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Welcome to September issue of our newsletter

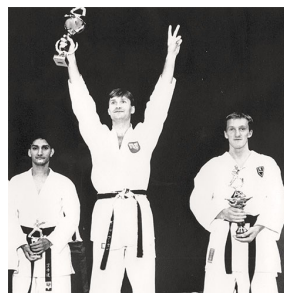
Hi Everyone,

After a particularly hot and humid summer, we are now heading into typhoon season before we actually see any resemblance of autumn (fall). This year, the weather has been rather peculiar with some unusually fierce weather storms, followed by major floods and landslides. The Olympics has finished, and now the Para-Olympics is in full swing as I write this newsletter.

August turned out to be much busier than I anticipated. The humidity can be difficult to bear, and coincidentally I usually get a major translation job or two during August, so spend most of my time tucked away working from home in the comfort of air-conditioning, trying to avoid leaving the house during daylight hours.

Karate in the Olympics

OK, not directly swords, but part of my personal history of why I got into Japanese culture and swords. I was very happy to finally see Karate included in the Olympics. I also fought among the best of my generation at European level, although I also fought (and sometimes won) against World Champions domestically and other minor international competitions. While I was coming up and competing, Great Britain and England had a very strong presence in the World Karate Federation (formerly WUKO). The British Team had won five world championships in a row (1982, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1990), and we had more than a few individual world champions under British and England Coach, Ticky Donovan sensei. However, it is Japan that has always been strong in the Kata (forms sections), with strong challengers from Europe.



So, imagine my disappointment when there was not a single British athlete on the mats for the Olympics. Then, on top of that, the overall level of fighters and fighting was, frankly, substandard for a world level championship. In desperation to get into the Olympics the rules have been changed, much protective equipment (that constantly needed adjusting) had been added making it even more difficult to see if a technique had even connected, let alone well executed. A rule called, mubobi, where opponents can be penalized for putting themselves (and their opponents)

in danger by attacking recklessly with no regard for their own or the opponent's safety, was non-existent.

Therefore, what should have been the biggest fight of the competition, the heavy weight final, left new and old viewers alike perplexed when a man who was four points down ran into the front leg kick of his opponent, got knocked out, but still won the match despite being stretchered off. The other fighter was penalized for excessive contact. There were also other fighters who were repeatedly turning their heads away while punching at their opponent, completely un-reprimanded.

The fighter that resonated with me the most was the French fighter, Steven De Costa. He rightly won his pool and went on to take the Olympic gold medal. Even though he is having to compete under the current conditions and rules, he was the fighter whose spirit most resembled competition Karate as I remembered it. The vast majority of the competition for me had begun to somewhat resemble Taekwondo. Many fighters were fighting side-on with their back foot turned out, ready to kick off the front leg. Hand combinations and sweeping techniques had turned into rush in a grab and try to grapple/throw. Also, the effort to keep the action continuous looked as confusing for the fighters as it did for the viewers.

My opinion may seem rather harsh, but I actually enjoyed the competition, and was straight back in the days when I used to compete myself. I like some of the additions. I like the color-coded equipment bringing it in line with boxing and taekwondo and similar to Judo. It's a shame that the traditional Red and White divisions have been lost as that is related to the colors of the Taira and the Minamoto in the Genpei Wars.

The extra thick mitts, body armor and the leg pads/boots, seems to have affected the techniques and the way that they are performed. I did think it was great to see Karate in the Olympics, and I hate to become that guy, "In my day...", but I think it needs to go back to basics a bit. It used to be that the strongest contestants actually also had a strong background in traditional karate. It was difficult for me to see that connection at the Olympics unfortunately. After watching the Olympics, I went onto Youtube and watched some old international competition videos, and even in 2004, when some of the changes have been implemented, you could still see 'karate'.



The Men's Kata final was superb, with the Japanese representative, Ryo Kiyuna in fine form. Sandra Sanchez was also obviously clearly the victor in her final. The Japanese female finalist, Kiyu Shimizu, performed well, but there was something a bit too dramatic about her kata, and slightly less Budo than Sanchez. Both were excellent, nevertheless.

I sincerely hope to see karate again in a future Olympics. It will not be at Paris 2024. If it does return, I hope it reclaims some of its identity. It kind of broke my heart to see what it had become despite its promise and the beauty of the sport that I know and love. It was tough to see all of the (mostly deserved) storm of criticism online. It was like someone attacking a family member, despite you knowing they are in the wrong. I wanted even staunchly traditional Karateka to be happy and proud to see karate in the Olympics. I would hate for it to become a poor imitation of Taekwondo, and the Olympics doesn't need two Taekwondo's.

Below are my summaries of the day's events for Japan-Forward.

The JAPAN Forward Guide to Karate in the 2020 Olympics



https://japan-forward.com/the-japan-forward-guide-to-karate-in-the-2020-olympics/?fbclid=IwAR2wNXYkVbKRz5VBe2psJ37idbdAgRR3z9Xdvn_f1W9Xzvk4GZijkSglQh0

Day One Summary Report

https://featured.japan-forward.com/sportslook/karate-smashing-debut-on-first-day-of-competition-at-tokyo-games/?fbclid=IwAR0V4NDt3rXGeJf7Km0KmMs2R-cn9_7EQzp74AX6d6kxe-kr4PMe8DLUOZs

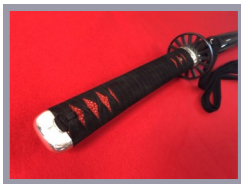
Day Two Summary Report

<https://featured.japan-forward.com/sportslook/karate-premier-stars-continue-to-showcase-sports-power-brilliant-techniques-in-olympic-debut/>

Day Three Summary Report

<https://featured.japan-forward.com/sportslook/karate-heavyweights-display-mettle-muscle-on-final-day-of-tournament/>

Hidden/Budo Japan



I was very honored to have a five page interview included in the September edition of a major Martial Arts monthly magazine, Hiden (秘伝) published by BAB Japan. I was expertly interviewed by long-time resident of Japan and fellow martial artist, Grigoris Miliareisis. Hiden's design department pulled out all the stops doing a wonderful layout in the magazine, and even more photos on the webpage.



Additionally, they also uploaded the article in English to their webpage. You can read the full article in English here:

<https://budojapan.com/kenjutsu/pms2108/?fbclid=IwAR2c2ErgbinifCf3y4sFQjIwE4vYPnDxaspX0R0arDawAXK24m1DdM7Jy3g>

[fbclid=IwAR2c2ErgbinifCf3y4sFQjIwE4vYPnDxaspX0R0arDawAXK24m1DdM7Jy3g](https://budojapan.com/kenjutsu/pms2108/?fbclid=IwAR2c2ErgbinifCf3y4sFQjIwE4vYPnDxaspX0R0arDawAXK24m1DdM7Jy3g)

Otaku Magazine USA Interview



Earlier in the year, Otaku Magazine USA done a short piece on my Demon Slayer, Kamado Tanjiro Nichirin-to style koshirae. They came back with a request for a further interview. The second season of the anime, Demon Slayer/Kimetsu-no-Yaiba, is due out anytime now, so hopefully we can introduce a new generation of young people to the world of real Japanese swords. The article also showcases the full making of the koshirae via my YouTube video series.

You can read the full article in English here:

https://otakuusamagazine.com/interview-japanese-sword-expert-on-getting-his-demon-slayer-fittings-in-museums/?fbclid=IwAR2m7f2UvAUd_WD2cY93lj94oeD6AveHEsouuzDurh5LDDQiw8YLDRFJiE

Samurai Shorts and Super Thanks

Recently, YouTube has introduced a new *YouTube Shorts*, probably to try to claw back their creators who began making videos on Tik-Tok. As I am behind on my YouTube editing and uploads schedule, I decided to turn my Samurai Shorts themed videos into one-minute 'Samurai YouTube #Shorts' videos. I have begun a small series on various samurai stories around Tokyo and introducing them within one minute. As some of them are far too interesting for a one-minute vid, we may revisit some of the themes in the future and make longer videos.

You can see the latest Samurai YouTube #Shorts here:

47 Ronin: Remains of Lord Kira's Mansion



<https://youtu.be/ipZQnsWIKRY>

And here: The Japanese Sword #Shorts: How to get to The Japanese Sword Museum



<https://youtu.be/PjGqAC4Vymo>

Here too: Magaki Heikuro and Atago Shrine



<https://youtu.be/Uj0NluL5FhQ>

And here,

Impermanence and Sword Fittings

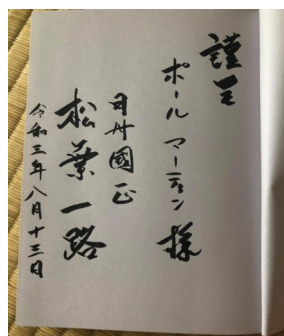
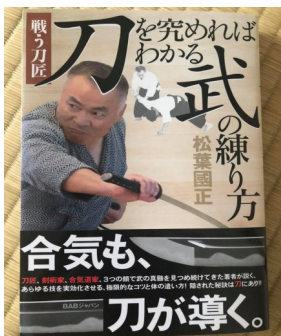


<https://youtu.be/gaavyPeD1bY>

Also, we hopefully will be resuming our regular schedule in the near future. However, with the time and costs invested we are running at quite a deficit. We considered adding a membership level but it does not look like it would be popular. We would like to do great things with the channel like all the giveaways we promised in an earlier video before a brief spell in hospital messed up the schedule (and the YouTube algorithm).

Recently, YouTube has introduced a new 'Super Thanks' button at the bottom of videos. This allows the viewer to make a donation of their own choice if they enjoyed the video or it helped them out in some way. If we have helped you with some free information or help, or you would like to support The Japanese Sword in continuing to provide these videos and newsletters, please feel free to click on the Super Thanks button at the bottom of the screens and buy us a coffee or something. Thank you for your support in advance.

Master Swordsmith and Martial Artist Matsuba Kunimasa New Book



Understanding Martial Training by the Study of Swords

I was due to appear on a Panel with master swordsmith Matsuba Kunimasa in Hyuga Miyazaki prefecture this month, but it has been postponed due to the current covid situation. Matsuba san sent me a signed copy of his latest book (only in Japanese at the moment).



Gotoba-in 800 Update

In 2017, I achieved one of my life long dreams and visited Okinoshima (the Oki Islands) for the first time to go and see the site of the funeral pyre of Emperor Gotoba.

There is also a small museum dedicated to him with quite of lot of swords in their collection and on display. The major part of the display is from the Showa (1926-1989) Gobankaji. Unfortunately, the swords were stolen from the shrine in the past. They were recovered, but not before a few of them had their mei removed. Honma Junji sensei and Sato Kanzan sensei aided by identifying which of the swords with the mei removed were by which maker, and they were re-inscribed. Luckily, they had all had oshigata of them drawn when they were put on display at the Osaka Takashimaya department store in 1941, and a catalogue was made. So, there is no doubt that the swords with the replaced inscriptions are the original swords.

In some ways, the area is like an 800-year-old time capsule, and you can really get a feel of the life of the exiled cloistered emperor. I don't usually say things like this, but his mausoleum was a real power spot. Probably my own excitement of being there but I got goosebumps being there. I had only ever seen old photographs of the mausoleum from the front, so I decided to walk all the way around it. When I reached the higher bank on one side, I realized that it did not have a roof at all, and you could see inside. You could see the actual mound of Emperor Gotoba's funeral pyre. I felt like I had seen something I shouldn't have, like I had peeped into the private quarters of Gotoba. I was incredibly moved. What with all the new information that I had gleaned over that weekend, it was in this same instant that I was hit with the inspiration that we needed a Gobankaji from the current generation of smiths. I proposed this idea to the priests of Oki Shrine and the Gotoba Museum, and this seed of an idea has now morphed into the Gotoba-in 800 event. One part of which is the, Heisei Gobankaji Project.

When we began the project, it was still the Heisei Era, so I wanted to try to acquire the works of swordsmiths who had been appointed and worked as master smiths during the Heisei era. However, the Reiwa era began, but I decided to stick with the Heisei name as hopefully, in future decades someone will take up the baton and produce the Reiwa Gobankaji. Part of this reasoning was due to another event that took place in 1977.



At that time, Living National Treasure Gassan Sadaichi came to the island to perform a forging demonstration in front of Oki shrine dedicated to Emperor Gotoba. He brought his apprentices which included his son, Gassan Sadatoshi. Now, Gassan Sadatoshi is a master smith in his own right, and has agreed to perform a forging demonstration in front of the shrine. Only this time, he will be bringing his son, Sadanobu. It is my hope that in the future, an older Sadanobu will continue this fledgling tradition and carry the torch for the Reiwa generation of swordsmiths. I am also happy to announce that we have raised the money to make this part of the project a reality!

Another aspect of the project (and hopefully a new tradition) was to also build up a data base of the works of representative top-level smiths of every generation. However, since we began, as well as a change in emperor, we have also been sidelined by the appearance of Covid-19. Various aspects of the project were subjected to delays, constantly changing situations and restrictions meant that the goal posts have been constantly moved.

However, we have rolled with the punches, and the Gotoba-in 800 project now is coming on leaps and bounds. Crowd-funding will begin soon. Unlike other sword crowd funding projects in Japan, this one will be completely bilingual. Depending on the result of crowd-funding, the original plan of twelve smiths works (like the original Gobankaji) may only be one sword forged by Gassan Sadatoshi and the actual dedication ceremony has been delayed by a year. However, I am quietly confident that we will raise a significant sum of money and the project length may be extended until we completely run out of steam. The crowd funding goods may include Gotoba/Kiku-Gosaku oshigata tenugui and t-shirts. There will also be goods from the shrine as Emperor Gotoba is residing divinity, and special events that include special sword viewings. Watch this space for updates.

For more info, bookmark this website. <https://en.gotobain-kensyo.com>

Gassan Sadatoshi Exhibition in Kyoto Takashimaya Department Store:

One Hundred Times Forging Makes Pure Steel



The Gassan Sadatoshi exhibition was on display at the Kyoto Takashimaya Department Store from 25th to 31st of August 2021 6th Floor. There were many works of Sadatoshi sensei and some of his son's, Sadanobu. Please also see their Facebook page for video clips and photos.

The Gassan lineage goes back to the Kamakura period and is famous for the perfection of Ayasugi hada. Workmanship tends to come in two main types: ayasugi-hada with a suguha hamon, or ko-itame with a notare hamon. Later this year, (Covid-19 allowing) Gassan sensei will also be performing a dedication forging for the 800th anniversary of the exile of the cloistered Emperor Gotoba in the precincts of Oki Shrine in Amacho, Okinoshima (Oki Islands) very close to the funeral pyre/grave of Gotoba.

It could be argued that Emperor Gotoba is the reason that Japanese swords are renowned throughout the world. It is said that in the run up to the Jokyū Disturbance of 1221, that he invited the best swordsmiths in the land to make swords with him at the Imperial Palace in Kyoto. His participation in swordmaking as a divine entity on earth, raised Japanese sword making up to more than that of a mere craft, and may have been the reason that much enthusiasm went into Kamakura period swordmaking that still is recognized as the Golden Era or sword making, and subsequently revered throughout the world.



<https://www.facebook.com/GASSAN.swordsmith>

Other notices

Sword Shop Seiyudo has Moved

Sword shop Seiyudo has moved from Ginza 5 to the Tokyo Kotsu Kaikan in Yurakucho.

www.seiyudo.com

Also, if you have missed previous issues of our newsletter and would like to catch-up, use the link:

https://thejapaneseword.com/archive_newsletters.php