowded, cavernous gym. I hoped my *dojo* mates would not let me miss my ring call. Master K came over to say he had erroneously scheduled my *kumite* before my *kata*, but had juggled it. I had the last *kata* division in my ring. Still waiting. No way I could stay warmed up for two hours!

My stomach was calmer, though, with the waiting—enough to nibble a few bites of PB&J on whole wheat. Lunch.

My *dojo* mate had her *kata* division—just her and one other—intermediate, ages 18 – 34. He was good; very precise and powerful, even though he had some visible, physical disability. (He and I weren't the only disabled there; I was pleased that the organization had a place for people like us.) My *dojo* mate vowed to win her *kumite* match. I didn't realize then that I would be her sparring partner!

My beginner 35+ *kata* division was up. Four of us. I was up last. Waiting. The first three performed their *kata*,

then I took my place at the back of the ring, only having to retreat when the three were called up, one by one, to receive their scores. Finally, I began. Extraneous noises decreased as my mental focus narrowed to the space within and around me. I imagined laser energy from my knuckles and balls of my feet striking the judges. It flowed with explosive energy. Hand over fist. It was over. I bowed. I waited for my score.

The ritual bestowing of the trophies, the bows, the congratulations and thanks given. My first place trophy must be four feet tall!

No waiting now. I learned that I will fight my *dojo* mate, and one other, an intermediate 35+ woman with one eye. I loved her brazen flouting of her disability with her ninja-emblazoned eye patch. She said she hated *kumite*. I would fight her first. I won, offensively chasing her around the rink, at one point receiving a warning for a low kick. My *dojo* mate suddenly stood before me; hands aloft. The judge asked if I needed a minute. I knew I was slightly winded, but felt like I was just getting warmed up. I shook my head. I saw my *sensei* was judge on my northwest corner. My focus narrowed as she slapped my hands and I began moving forward, left block right punch. My vision seemed to dim. "Matte," I heard. The lights came up. Her point. Again, the dimming inward focus. Bam! a hit to my head. Warning to her. Bam, bam, bam. I think I got her. I saw my *sensei* scream *matte* from inside the ring. A point in dispute. Again, dimness, a hit to my left chest, light. Two more disputes. I knew this was the last point and felt the tension leave my body with an exhale. She looked fired up. I started again, no strategy in mind, only muscle memory. "Matte," the point is hers. Three to zero.

I thanked her for the match, and she hugged me with a "good fight!" I don't feel too bad losing as she has at least two years more experience than I do. I imagine I'll beat her some day. I felt physically drained and emotionally sad, as I know I'll never have another "first" tournament, but contented with the events of the day, nonetheless.



### Our History Does Matter

By Chris Wallace, Yonkyu, Monroe, NC


There is a famous maxim that floats around on people's list that has an interesting view of historical study: "Those who do not know their history are destined to repeat it." While there is a lot of argument as to where this statement originated – from Cicero in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, Edmund Burke in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, or Prof. George Santayana in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century – the end result is the same: if we do not know the mistakes of those who have come before, then there is a good chance that we will make the same mistakes.

In the study of martial arts, we live by this statement, for everything that we do – basics to kata to sparring – are all part of a long-standing tradition. As practitioners of Isshin-ryu karate-do, we stand within the tradition created by Shimabuku Tatsuo; but, even as we stand in the shadow of this great *shihan*, we must also realize that he stands in the shadows of those who came before him: Miyagi, Kyan, Motobu, Shinken, and Moden. Then, as we look at these great teachers, we find ourselves looking back over centuries of great teachers – Anan, Kusanku, and others.

Does this long regression of great teachers make it difficult for us to reason out who is responsible for what? At times that is exactly the case. But perhaps, that is not why we need to know our history; perhaps what the focus should become is not who gets credit for what kata or stance, but that *everything* we do has been handed down to us from others. The burden of

attempting to re-create the wheel in every generation has been removed!

What *this* knowledge of our history gives us is the wonder of understanding that everything that we practice has already been shown to be effective. Through centuries of practice and usage, through countless masters and students, *our history and lineage lives on through our hands, bodies, and feet*. Thus when performing Kusanku kata, we are connected to that man who was sent from mainland China to the Ryukyu kingdom in the mid-1700's as part of an imperial envoy. When we perform Chinto, according to legend, we are connected with that hermit living in a cave who literally wiped the floor with any who chose to fight him.

What then does this mean to the karate-ka of Isshin-ryu? *We are our history*. As we learn and grow in our study, we embody the spirit and wisdom of those who came before us. Ours is a proud history that is defined by modesty and courtesy; ours is a history that is filled with combat, life-and-death struggles, defined by integrity and standing up for what is right; ours is a history filled with the contemplation of philosophy and the desire to be a better person in all that we do. So, as karate-ka in the tradition of the AOKA, Isshin-ryu, Goju-ryu, Shorin-ryu, White Crane, Monk Fist, Shaolin, and countless others, we need to *know our history and hope that indeed we are destined to repeat it*. 

### Display Your Flag with Pride

By Sensei Bob Harris, Yondan, Wetumpka, AL

A flag is nothing more than a measured piece of cloth with a special ink pattern. However, the flag is a national symbol of a nation. The flag represents the basic core and common beliefs of the people it represents.

For the most part, citizens take pride when seeing their flag flying. Any person who has ever watched the Olympics feels great pride in seeing their flag, their national symbol, raised for all to see.

As a military brat, an Army veteran and a Boy Scout leader, all the training I received was consistent when it came to the display of the flag of the United States of America. I take offense when I visit a retail outlet and

see our national symbol displayed incorrectly. The managers I've spoke with about the matter have a lackadaisical attitude concerning the display of their flag in their store. I believe the improper display of the flag represents the values of the leaders operating the store.

When we fly a flag on a pole, a kindergartener can insure it is flown correctly. When a flag is displayed vertically, 80% of us will get it wrong. I've spoken with every General Manager at Wal-Mart I've visited and asked them to change their display of the flag on the rafters. Lowe's sewed two flags back to back so no matter which direction you see it, the flag is displayed

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properly. I've written movie studios to express my displeasure when watching a preview of an upcoming preview and it shows our flag displayed incorrectly. (With all the consultants on a set, can't they get it right?)

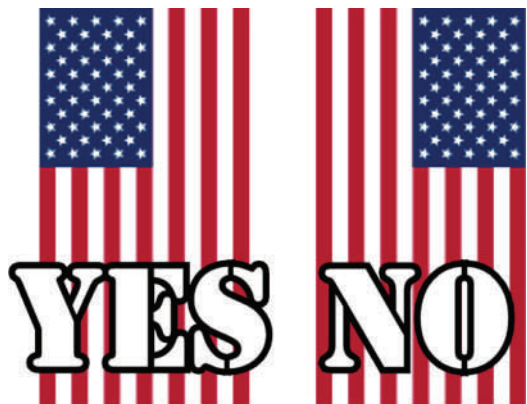
Having spent a majority of my life in the military, knowing how to display 'Old Glory' became second nature. In the Boy Scouting Program, both Cub and Boy Scouts learned the proper method of displaying our flag. While I was in school, the Civics program was responsible to teaching how to properly display our flag. So what happened?

I've come to believe that many Americans just don't give a damn about our nation symbol. Men and Women, past and present, have died for this symbol. Many have died in the simple attempt to show it for all to see. It is our duty to insure their death was not in vain.



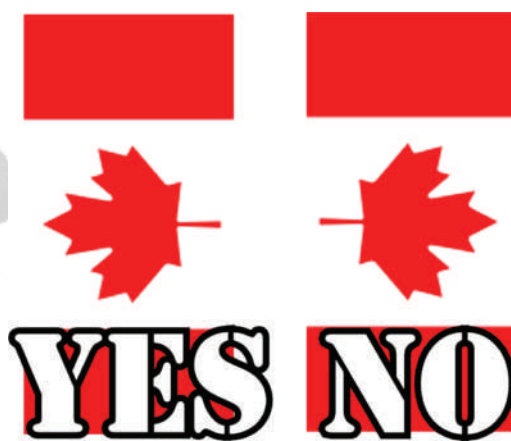
Obviously, when the flag is flown on a flag pole, the above picture is the proper method of flying the flag.

When the flag is displayed vertically, with Hoist on top and the Fly on the bottom, the Union is displayed on the left. A good rule to remember is a solid red strip on right (R-R).



I've enjoyed visiting a lot of minor league hockey games. In addition to displaying the US Flag, the Canadian flag is displayed as well. This is a good thing; after all, Canadians take credit as the inventors of the game.

Most of the hockey rinks I've visited display the Canadian flag incorrectly. When the flag is displayed vertically, the flag should be displayed with the Maple left tip pointing to the left, as displayed below. Again, I point out to the Manager of the facility, the Canadian Flag is display incorrectly, I find it offensive that no action is taken.



When flags of more than one nation are displayed together, the flag of one nation should never be higher than another. All flags should be displayed at the same level. If you have a flag of another nation, it would behoove you to research the proper method their flag should be displayed. I wrote to a Brazilian official in order to learn how to properly display their flag since I couldn't find it on the Internet.

As karateka, we hold ourselves to a higher standard. We do it in our training and in our respect for one another. Now, do the same when it comes to insuring



## An Interview with Master Marilyn Fierro

By Sensei Tracy Burke-Carriere, Sandan

During the recent AOKA Seminar Weekend held in Fort Madison, Iowa, on July 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup>, I was fortunate to attend a seminar on women's self defense taught by Master Marilyn Fierro. As someone who has been helping my sensei with women's self defense classes ever since I was a yellow belt and recently started teaching classes on my own, I was extremely interested in attending this class. My goal was not just to learn new self defense techniques, but also learn how I can improve my own teaching methods. Master Fierro more than met this expectation and she graciously agreed to be interviewed for this article.

Q. Do you have a favorite technique when teaching a women's self defense class?

A. "No, not a physical technique, but the number one emphasis of any program is on awareness-of your surroundings and avoiding attacks before they occur. Also, basic techniques such as a strike to gain release then following up with knees, elbows, and palm heels before pushing the attacker away and running."

Q. What do you find to be the most effective format when teaching a women's self defense class?

A. "I like to start by feeling the energy of the group to figure out what will work best and tailor it to the group from there. The instructor needs to connect to the group by letting them know where you come from and finding out who they are. Additionally a woman needs to understand why it is important for them to take care of themselves and not count on others. This is why I start all programs with a lecture about self-defense and awareness. We do basic technique in the air and on pads followed by combinations and finally practice on an opponent."

Q. How do you deal with the inevitable questions like "what if they have a gun, a knife, etc.?"

A. "You can't tell what's going to happen; you just have to deal with it when it does. If the attacker has a gun, give them everything because it can be replaced. But, never leave with anyone! Absolutely nothing good will come of that. I also encourage them to come to karate class. There is no 'what if' - if you complete your technique it removes that question."

Q. What do suggest for someone who is accosted while they are carrying a child or have children with them?

A. "A mother's worst nightmare! Defend the child with your life, but it starts with awareness. Don't walk between cars and pay attention to people around you. Attackers are looking for someone who is not aware and being distracted by the child gives the attacker an opportunity. It comes down to doing whatever it takes to get away safely because if you don't someone will end up severely hurt or dead. Put yourself between the attacker and the child but try to put the child down in a safer location before physically taking action. I also recommend having dogs at home; attackers won't like the noise."

Q. What is the optimum number of participants for a women's self defense class?

A. "I prefer a group no larger than 20. If you have an assistant it can be bigger."

Q. In your experience, what is the best method for overcoming participant resistance?

A. "I remind them that it doesn't work if you are afraid to get hurt or hurt the attacker. It's always helpful to go to the next level and either be padded yourself or have an assistant in pads."

Q. Do you have a suggested reading list for either participants or instructors?

A. "Nothing specific. There is a great deal of literature available."

Q. I have found that some participants respond better to me as a teacher rather than my Sensei who is a male simply because of gender. What advice do you have for male instructors who would like to teach a Women's Self Defense Class?

A. "Use gear and let them hit you. Focus on technique not brute strength. Make sure to modify techniques for smaller individuals. Remember that Isshinryu is for everyone."

Q. Do you change techniques for the elderly or the very

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Location	Event
9-11 Oct. 2009	Columbia, SC	International Martial Arts Symposium (Click for more information)

## Kyu Advancements

Gene Bratchie – Ikkyu  
 Dennis Cedeno – Ikkyu  
 Walt Ellingson – Ikkyu  
 Heath Stewart – Ikkyu  
 Neil Smith - Nikyu

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young?

A. “Everyone should use whatever they have to work with. Children have speed so if they can create an opening they should run as fast as they can in an opposite direction. For Seniors, I encourage them to focus on their abilities rather than their limitations and to use whatever they have in their hands. For example, if you use a cane and can briefly stand without it, use it! If not, work with what they can do and focus on techniques that use leverage more than brute strength. I also stress the phrase ‘Escape To Gain Safety’ which stands for the target areas: Eyes, Throat, Groin, and Shin.”

Q. Do you recommend that instructors have participants sign waivers and/or have dojo insurance the covers women’s self defense classes?

A. “Absolutely. Insurance and waivers are a must. The waiver must include wording similar to, ‘I understand that \_\_\_\_\_ is not responsible if I am attacked and fail to defend myself using these techniques.’ Liability lawsuits are all too prevalent

today and instructors must protect themselves.”

Master Fierro, an Eighth Degree Black Belt, is the owner and chief instructor of the Smithtown Karate Academy in Smithtown, New York. She has been presenting “Attack Prevention” programs and workshops for women since 1978. In 1992, she was a co-creator of a six-episode program called “Attack Prevention” for “In Your Interest.” This program was the basis for the show still airing today. Master Fierro’s program has been the focus for “Women in the 90’s” with Councilwoman Pam Green and has been highlighted on TV News 12. It is also presented in high schools across Long Island. Additional information on a variety of “Taking Charge” subjects airs weekly on both Hauppauge and Brookhaven Cable 20. For more information, Master Fierro can be reached her dojo at 135 West Main St., Smithtown, NY 11787 (631) 265-9062 Contact her by email: [Marilyn774@aol.com](mailto:Marilyn774@aol.com). Visit her website at: [http://www.dojos.com/smithtown-karate/attack\\_prevention.htm](http://www.dojos.com/smithtown-karate/attack_prevention.htm)



## AOKA Updates

By Grand Master Stephen Young

### New AOKA Member Management System

The AOKA recently acquired a new system to help keep member information up to date. It will also be a focal point of what is going on in Isshinryu Karate. The system allows members to update their personal information by logging on to the system and will allow a much better information flow about what is going on in the AOKA and in Isshinryu Karate. Blogs, member directories, forums, event registration and much more will soon be part of the new system.

To gain access:

Go to [aoka.memberlodge.org](http://aoka.memberlodge.org)

Use your email address that is on file with the AOKA for your user name

Request a password reset.

You should then be able to log in and take advantage of the system. If you have any problems logging in please contact me at [aokanew@comcast.net](mailto:aokanew@comcast.net).

In order to be on the new system and take advantage of the many new features, you must have a unique email address. Many members have not supplied an email address and their information was not loaded. They will need to register from scratch with a unique email address (in other words three members of the same family or dojo cannot share an email address.) Email accounts are free at Yahoo, Gmail, Hotmail and many other places should you need to acquire an address.

### New AOKA Membership Levels

In conjunction with the new member management system, the AOKA will be offering a premium membership package that will be a small monthly fee. The members enrolled in this program will have access to scheduled video broadcasts of taped seminars and workshops for free or for very minimal charges. A schedule of broadcasts for each month will be available on the new member site beginning later this year. Premium members will be given access to view the broadcasts via the internet. This will allow many members located in remote locations to experience the training activities that go on throughout the world. It

will also give participants that attended the live event an opportunity to review materials that are often forgotten.

Additionally, we are going to be archiving very short clips of specific training techniques, drills, bunkai, tournament performances, etc. that will be available on demand for premium members. Building the archive for this project will take time and we will be asking for video clips from all Isshinryu practitioners in the near future. Over time, we hope to establish a categorized database of informational training tips for all levels of practitioners. More information will follow on the video clip needs.

### Weapons Weekend Training Workshop

The American Okinawan Karate Association, in cooperation with the Weapons Connection Society, will be sponsoring a Weapons Training Weekend in Lisle, IL on November 14, 2009. Master Peter Carbone will be conducting three weapons session. Additionally, he will be conducting a Friday evening session for all head instructors that have a paid registration for Saturday.

The event will be held at the Lisle Hilton and due to room capacity; we are limiting the number of registrations. Also, a discounted early registration will be available through September 30, 2009. Both current AOKA and WCS members will receive a significant discount on their registration.

For more information or to register, please go to: <http://aoka.memberlodge.org/Default.aspx?pageId=405508>.

