

SEIZAN®

Newsletter of the American Amateur Karate Federation

March 1, 2011

Volume 2, Issue 1

Editorial Staff:



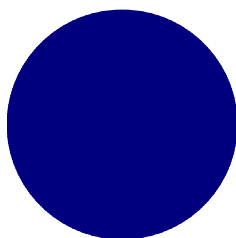
Alex Tong



Amy Young



Bradley Webb



Inside this Issue:

Letter from the Editor

Q & A with Sensei Mahmoud

Tabassi

Perspectives

Athlete's Log

Technical Notes

Upcoming Events

Strength Upon Strength

Seizan celebrates the beginning of 2011 with the 50th anniversary of AAKF. As detailed by Mr. Toru Shimoji, AAKF President in his State of the Organization address, 2010 was a challenging but productive year as the Board of Directors made measurable gains towards accountability, democratization, and promotion of technical standards. *Seizan* was launched as a quarterly newsletter publication. AAKF Rules and Regulations have been revised to expand the Board of Directors, and qualification guidelines are now in place for AAKF athletes, coaches, medical committee, regional seminar protocol, and dispute resolution. Two National Seminars and a Mini-camp were held across the US in addition to our National Championship. There were two successful meetings with ITKF Board of Directors to attain cooperative interactions, mutually benefiting members of both organizations. The AAKF website has been updated with links to social media tools (Twitter and Facebook), and financial accounts (including auditable annual financial reports) are in proper order. More gratifying, individual membership increased by 3-fold, with a corresponding 2-fold increase in registered clubs from 2009's numbers. Among the Board of Directors, Sensei Mahmoud Tabassi has played quintessential roles in spearheading these efforts. Sensei Tabassi's training background and his current and future visions for AAKF are highlighted in this issue's Q & A.

On the international front, our National Team made a strong presence among over 30 other countries at the 15th World Traditional Karate Championship in Curitiba, Brazil held on Nov. 8-13. The US team comprised of a 17-member contingent of competition judges, offi-

cial, athletes, and assistants hailing from various regions (Toru Shimoji, Alex Tong, Richard Kageyama, Mahmoud Tabassi, Vince Nistico, Amy Sperling, Ricardo Depena, Brian F. Power, Soolmaz Abooali, Laurie Elliott, Ruth Rokah, Barry Power, Brian J. Power, Darrell Power, Taichiro Kaijima, Sasa Panic and Marcus Wenner). Congratulations go to Taichiro Kaijima, who took third place in Men's *fukugo*, and the US *kumite'* team who advanced to the final four in men's team *kumite'* after many hard fought matches. In recognition of the uncanny efforts and dedication of our athletes (and their family members), *Seizan* offers personal accounts from Laurie Elliott and Marcus Wenner, US athletes from the N. Central and South-western region, respectively.

Seizan will continue to highlight 2011 events that celebrate the momentous golden anniversary of AAKF, as well as the ongoing endeavors by the Board of Directors to streamline technical credentials of AAKF members (kyu and dan ranking, coaching, examiners, and judging requirements), and institution of technical qualification seminars nationwide. We look forward to your participation at the March National Seminar in Minneapolis, MN. Also, don't miss the National Mini-Camp and National Championship incorporating both adult and youth competition along with a memorable celebration of AAKF's 50 years of history in Atlanta, GA. Finally, we plan to end the year with an exciting National Seminar that we encourage everyone to attend (December, tentative in the Western region).

Alex Tong
General Editor



Q & A with Mahmoud Tabassi

Seizan interviews Mahmoud Tabassi, Treasurer-elect of AAKF



Sensei Mahmoud Tabassi, Treasurer-elect AAKF

S: *Sensei Tabassi, you have a long and illustrious training and competitive history that many of our younger members are not aware of. Could you give a brief account of your training background?*

T: I began martial arts training in Iran at the age of 7 under the instruction of my eldest brother. Soon after, I focused on Shotokan karate under the tutelage of Sensei Sharifi. By then, my interest had quickly grown from a simple hobby into a lifetime pursuit of excellence. I moved to the United States when I was 17 and continued my practice under Sensei Mikami.

Through the years, I have trained with many karate masters, including Mikami, Okazaki, Koyama, Kanazawa, and Tanaka, but I feel very fortunate to have trained under the guidance of Sensei Nishiyama. I received my Shodan from Mr. Mikami, Nidan and Sandan from Mr. Okazaki, Yondan from Sensei Nakayama and Godan, Rokudan and Shichidan from Sensei Nishiyama.

My youngest brother Ali (who currently holds the rank of Godan) and I competed together for many years on national and international levels. At that time we were the undefeated champions

of the East Coast Region in both individual and team kumite'. By the mid-late 80's however, I decided to change my focus from competition and direct it solely towards teaching and coaching.

S: *What was your fondest memory of training with Nishiyama Sensei?*

T: It is very hard to pin point only a few incredible moments since every memorable occasion with Sensei Nishiyama is unique. Every training, seminar, and camp with him provided me with numerous ideas, a more refined direction and instruction in my quest to explore traditional karate. Sensei had a gift to simplify techniques in a manner that every student in the class could benefit from it regardless of his or her level of understanding in karate. In other words, one could learn something new at every juncture of their training and as their karate progressed.

Some of my fondest moments with Sensei were not in the dojo but after training and during meals, where we would spend time talking about different issues in karate, history, politics or family. I've always cherished those times and will continue to do so.

[Continued on page 4](#)

"Sensei had a gift to simplify techniques in a manner that every student in the class could benefit from it"

Mahmoud Tabassi



Perspectives: From Seattle to Curitiba, Brazil: The Journey from Nationals to the World Championships

By Laurie Elliott



Laurie Elliot

Lots of karate students choose not to compete, but for myself, it's always helped me focus my training. I pay better attention in class, listen more carefully, and ask questions to gain better understanding. The five months between Nationals and the World Championships are enough time to integrate new ideas and make improvements. But first, I return to a normal training

schedule after Nationals, and enjoy karate for the art that it is.

When resuming competition-level training I injure my left foot. It affects my balance, ability to turn, make pressure to the floor, and push off for stepping and shifting. It changes the way I walk which causes pain in my back.

[Continued on page 3](#)

Perspectives Continued

After eight weeks it's finally healed enough and I'm feeling way behind. I'm not really a quick study and the sooner a change can be made, the more likely it will actually occur in competition. The World Tournament is now only eight weeks away. Instead of focusing on significant improvements, I work on trusting the strong foundation of my past training. I'm disappointed in this revelation; I'd much rather train hard and improve more, but it is what it is.

My strategy for training is to pick the worst parts of my *kata*, figure how to do them better and work that change every time I train. That means doing it ten times correctly, which typically means more than ten repetitions of the move or sequence. Most of the time it takes two-three weeks before I can go ten for ten. Then the moves and sequences get strung together, with the same standard of ten correct sequences; followed by doing one-third or one-half of the *kata*, and so on.

I've always struggled with cardio conditioning. Even as a young gymnast my cardio stamina was lacking. So for competition (and testing) I put heavy emphasis on this for the final four to six weeks. That's usually three back-to-back *katas* – in any combination of slow, medium or full speed. Eventually working

up to medium and full speed only for the cardio training.

In competition I focus on doing the best karate that I can. It's me against perfection; not me against another athlete. When I first started competing at Nationals, I was only interested in cheering on my regional teammates. Once I hit the international stage though, I realized we're all in this together. You're cheering for competitors from all over USA, hoping that they'll excel because they represent your country. You're so proud of them when they do well. And after that, your world's viewpoint changes; you can't go back. You still cheer for your regional teammates at the Nationals, but you now share a common experience and bond with your Team USA friends.

The other thing I realized in training for competition is, it takes a "village" - Senseis, kohais, training partners, understanding families, people who train with you after class, etc. Everyone you train with knows your *kata*. Everybody contributes something – good advice, well wishes, assurances that you're ready. It all helps, and it all matters.

Laurie has been training for 14 years at the Midwest Karate Association dojo in St. Paul, Minnesota. She received her Sandan rank from Sensei Nishiyama in 2007.

Athlete's Log: Texas to Brazil

By Marcus Wenner

May, 2010: National Championship: Lots of varied emotions. I always think that I can do better after a tournament, this year that is especially true. I improved my placement in every event from last year but feel that I've realized my full potential.

Training before the championship was phenomenal. Almost TOO much information was given at the Dallas, National Seminar. I've said it before but

it bears mentioning. When we used to train with Sensei Nishiyama we would get nuggets of information. Now when we have these trainings, it is being 'dumped' on us like buckets of water. Very difficult to process all of it at once. I'm still processing what happened at Nationals and I am not clear as to whether or not I'll go to Worlds, but I'll continue to train as if I am.

Continued on page 6



US Team athletes Laurie Elliot and Amy Sperling (N. Central region) preparing for competition in Curitiba

"In competition I focus on doing the best karate that I can. It's me against perfection; not me against another athlete."

Laurie Elliot



Marcus Wenner



Q & A Continued

S: *As financial officer of the AAKF Executive Committee, what do you see as the biggest financial challenge of AAKF?*

T: The biggest financial challenge is to maintain steady growth of our membership. Without steady growth, AAKF will have difficulty providing quality service, opportunities, and programs to our constituents. For example, the AAKF Technical Committee now conducts three seminars and camps throughout the USA every year. The Committee members provided instruction at seminars and camps without compensation or expense reimbursements in 2010, and will continue to do so in 2011. Proceeds from these events were divided between the host region and AAKF, hence providing income. Unfortunately, this situation is not sustainable past 2011 due to the financial burden that has been placed on our instructors. One can see that the financial strength of AAKF is vital for maintaining the continuity of opportunities and programs to our members such as these seminars and camps.

S: *What is your vision of strengthening this financial structure and AAKF as a whole?*

T: As I explained in the previous question, a strong organization depends on a thriving membership and its financial strength. A strong organization can provide seminars, camps, certification pro-

grams, national and international championships, research, athlete development, intra-country or continent cooperation and much more. To strengthen our financial structure, we have to look to our balance sheet, reduce expenses, increase income, or accomplish both. So far we have reduced our operational expenses to a bare minimum and will continue to keep them at the lowest level without impinging growth. We also increased our income in 2010 and will strive to do the same in subsequent years.

The critical factor is that we would not be able to achieve our goals without the help and participation of our membership. If each current AAKF member can register one new member with AAKF each year, we can easily double our membership every year. In addition, the participation of our members in our sanctioned events, such as seminars, camps and certifications programs will help strengthen our financial structure.

AAKF officers and directors will do all they can to make this organization a more vibrant and first-rate organization, but this task will not be possible without the help, cooperation and participation of our membership. I have tremendous faith in our membership and I see a very bright future for AAKF, both financially and technically.

“The critical factor is that we would not be able to achieve our goals without the help and participation of our membership.”

Mahmoud Tabassi



*US Team athlete
Soolmaz Abooali
(Mid-Atlantic region)
in Curitiba*

Technical Notes: Enbu

By Alex Tong and Albert Cheah

The fundamental training methods in karate involve *kata*, *kihon*, and *kumite*. The three training methods compliment one another in such a way that the karate-ka learns to develop the techniques and applies them against a partner. These training methods as well as many of the techniques in karate were originally derived from the ancient Chinese martial arts developed from the *Shaolin* temple. But as karate evolves into an art of its own, some of the other training methods from the past were either lost or discarded over time. One such forgotten training method is *Enbu*.

Enbu is prevalent in modern Chinese *Wu Shu* (martial arts) training, and often displayed in the movies by well-known martial artists such as Jackie Chan and Jet Li. The precision and timing with which the techniques are executed often impresses the audience, especially when a dangerous technique is deflected at the last moment and an effective counter attack brings down the assailant. The well-choreographed sequence of fighting displays both skill and creativity. Although these well choreographed fight sequences are there to entertain, it nevertheless demonstrates theadroitness of the players.

Such choreographed training in karate only presents itself these days during demonstrations. Perhaps during the evolution of karate, *enbu* training was dispensed with in favor of pre-arranged *kumite* training. But the value of training in partnered fighting sequence remains evident today in other martial arts such as *Shorinji* (Japanese pronunciation of *Shaolin*) *kempo*, judo and aikido. The essence of *enbu* training not only develops the karateka's timing with the opponent, but also furthers the understanding of *zanshin*, *todome-waza*, and the *budō* aspect of each technique. Sensei Nishiyama, with his profound understanding of traditional martial arts

values, recognized the importance of this training method.

Enbu, roughly translated as "choreographed self-defense", is best known to our members as a relatively recent competition category introduced by Nishiyama Sensei a decade ago. Two competitors (either man against man, or man against woman) would be scored on a series of attack-defense exchanges within a one minute time limit, and incorporate compulsory, offense side techniques of straight punch (*choku-zuki*), front kick (*mae-geri*), roundhouse kick (*mawashi-geri*), and back kick (*ushiro-geri*). These attack/defense engagements culminate in one competitor demonstrating the execution of a "finishing blow" technique (*todome waza*) to his/her opponent at the end of the event.

Enbu scoring is based on four overall criteria: technique execution, timing and distance, *budō* aspect, and choreography. Thus *enbu* training engenders elements of *kata* (predetermined sequence, proper power, transition, and balance), and *kumite*' (correctness of technique timing and distance during engagement) competitions, with the additional expectations of proper *budō* and choreography. These criteria are consistent with the literal translation of *enbu* (演武). The two kanji characters denote "en", to demonstrate or illustrate, and "bu", meaning martial aspects. It is noteworthy that *enbu* also ascribes non-competition demonstrations by ranking instructors that showcase principles and practice of the training style. Well known *enbus* that were created by early JKA instructors have been preserved in the Best Karate series of monographs. The difficulty with which many of these *enbus* were executed demonstrates the high level of skill required, both physically and mentally.

Continued on page 7



Alex Tong



Albert Cheah



"Although these well choreographed fight sequences are there to entertain, it nevertheless demonstrates the adroitness of the players."

Alex Tong & Albert Cheah



Athlete's Log Continued



US Team athletes Ruth Rokah (Western region) and Marcus Wenner (Southwestern region) warming up for competition in Curitiba

July 2010: Continuing to train body connection through the center core and floor connection to facilitate transition in movements. Feel like this is where I lack the most in *kata*, which is VERY evident by the fact that it absolutely SAPS my legs to apply these ideas. Will start some cardio this week to build up endurance.

Feeling very tight in my upper body, and feelings of collapsing my chest cavity while executing core compression. Very old bad habit and it's been hard to break. Need more critical eyes on me to correct this. Self-training has been very trying.

August 2010: Still feeling as if I need more one on one coaching but hard to make that happen. Video proves difficult to critique. Just need to feel the right body connections. Working on rhythm and flow, applying floor pressure through the legs, and thinking of nothing but the flow of the *kata*. Rhythm is huge to me, and each *kata* after practicing for a long time takes on its own set of sound in my head. (this "sounds" hoky :). It's a double-edged sword however. If the rhythm is interrupted in any way, it really throws me off.

September 2010: Team Training! Absolutely Awesome! Completely rejuvenated and feeling great. Cohesive Team attitude was coming together and I'm infinitely optimistic about the future of our team. Everyone put EVERYTHING on the dojo floor, and that made me feel exhilarated. Also very easy to feel intimidated when training with the Team. "Gee I don't seem to be doing so great, I wonder why?" It's because we are training with the best the AAKF offers. No shame in having to 'keep up' or feeling a little overwhelmed.

October 2010: Stepping up workout regimen; 100 pushups, 30 minutes running daily; core training 3 times a

week, in addition to teaching my classes Mon-Saturday. Whew!

Kata training is focusing on visualization and extending through back. Loosening tension in arms and creating long techniques and crisp transition.

Legs felt very heavy today, trained through it and hopefully gained some much needed endurance. Taped self and felt that most of the points discussed at Team Training are being met. Still more details to incorporate!



Ruth Rokah and Marcus Wenner in Curitiba

"The World Championship taught me one amazing truth. We must never, ever be satisfied."

Marcus Wenner

November 2010: No turning back now. Arriving at the Tournament was surreal. The whole thing just became very real very quickly. Warming up with the US Team was great, feel good but not too good. Tournament was fantastic. At times I honestly felt it was my best. Seeing the other competitors and bonding with them was a great experience and motivates me to further improve so I can compete at this level again.

December 2010: Back from Brazil, the adrenaline dissipated...slow grind returns. But my brain is anything but slowed, my body is ready for more.

Starting Crossfit training for the new year, more training, more plans to meet with the great Senseis we have in the US and more competition. The World Championship taught me one amazing truth. We must never, ever be satisfied. I look forward to more, and bigger, and better things for all of us.

Marcus Wenner began training in 1987 in Canada, receiving his shodan in 1991 from Sensei Nishiyama. He received his nidan in 2008 and currently trains and teaches in San Antonio and Austin, TX. Marcus may be reached at: thewenners@gvtc.com

Technical notes continued

Thus it comes to no surprise that a commonly held viewpoint, from conversations with Nishiyama Sensei and in competition judges' seminars, is that most *enbu* competitors, though technically competent, often fall short of the intended tenets of this event even at national and international competition levels. In upcoming national seminars, the AAKF Technical Committee will introduce the concept that *enbu* training can benefit beyond the competition arena, particularly towards improving the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of proper technique development. The key aspects include:

Zanshin. *Zanchin* is defined as maintaining mental and physical preparedness after technique execution. The practice of *zanchin* is an important aftermath, in order to sustain physical and mental continuity for follow-up techniques execution. *Zanchin* ensures that one retains control of the opponent's and one's own reactions, and provides safeguard against the circumstance that the opponent feigns defeat.

Todome'-waza. Partnered *enbu* training offers the training opportunity to fully commit one's physical and mental resources to execute a finishing blow technique. Thus *todome' waza* necessarily engenders the demonstration of total mental focus, as well as proper tactics, distance and timing leading up to controlled energy transfer with total body power and appropriate body dynamics. And of course, *zanchin*.

Realism. The *enbu* exercise should be modeled after techniques that, if carried out to the fullest extent, have a high likelihood of success in self-defense scenarios. This externally-directed concept is somewhat paradoxical to tenets of *budō* (see next paragraph). Nonetheless, the choice for proper, realistic techniques is an important aspect of martial relevancy in *shotokan* training, and for the development of proper mental imagery. Moreover, tactics, technique sequence

and rhythm in *renzoku waza* (combination techniques) should be consistent with *kumite'* practice. Crowd-pleasing acrobatics resembling movie play-acting not only detract from proper personal development, but also convey a wrong impression of *enbu* training philosophy.

Budō Aspect. *Budō* (武道) is roughly defined as the founding spiritual and moral principles of modern martial arts (*gendai budō*). The abstract concepts in *budo* embody the most important tenets of martial arts training but are often overlooked in *enbu* competition. Modern *budō* (as opposed to *koryū bujutsu*, or the ancient warrior's way) focuses on no external enemy, the only training goal being to overcome the internal enemy, or one's ego. As such, external forms (*kata* movements, *bunkai*, *enbu* exchanges) constitute manifestations of the *karateka's* understanding of the spiritual, moral, and physical values of his/her training style, a "way" through constant improvement to achieve self-mastery, and ultimately personal enlightenment through the conquering of ego. Another long held idea is that the training partner is an essential element for the *karateka* to achieve technical understanding and therefore should be held to the highest respect. *Enbu*, as a conduit to demonstrate *budō*, should portray these elements within the context of the exercise, as reflected by emotional stability, mental concentration, dignity (*kura*) and respect for the opponent.

Ancient masters left their indelible mark in *katas*, "forms" or templates for technique preservation and evolution. Along the same vein, we inherit from Nishiyama Sensei a competition *kata* (*kitei*) with embedded *bunkai* elements, as well as *shiai* categories of *enbu* and *kogo*. The technical focus of these events coincides with critical components of proper traditional karate technique execution, which the Technical Committee will examine in upcoming National Seminars. Continued on page 8



"Enbu training can benefit beyond the competition arena, particularly towards improving the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of proper technique development."

Alex Tong & Albert Cheah



*Mid-Atlantic region
man-woman enbu team, 2009
AAKF National Championship,
Minneapolis.*

西山

American Amateur Karate Federation

National Office
445 S. Figueroa St.
Suites 2600 & 2700
Los Angeles, CA 90071

Phone:

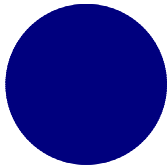
(888) 939-8882

Fax:

(888) 939-8555

E-Mail:

siezan@aakf.org



We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.aakf.org

Become a fan of the American Amateur Karate Federation on **Facebook** and receive notices when the website is updated.

Technical notes continued

The finale' of *enbu*, execution of *todome waza*, is often represented as the final counter-offensive by the physically weaker party in order to neutralize his/her opponent. When performed with the appropriate mental intensity and physical prowess, *enbu* should display a sense of foreboding – its gravitas bringing to mind *la danse macabre*, or the dance of death.

Alex Tong and Albert Cheah are members of the AAKF Technical Committee. Alex Tong, 6th dan, resides and teaches in Dallas, TX. Albert Cheah, 5th dan, resides and teaches in Orange County, CA.

References.

- Nakayama, M. Best Karate, vol. 3. Kumite 1. Kodansha International, USA, NY, 1978. ISBN 0-87011-332-1.
- Nakayama, M. Best Karate, vol. 4; Kumite 2. Kodansha International, USA, NY, 1978. ISBN 0-87011-359-3.
- Nishiyama, H. Traditional Karate Coach's Manual. International Traditional Karate Federation; Los Angeles, 1989.
- Nishiyama, H. Traditional Karate Competition Rules. 2009 edition. International Traditional Karate Federation; Los Angeles, 2009.
- Wikipedia contributors. Budo [Internet]. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia; 2010 May 1, 23:00 UTC [cited 2011 Feb 23]. Available from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Budo&oldid=359531325>.



Team USA; 15th World Traditional Karate Championship Curitiba, Brazil; Nov. 8-13, 2010

Upcoming Events

	Date	Location
➤ National Seminar	March 25-27	Minneapolis, MN
➤ Mini-Camp & 50 th AAKF National Championship	June 15-18	Atlanta, GA

Your Viewpoints Count!

In preparation for the 50th National Championship, the South Atlanta region is preparing a special commemorative program booklet that celebrates our five decades of competition history. Please submit all comments, viewpoints, scanned versions of your collection of memorabilia (in PDF format) regarding the past and present AAKF for consideration for inclusion in this special edition. Please support your organization by emailing your submission to office@aakf.org. Kindly include a 2-3 sentence bio (name, region, rank, etc), which will be reproduced alongside your submission (if selected).

All rights reserved. Contents are not to be reproduced without expressed permission from Seizan or the American Amateur Karate Federation.