



The Isshinryu Way

Everything Karate & Kobudo

**Isshinryu
Worldwide**

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Be Present in the Dojo

As practitioners of Isshinryu, we dedicate ourselves not only to physical technique but also to mental mastery. In our complex modern lives, the time we spend within the dojo walls represents a unique opportunity—a chance to step away from external noise and embrace complete, singular focus.

When we speak of commitment to our art, we often cite the need for Perseverance and Self Confidence. Yet, these traits are built moment by moment, through dedicated practice where the mind and body are synchronized. When we are truly present, our focus is unwavering, allowing us to absorb lessons about foundational movement, whether practicing basics or Kata.

Presence is the difference between simply executing a movement and truly understanding it. It allows us to feel the nuances of power generation, timing, and control that are essential to our training. These demanding aspects of training re-

quire us to leave distractions at the door and immerse ourselves fully in the current repetition or drill.

Being present also means being receptive to the environment and the community around us. We learn by observing the power of example set by instructors and advanced students. We honor the culture of karate by engaging fully and showing respect for the training space and our partners. Regardless of our goals, the quality of our effort hinges entirely on our presence.

As you move through your training this season, consider the many benefits of Martial Arts Training that stem directly from this focus. I encourage you to reflect on how you can heighten your awareness and ensure that every moment you spend on the training floor is a moment of conscious, focused growth.

Upcoming Events

Events

January 24—Norm Rivard Knockdown Seminars—Thunder Bay, ON, Canada

May 2026—Isshinryu Expo—Thunder Bay, ON, Canada

July 2026—Isshinryu Hall of Fame—Gatlinburg, TN, USA

Inside this Issue:

Unlocking the Layers of Isshinryu 2

Chitora Promotions 4

Isshinryu Hall of Fame 5

Isshinryu Expo 2025 7

Essential Isshinryu is available!

For more information on the first Canadian Isshinryu book, visit www.essentialissheinryu.com!

Persistence is Powerful



Unlocking the Layers of Isshinryu Karate

By Greg Saxe

The following essay will discuss my evolving understanding of Isshinryu Karate as a complete system of self-defense, with many layers that takes a lifetime to perfect. I will discuss my journey of learning that system and include some of the experiences and perspectives that have illustrated this to me.

When I began training Isshinryu Karate, under Shihan Tim Leonard, I was not particularly coordinated or physically skilled, but I liked to fight, and so I focused my training in that direction. I trained the basics and studied kata to be able to progress to the next belt, yet for the first number of years I only ever grasped a cursory understanding of the katas' applications, or bunkai. I competed in my first semi-knockdown tournament as an orange belt and although I wasn't that successful, I loved it and continued to compete in other tournaments. I eventually fought full contact, knockdown rules, at 40 years old, as a black belt. All that being said, I still had a difficult time making the connection between my kata practice and competing in a Kyokushin knockdown tournament.

I remember asking Hanshi Albert Mady, when testing for Nikyu, in Windsor, what the connection was between kata and fighting? How did learning and performing Kusanku Kata, for example, help me in my competition fighting or kumite? I did not see a fighting stance or combinations that I used and saw being used by others when facing off with another karateka on the tatami. Hanshi Mady was quick to tell me that training kata taught our bodies how to move and respond when faced with physical conflict. It still took some time for me to make sense of what my Hanshi had to say.

It was not until I became injured (and older, and wiser) and could not compete in kumite, that I had to shift the focus of my training and motivation in practicing karate. If I am to be completely honest, when there were no rules or a referee to mediate the match, I did not have the same confidence with my karate. As my thesis suggests, karate was not developed for sport, but for self-defense - *life or death, right or wrong*. I know that when push came to shove, I could defend myself and those around me, but I don't know how much *bunkai* I'd be using. My understanding of the basic level of practical applications from the kata is clearly understood, but remains just that, basic. Strengthening my understanding of the kata and the application of bunkai

had to become the new focus of my training and practice of karate.

While I was focused mainly on using karate as a vehicle for competitive sparring and tournaments, I was able to get away with blunt applications and muscling my way through techniques. My training was normally high paced and physically demanding, rarely taking the time required to move beyond a surface understanding of kata bunkai. As I have now come to understand, bunkai analysis is often a slow paced, mentally demanding process. It involves dissecting kata movements to reveal their hidden potential, including strikes, joint locks, throws, grappling and takedown defense. I can no longer continue to force my way through a workout or training session and not be 100% mentally present. Learning the specific body mechanics and movements and training my body to be able to apply them effectively would require me to slow down and become teachable again. At first I began to seek out other sources for information, in videos, articles and books. Although these sources are inspirational and informative, I found only when I returned to regular practice, with other Isshinryu karate-ka, that I was able to understand and reinforce the deeper lessons of the kata.

Over my years of practicing karate with Toshikai Dojo and Shihan Tim Leonard, I have had the privilege of learning from highly skilled Isshinryu Karate practitioners. Weekly training with Shihan Leonard and Sensei Shane Hale and Sensei Rod Berek gave me a strong foundation on which to build. Attending seminars by Hanshi Mady, Senseis Mike O'Leary, Richard Roberto, and Hanshi Markovitch along with others, has given me the knowledge base from which I can grow.

As cliché as it may be to say, there is a reason you will hear that the Martial Arts is a lifelong journey. I could not have come to my current understanding of Isshinryu Karate without my past experience. I know what it is like to train, whole heartedly, with a single purpose over several months and to have it culminate in one one day, then be over. There is only so much I could do to be fully in those moments and try to learn all other aspects at the same time. I believe this is the natural progression of my journey in the Martial Arts and Isshinryu Karate.

Hanshi Mady's perspective on "old school" karate reinforces the idea of Isshinryu Karate katas as a comprehensive self-defense system. In the recent issue of *Isshinryu Way*, Hanshi underscores the reality that karate was developed not for sport but for survival. Old-school karate-ka were trained to handle attacks from various angles, including

(Continued on page 3)



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standing up, sitting down, or lying down, and against assailants attacking from different directions. The emphasis on real-world effectiveness is crucial, as Hanshi mentions how karate was designed to maim, cripple, or kill if necessary. This mindset is not about promoting violence but about equipping practitioners with the skills and mindset to defend themselves effectively in life-threatening situations. I had the experience of training my karate for sport and now it was time to train for keeps.

Addressing challenges posed by sport karate approaches is another consideration in Isshinryu Karate. Insights from experts like Patrick McCarthy, Jesse Enkamp and Iain Abernethy highlight the importance of maintaining a balance between traditional kata training and practical self-defense applications. While sport karate focuses on competition, toughness, rules and scoring, Isshinryu Karate encompasses a broader spectrum of techniques and strategies tailored for personal protection and combat effectiveness. In my experience, and opinion, doing both traditional and sport karate gives one the fullest appreciation of karate's potential.

Knowing that it takes a lifetime of practice to completely unlock the layers of Isshinryu Karate, it makes sense to me that there would be intentionally

different levels of interpretation and application of bunkai. For example, at the time when I was first learning the movements in Chinto Kata to perform it for my kyu belt testing, I was not learning the arm trap, wrist break counter to a straight punch found in the opening series. But rather and more appropriately, I learned the more basic block then punch counter to that same attack. I needed to learn the foundational footwork and body mechanics from the kata before I was able to execute a more complex and nuanced application. It is only through the week-in and week-out practice, over years and years, that what looks like magic or super strength becomes a reflexive and calculated response to violence.

When looking forward to my next 16 years of practicing Isshinryu Karate I have some conclusions and understanding that I am taking with me. Firstly, Isshinryu is designed for self-defense and that self-defense happens up close and personal, when you are least expecting it. As such, my understanding of bunkai needs to reflect the closeness and intensity of that reality, in terms of spacing, timing and opponent location. Secondly, this understanding of kata is something that takes a considerable amount of time and practice, begins with the basic kihon and is progressive in nature. Lastly, if I am to continue training Isshinryu Karate, I need to give back to my community. It is my hope to share my experience and understanding of Isshinryu Kata as a complete system of self-defense in my next 16 years.

Norm Rivard in Thunder Bay

What an incredible training weekend! We were honoured to host Shihan Norm Rivard from Windsor, ON, for an intense seminar on Authentic Isshinryu Kumite.

It was all about real fighting, Okinawan roots, and powerful drills designed to build a Warrior Mindset. Shihan Rivard brought a fantastic, high-energy approach that truly elevated everyone's skill and spirit.

Thank you to everyone who participated! Let's keep that fire going in our dojo!





Chitora Dojo Promotions

Chitora Dojo is happy to announce the following promotions to Yellow Stripe that took place on June 17th, 2025.

Phelena Solenn Juan

Tobias Sedano

Luca Armstrong

Eli Armstrong

Rocco Quaresima

Congratulations!



Richard Ruberto Seminars

Sensei Richard Ruberto from New York lit up Thunder Bay Sept 19-21 with unforgettable seminars that drew martial artists from across NWO and Manitoba.

He showed us how to bring it all together:

- Karate-Do & Kobudo
- Bunkai-bringing kata to life
- Economy of Motion-power through efficiency
- Body Mechanics-movement that works

An incredible experience we'll carry back to our dojos and training. Thank you Sensei Ruberto!



Isshinryu Hall of Fame 2025

By Susan Baldassi

The Toshikai Dojo family achieved outstanding recognition and competitive success at the recent Isshinryu Hall of Fame (IHOF) events and the Tennessee competition. We are extremely proud of the hard work and dedication shown by our students and instructors.

Hall of Fame Recognition

Youth Excellence

Evelyn earned the prestigious Outstanding Young Karateka (12 & under, Female) award at the IHOF. A dedicated leader, Evelyn also performed spectacularly in Tennessee, competing in kata, kumite, and weapons. She demonstrated great poise by opening the ceremony, singing O Canada in both official languages.



Three other Canadian Isshinryu Karateka were recognized as finalists for their wide-ranging contributions to the dojo, community, and the martial arts world:

- Keira Purdon
- Hannah Fonso
- Lucas Fabiano

Competitive Victories

Instructor Sensei Susan Baldassi led by example, achieving success and becoming a double gold medalist include a win in masters weapons with her Hamahiga no Tonfa.

Sensei Baldassi continues to compete to "lead by example for my students."

Also competing from Canada were Tim Leonard, and Susan's two sisters Janet and Debbie who also did great and placed well.

Congratulations to all the winners and finalists! We celebrate their skill, spirit, and commitment to inspiring others.



A Word of Thanks from someone always learning

Richard Ruberto

I want to express my appreciation, to all of you, who supported my recent seminars in Thunder Bay.

Duly noted the host, Susan Baldassi sensei, worked hard to make all the arrangements. I tried to give each one of

you something you could use to improve your skills. I always reflect on my presentation(s) so that I may improve in the future.

Isshinryu Expo 2025

The Isshinryu Expo 2025 was held in Thunder Bay, ON. This major gathering ran across two days: Saturday, May 17th, and Sunday, May 18th, 2025.

The schedule featured a wide array of activities organized into categories focusing on Karate, Health & Wellness, and Self-Defence.

The two-day event began with a wonderful Opening Ceremony on Saturday morning. A major highlight of the gathering was the Banquet on Saturday evening, which included dinner, presentations, socializing, and a bonfire. The gathering concluded on Sunday with the expo bus tour, allowing attendees to experience the sights and tastes of Thunder Bay.



Activities and Seminars

Karate sessions included instruction on the Basics of Isshinryu (Hanshi Albert Mady), Isshinryu Bunkai (Scott Fawcett), Isshinryu Body Mechanics (Richard Ruberto), and Wansu Kata. Specific forms such as Hamahiga / Shishi (Hanshi Albert Mady) and Gojuryu Seiuchin Kata also were taught. The event also offered Kobudo instruction, covering Bo and Kama Basics (Richard Ruberto) and Matayoshi Kobudo Sai basics (Duncan Stewart).

Health & Wellness offerings covered topics such as Breathwork & Posture (Dr Steve Fonso), Meal Planning for a Healthier Future You (Dr. Kim Boileau), and Mental Agility (Dr Mandy McMahan). Participants experienced specialized forms of yoga, including Vagal Yoga with Erin May and Restorative Yoga with Angela Slomke. Sound-focused sessions included the Power of Sound & Movement (Natasha Allard) and a formal Sound Meditation.

In Self-Defence, sessions featured Nage Waze/Tachi Waze (Thomas Hudacko), Mastering Flow with the Knife (Trevi Chandler), Daito Ryu Aiki Jujitsu (Mark Ceasar), and BJJ (Phil Roussin and Tson Douangmala).





Isshinryu Expo 2025

The event also served as a significant opportunity for rank testing, accommodating numerous candidates spanning Sankyu through Hachidan levels. All candidates participated in an evening long session demonstrated their skills in front senior dans in Isshinryu and culminated in hard and spirited fighting.

Sankyu Chadwick Fletcher Toshikai Ottawa
Nikyu Evelyn McMahan Toshikai Thunder Bay
Nikyu Ben Lamoureux Toshikai Ottawa
Ikkyu Leanne Oger Toshikai Thunder Bay
Ikkyu Michele O'Leary-Myers Toshikai Ottawa



New Black Belts

Shodan Ho Lucas Fabiano Toshikai Thunder Bay
Shodan Ho Julia Fenton, Kaelyn Fenton Chitora Dojo
Shodan Mike Wallace Kenora
Shodan Aric Dobres, Duncan Stewart Winnipeg

Nidan Angela Kavanaugh Kenora
Sandan Marlies Iorianni Toshikai Thunder Bay
Sandan Anna Carangi Toshikai Thunder Bay
Sandan Matthew Morin Toshikai Ottawa
Sandan Donna Adams, Doug Iverson Kenora
Sandan Mark Ivanowich Dryden



Senior Dans

Nanadan Dinah Jung Satori Dojo Thunder Bay
Nanadan John Simons Toshikai Thunder Bay
Nanadan Tom O'Neil New Jersey
Hachidan Brant Ledoux Dryden





About The Newsletter

Just as in our dojo training, the newsletter is about sharing and improving as a group. We regularly have contributions and updates from Quebec to British Columbia in Canada, as well as from Germany, New York and the Southern United States. Everyone is always welcome in my Dojo or to share via the newsletter.

Articles are welcome from anyone and everyone. They can be about anything related to the Martial Arts, a technique you think is just great; A better way to do a technique; History of a Karate Master; a tournament trick that works well; ANY-THING!

All articles are appreciated as e-mail. You can send it to your instructor to proof read and send in, or directly to me. (sensei@isshinryu.ca)

You can even include pictures if it helps your article!

Karate Terms

Bō - Staff
Roku-Shaku-Bō - Six Foot Staff
Kun (Okinawan) - Staff
Gun (Mandarin) - Staff
Jō - Short Staff
Gusan (Okinawan) - Short Staff

Katana - lit. 'one-sided blade'/Long Sword
Wakizashi - lit. 'side inserted sword/ Short Sword
Tanto - lit. 'short blade'/Knife
Bō-Ken - Wooden Sword
Shinai - Bamboo Practice Sword
Kama - Sickle
Tonfa/Tuifa (Okinawan) - Side-Handle Baton

Age - Rising
Otoshi - Descending
Yoko - Side
Mae - Front
Ura - Back

“It’s not enough to shelve your own competitive streak. You have to try, consciously, to help others succeed.”

**— Chris Hadfield,
An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth**