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Ichikawa of Ueno

By C.J.Clifford



One of the diagrams in the Bubushi

Grandmaster Sosui Ichikawa 10th Dan is a name that many practitioners of Goju Karate will have no doubt heard of, he is a living legend of Karate knowledge, and one of only ten men to be in possession of a copy of the original Bubushi (handed to him by Grandmaster Izumigawa). He rarely leaves his tiny Dojo in Ueno, rather favouring to be left in peace to train and teach in private. The following is an insight into training with him at his private Dojo by the only Westerner to hold a copy of the legendary Bubushi (that has been presented to him by his master).

The lesson starts with meditation. We bow to the Kamiza, then to Ichikawa Sensei. He sits and watches the students training, the high grade teachers instruct the lower grade students. A lot of emphasis is placed on watching the higher grade teachers, for if they are wrong, the lower grades will also be wrong! This helps to maintain a higher standard and shows the higher grades the importance of being a teacher. Ichikawa Sensei would stop the lesson immediately if he saw anything he was not entirely happy with. He is meticulous to a fraction of an inch, not only in body, but also in mind and spirit. He emphasises this always, more often than not, he will show a particular point himself. I once witnessed, after a lesson had finished, him teaching Yonemoto Sensei a movement within Saifa Kata for FORTY minutes trying to get it right, not just the movement, but the feeling applied to the technique. It looked absolutely correct to me . . . but as Ichikawa Sensei says, "It is not what you see, but the eyes that you see with."

There is no physical exercise and very little stretching practised in the Dojo. It is expected for you to do this before you arrive at the lesson. The importance of physical condition is stressed to all students.

There are no one step, two step, three step sparring forms, no

pre-arranged Kumite. He believes that this type of practise creates a certain expectancy in one's mind. In other words, the mind is trapped and cannot therefore see anything else.

Very little training in basic technique in isolation takes place, Ichikawa Sensei believes Kata and Kumite must flow. Basics practised too much in isolation can become stagnant. Basics are practised within the sequences of Kata and Kumite, he expects them to be practised as one and the same.

The movements within the Kata he teaches, pushing, pulling, holding, trapping, sticking and locking are incorporated into Kumite. Only two students practise Kumite at any given time, higher grade to lower grade, with the other students watching. It is normal for a higher grade to referee such bouts, and quite common for Ichikawa Sensei to stop a bout and question the participants on their movements, techniques, etc.

When two students face each other and bow, Ichikawa Sensei will tell the higher grade to think of Kata application, or even a mixture of applications, and the lower grade to defend and counter - he is fortunate enough to know he has a stronger attacker. He believes that whoever we face, we must treat them with the utmost caution, for this could be the difference between one of you meeting your maker before your time! Ichikawa Sensei once said, "When you are a young man, you must practise Karate for when you are old." This is because an old man cannot match a young man for physical strength, so he must fly higher in the mind. An old man must read the mind of a younger man, this can be done by remembering one's past.

I once faced Ichikawa Sensei in Kumite and as we bowed to begin, he looked at me and told me that he had won! I looked at him bewildered . . . He then asked if I would like a rematch, I said yes and we again bowed to commence the bout. The same thing happened again, he

immediately claimed victory before anything had happened - he hadn't even moved! He later explained to a high grade what my thoughts were, and what my movements would have been - and he was absolutely correct! He calls this 'Fighting without fighting' said the senior grade laughing.

As we become higher in Dan grades - we are often taught higher ways of crossing our opponent safely. These ways are all hidden within the Kata and ONLY if one studies deeply enough can they be seen. Kumite at Ichikawa Sensei's school reminds me of a predator after his prey, first he is still, with his movements retained within the body, then he controls and kills. This is the way he sees Kumite.

The Kata of the school are as follows:

1. Gekhai - This was made by Ichikawa Sensei as he did not like Gekesai Ichi & Ni.
2. Unshu - It is an old Kata from Okinawa.
3. Sanchin Sampo
4. Saifa
5. San Seiru
6. Ni Saichin - This is an old Okinawan Kata.
7. Seiyun Chin
8. Shisochin
9. Tensho
10. Sanchin
11. Sepai
12. Sesan
13. Kururunfa
14. Suparinpei
15. Crane Kata - believed to be handed down from Master Kanryo Higaonna.

The Kata 'Sanchin' is primarily for health. It is an aid to the balance of energies within the body. The lungs work to distribute the vital energies taken in from the atmosphere evenly

among the essential organs. The Kata should be performed smoothly, not forced. Ichikawa Sensei said that when the form first came from China it was practised more softly. Often when one shows something to others it can be exaggerated. Sanchin is for the development of oneself. If there is a secret in Sanchin it is knowing, not showing! Sanchin is used as a correction Kata for all Kata (plural) and all applications contained within Sanchin are used as any other Kata with Kumite.

The emphasis on inhaling and exhaling are again applied in all Kata.

We must study the rotations of the body, the power in and out of each technique, and study deeply the true meaning of 'Go Ju'. When we understand that Go and Ju are one and the same - then we begin to understand Karate. The Kata performed are far more flowing, sticky and whipping than I have ever seen in other Goju schools in England and Japan. The hands can be seen to vibrate with Ki. When Ichikawa and Yonemoto Sensei perform Kata, the

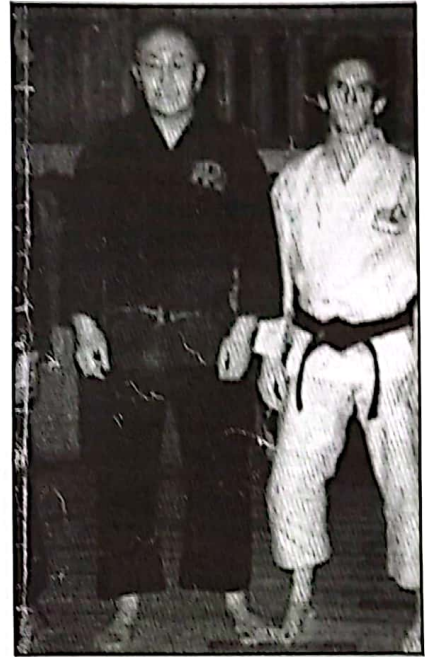
feeling they emphasise resembles many different arts (Tai Chi etc). I once asked Yonemoto Sensei why the Kata looked different in content, and he said, "If you take away the names of different arts, they would all be just 'arts'. It is the depth to which one studies his art. Studied deeply one will understand the needs your system must contain, e.g. Karate, Kung Fu, Judo, etc. Like life itself, the depth of Ichikawa Sensei's school is deep, he has studied long and is still doing so.

Ichikawa Sensei has said in the past, study the past of Japan, Okinawa, and China until you arrive to the study of yourself. There are differences in the Goju systems and I have tried to explain some from Ichikawa Sensei's school. However, in no amount of writing can I attempt to explain the depth of Ichikawa Sensei or the school.

Consider this: You are you, and I am I. Independently we share our chosen arts together. And often in our thoughts we will meet.

Next month we will feature and article on Yonemoto Sensei's recent

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One of the rare pictures of Grandmaster Sosul Ichikawa 10th Dan.

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