

The T.K.D. Flash

A Publication of the Association of Academies of Martial Arts

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Upcoming tournament action:

2004 Midwest TaeKwon-Do Invitational Tournament--(a M.A.T.A. Tournament) August 14, Elgin IL. Contact Dan Valin, matkd@prodigy.net.

The Cadillac TKD Tournament will take place on August 21 in the Cadillac MI High School gym.

AAMA NC Tournament

At Huntersville NC on Sept. 18. Under the leadership of Mr. Jeremy Kempka, this event will feature continuous free sparring, head-to-head bracketed Chang Han Patterns, team patterns and breaking competition.

AAMA Fall Classic. October 9. At the Neenah-Menasha YMCA under the leadership of Dr. John Butitta, this event will feature continuous free sparring, head-to-head bracketed Chang Han Patterns, and team patterns.

The AAMA is organizing a U.S.T.F.-sanctioned Black Belt Testing on November 13 in Wisconsin. Inquiries may be made to Mr. VH at fmvh@execpc.com.

There will be a Black Belt test in Charlotte on October 23.

Justin Wagner, Gup Two Red Belt, married Rebecca Malm from Kungsbacka Sweden on July 2, 2004. He is on a 2 week leave from the service of his country in Iraq and will return to Iraq until early winter. God Bless Them.

On July 10 there was a U.S.T.F. sanctioned Dan Testing at Marquette TaeKwon-Do, U.P. Michigan. Participants were from Marquette TaeKwon-Do (Marquette MI) and Lone Wolf TaeKwon-Do (Cadillac MI). This historic U.S.T.F. dojang on the south shore of Lake Superior provided a warm welcome to Region V Director F.M. Van Hecke and presented him with some breath-taking Nunobikiyaki pottery. Mr. Jack Eibler ably took the Corner as Mr. Dan Oja, Mr. Charles Stepan, and Mr. VH presided. Mr. VH was greatly honored to have been invited.

Congratulations to the following on their Dan promotions on July 10:

Third Dan

Mr. John Schulz
Mr. Jim Alger

Second Dan

Mr. Chuck Giotto
Miss Angela Giotto
Miss B. Hilija Spiessl
Miss Heidi Spiessl
Mrs. Janelle Kerschner

First Dan

Mr. Jim Portale.

On August 7 Mr. Kevin McDaniel as part of his community outreach activities will host "Safety Awareness for Children" at the American Martial Arts Center in Middleton WI, to be followed that afternoon by "Safety Awareness for Women." For info, contact Mr. McDaniel at info@amac-tkd.com

An Address at the Completion of a Black Belt Test in Marquette MI on July 10, 2004.

By F.M. Van Hecke

Being a Black Belt means being a leader and showing leadership.

We sometimes forget in the age of television and air conditioning that men lived once far closer to the cycle of the seasons, to nature, to the consciousness of life and death. We forget the central role of God and of organized religion to men's lives in past ages.

We look upon religious institutions as somewhat anachronistic now in our modern and somewhat arrogant social milieu. Why can't they resolve these issues in Londonderry or Belfast, in the Gaza Strip? And what's this "beheading" stuff? But don't mistake organized religion's central importance not just for the individual today or then, but to the core of *social structure* in older times. Religious congregations then partook, perhaps, too much of the society's structure. There were, as there still are, churches in which social class, race, ethnicity, and other issues very much mattered.

I don't say this to wax religious on you, but to set a context for you for a story about leadership.

Let me take you to St. Paul's Episcopal Congregation in Richmond, Virginia on late Spring, 1865. That was just a few months later than the surrender at Appomattox which ended our nation's bloodiest and costliest war. A part of the Episcopalian belief, and I'm not Episcopalian so realize I'm talking about somebody

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else's religion, sanctions the taking of bread as representative of the most sacred center of religious life.

When it came time for that sacred communion, the congregation rose to come forward. And the first man forward to receive was a Negro, perhaps asserting his newfound freedom but creating a hushed and awkward silence in his utterly unprecedented act, standing at the altar of a church where he and all he symbolized were frankly not welcome.

Out of the stillness of the congregation, the gasps having frozen into breaths held in silence, came a grey-haired old man to stand beside the Black, to take his communion, to show his congregation and his nation the spirit in which we must all learn to live. They all knew him. They all knew Robert E. Lee. And they saw real leadership, and came forward to partake as a congregation.

Robert E. Lee's leadership didn't end on the battlefield, it went to the core of his community's life. You can do the same.

Something free. You can offer your students the electronic monthly TKD Flash free. Cost to you? Nothing. Just provide me with their names and e-mail addresses (no other information required).

The American Martial Arts Center Martial Arts Championships were held in Waunakee WI on July 17th. Mr. Kevin McDaniel was Tournament Promoter for this, another in the series of M.A.T.A. tournaments. An unprecedented

total of 219 competitors made this event the clear "leader" among MATA events.

Related by Mr. Mark Skalsi to your editor on July 17: "When I was studying with GrandMaster Sereff in Colorado General Choi sent us over a Master Ra, who was one tough guy. His English was non-existent at first. Master Ra was referred to as 'Gen. Choi's Right-Hand Man' even though his entire right arm was missing. He had developed his left fist into an enormous weapon, and would forge his knuckles on a steel support beam. One day I was free sparring him, he deftly moved the right side of his body into me and struck out with his right stump. I was taken totally by surprise, and when my eyes caught up with the pain in a momentary panic I assumed he had driven an entire arm through me, and if he pulled it out I'd die!"

On September 11 Dr. Steve Osborn will host a USTF Referee Seminar to be conducted in Cadillac MI by Mr. Kevin McDaniel. Mr. McDaniel, a Class A Referee, will be giving "hands on" experience and training along with a chance to become certified as USTF Referees, Classes C, B, and A. Just in time for the Fall Classic in Neenah! For information, contact Mr. McDaniel at kevin.mcdaniel@amac-tkd.com.

[Editor's Note: this review was originally published in the Flash in October 2000 and is here repeated for a laugh.]

Secret Fighting Arts of the World,
by John F. Gilbey
(Tuttle, 1989): A Review

by F.M. Van Hecke

This book has "been around", it seems, forever. Now in its seventh printing, it is the classic volume of the sort that one picks up on a lark, looking for a new angle on the martial arts.

Gilbey would appear to be a cosmopolitan and sophisticated martial artist, travelling around the world looking for new and ever deadlier martial arts and martial arts techniques.

The book is a bust.

Structured as a series of short stories with the author as hero/explorer in each, we are taken to China to learn the "delayed death touch" (which, of course, remarkably works) in which the time of day at which an organ is struck leads to the victim's demise, the "Canton corkscrew" in which a soft punch in the low abdomen leads to the graveyard, to India where the boxers of Benares have mastered the fighting world, to England where a "nutter" (head-butter) shows his technique, and other locales.

The secret technique is usually revealed to the author only after an exhaustive search, due in part to the prowess shown by Gilbey himself as a fighter.

Some of these secret arts would appear to border on the ridiculous. In "The Macedonian Buttock" we learn of the use of well--err--one's "hinder" as a death-dealing weapon.

Kiai-Jutsu involves shouting so loud as to knock out one's opponent, cause earthquakes and so on. I would suggest the author's adeptness in the not-so-secret art that deals with fools and their money; certainly this fool got beat out of \$12.95 on this one.

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[Editor's note: the following was written at the request of parents searching for a school in another community and the original was extensively footnoted.

Footnotes are eliminated here for space considerations.]

Contracts & Martial Arts Schools

By F.M. Van Hecke

What can a parent expect to see when in the market for a martial arts exposure for their children? The answers are widely diverse, but there are a few common formulae.

In assessing the market, parents should be aware that there are several forces driving pricing and contract formula decisions.

The recent rise of trade associations is a major factor. The Martial Arts Industry Association and the National Association of Professional Martial Artists are relative late-90's newcomers to the scene. Both push indefatigably for higher pricing, long-term contractual obligation, electronic fund transfer, and derivative marketing. This is not surprising, in that their model appears to have been the health club industry.

Another major factor at work is basic economics. The greater the number of schools in an area the more competition will lower prices. Similarly, the more attractive a particular school's facilities appears the more likely it will attract customers.

The demographics and economic health of a region will tend to influence contracts. In poorer urban areas many families regard

martial arts as mere recreation; in affluent suburban districts many families are willing to invest substantial dollars in what they perceive to be educational opportunities. It is not unheard of that a suburban child may participate in five activities at a time, and thus the prices of other activities may tend to cause parents to weigh carefully their purchases of such services.

Finally, the ability of the faculty to run the given facility and survive is a critical parameter. Some schools have a minimal overhead situation, surviving in space donated by a church or community recreation department; others have plush and carefully appointed quarters in high traffic areas. And some schools are taught by people as recreation for the teacher, who may have a "day job" or a supportive spouse and thus little need for cash flow.

We do not intend here to examine martial arts clubs, such as those associated with universities, which are limited to the student body as a customer base, meet infrequently, and have little internal cohesion or stability. They can have great merit as a recreational opportunity, but rarely is a contract, other than a waiver of legal action in event of injury required.

In addition, we fully recognize that in describing what may be "typical" we inevitably do not take into account any one school. Schools are very different and may contract with their students for their services in a myriad of ways.

The "Hobby" Formula. The "Hobby" Formula school rarely requires a contract beyond a

handshake. These schools are admittedly run by part timers with a "day job" to support themselves. They often belong to no trade associations, few, if any, recognized martial arts associations, almost never look to any authority other than the individual instructor. What he says, goes. Unchecked, safety may be a minimal consideration. Usually the facilities are minimal, and often the teaching takes place in somebody's basement. There may be little tournament opportunity. Quite often the school's curriculum "tops out" quickly. There is very rarely any ongoing input to the instructor, and the absence of continuing instruction for the faculty is apparent. The ideal student in this environment is a male teen because children require a great deal of attention and women are often uncomfortable in that sort of environment. Usually a student who achieves his Black Belt will last only a short time after graduation as the instructor becomes concerned as to his own continued dominance. While some teachers can be excellent, often there is a "cult" quality to these schools.

Typically, such schools range from completely free to charging very large test fees up to a thousand dollars, especially for Black Belt. Often these schools are not stable financially, and starting with one does not mean a student completes the course.

The "Rec Department" Formula. Most municipalities have a Recreation Department, and the rent charged to martial arts instructors is minimal. Quite often the instructor is young and runs his

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school almost exclusively for little kids. The emphasis is on “self-defense,” which in practice means games built on a martial arts formula. Students are most often sold uniforms, which boost self-esteem, and are tested often (with the same objective). Students may range in age from four to ten years of age.

Occasionally the formula is provided by a franchise. The school may be of limited longevity. Rarely does a student achieve other than a “Vanity Black Belt.” Black Belt test fees are often modest, fifty to one hundred dollars. Quite often parents, dissatisfied, try to matriculate their children in a more stable school and are disappointed by the inability of their children to adapt to a more “serious” environment.

Often, however, these schools are run by talented martial artists, coincidentally good educators, who are establishing a base with the frankly admitted intention to start a more traditional school.

These schools rarely require a contract. If they do, the contracts are for a “session” which is often defined by the Recreation Department’s calendar. Different payment plans may range from twenty dollars a session (often three months, two nights a week) to a simple payment of five dollars per class, payable at the door.

Because they are inexpensive and common, parents will often start their children with an idea that if the child becomes serious they can

transfer to a more stable school later.

The “Traditional” Formula.

There are, in fact, many traditional approaches to contracting for martial arts lessons. Often many “Industry Association” aspects have become part of the landscape for these schools, because they work to make money and contribute to the income of the proprietor and the stability of the school.

A traditional school often has a “history” in the community. It is not uncommon that such schools will have students in the second and third generations of families. Often the faculty will be somewhat older. Almost a “given” is the school’s affiliation with umbrella organizations in the particular martial art taught. Classes will tend to be well organized, but since adults are often a component of the student body, there is a serious tone to study and “fun games” for little kids are almost absent. Sometimes such schools are a bit “old fashioned” in their approaches, and a traditional school often struggles to provide variety and interest to their students. The stronger the faculty, ironically, the better a job they may do on innovation.

These schools usually occupy rental space and have decorated it. They may have the most attractive commercial premises in less commercially desirable areas. They have accumulated equipment, both safety equipment and targets for striking. They may have mats or a “safety floor” for falling exercises. They will sell items such as sparring gear from a catalog or a small inventory, but it will not be a

significant focus of their operation. Often students participate in events, such as picnics and parties, unrelated to the “mission” of the school, and often tournament competition and seminars are available involving affiliated schools.

Typically, such schools will require a “sign up” or matriculation fee. This is often marketed with a “free uniform” or free orientation. The free orientation may include private lessons, sometimes up to six weeks. These fees vary widely, but not atypically might be in the neighborhood of one hundred dollars depending on the market. If there are test fees, they are due at time of the test. Typical schools will have from nine to twelve separate tests before Black Belt, and the test fees will range from ten to fifty dollars. Black Belt test fees are generally regulated by the broader associations and can run anywhere from one hundred dollars to eight hundred dollars per Degree.

In addition, such schools charge a monthly tuition, usually ranging from forty to one hundred thirty dollars. Characteristically, such schools exude confidence and neglect many commercially sound methods of assuring continued attendance, such as providing a discount to students for contracting for longer periods of time; however, many such schools have in more recent times started to utilize more and more of the methods of schools following the “Industry Association” formula.

The “Industry Association” Formula. Schools adhering to the “Industry Association” model

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tend to have a very different contractual philosophy. Their high overheads and marketing expenses require higher cash flows. They may employ “closers” to get students to sign long-term contracts, knowing that many students have a limited, perhaps ninety-day average, interest in martial arts and once they drop out their parents will have to continue to pay. Aggressive attention to the novice early separates this type of school from the commercial pack.

Often they will use “teasers” such as “First Ten Lessons Free” or “\$19.95 special for 30 days” knowing that many children will bond quickly if sufficiently praised and flattered. Once the child has determined that his instructor is the greatest guy or gal in the world and has been promoted to “Super High White Belt,” out comes the sales pitch for the long term obligation. (Try transferring your child once all this has transpired!)

Often there are discounts for automated access to the parent’s bank account. And usually there are program enhancers after the student is under contract. One of these in common use is the “Black Belt Club,” which uses a merit badge system, like the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts. Often the student will be offered an even longer term contract with some discount elements. The student may be promised a free Black Belt test at the end of the road, but in exchange for that promise if the student stays, he may be buying a distinctive uniform or making other expenditures now. Often interim test fees are

In addition there are “tie-in” sales of gear of all sorts, “weaponry,” t-shirts, sweat shirts, ball caps, martial arts shoes, books, videos, etc., etc. Sometimes the school will sell a “package” to each student of gear “appropriate” to his level of achievement. Retail margins in the industry are comparable to high end stores. Some parents have argued that the numbers of new programs, side-purchases, summer camps, special events, etc. never end.

Such schools are often located in desirable places like shopping centers and are decorated to look impressive. While there may be a single dominant proprietor, the faculty are usually comparatively young; ironically, the younger faculty are often more dedicated to the students than the proprietor. Turnover is usually fairly high.

These schools seem to have a better tendency to be sensitive to market forces on monthly fees. I have seen their basic package go as low as forty dollars per month for a multi-year contract, as high as eighty dollars for shorter terms. Typically their “sign up” fee will run about one hundred dollars. A lot of their money is made on sales to their student body for enhancers such as “weapons” programs, lock-ins, summer camps, equipment sales, and tournament fees (under a suitable arrangement, perhaps reciprocal, with the tournaments’ promoters).

In General. As we can see, there are many different ways to skin the cat, and it is impossible to fully describe with assurance exactly what the parent is likely to

encounter on making inquiry. However, a few questions are well worth asking:

1) Am I signing up my child, perhaps before he or she is ready? What is the considered recommendation of school owners (often, “Sign here.”), my son or daughter’s teachers, and other trusted objective sources as to an ideal sign-up age? The recreation programs will often take children at four years because their objectives are different. Serious schools generally will tell you to wait until age six or at least be candid as to what you can expect from a younger student. Is the program for me or for my kid?

2) What do I want from the school? If all you want is for your kid to have an ego boost and a cute uniform and are willing to accept that he or she may never develop as a martial artist, you may not need as much expertise on a faculty. If I want lessons in character and martial arts proficiency, perhaps the color scheme of the school is less relevant than faculty qualifications.

3) Am I comfortable with the school? If there are no girls on the floor or women on the faculty, why? If the school is dirty, why? Is the school well-populated or are classes so tiny that you are concerned the program has not proved valuable over time? Or are classes so large that chaos reigns 90% of the time? And are classes “open” so you can see what’s going on or behind closed doors? Are you convinced that classes must be in secret because mom’s watching may distract the child, and if so, is that child really ready to

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study in this field? Trust your parental instincts.

4) What are ALL the costs and available enhancers, special programs, likely costs for new uniforms, test fees, discounts, family discounts, etc. Are there “tie-in” sales, packages, etc.? No proprietor can absolutely pledge where pricing will be in another two years, but he should have a good idea if he has any experience at all. Does he or she dodge answering questions? Write out your questions in advance and make sure they all get answered.

5) What is the background of the school? Who owns it? What are his or her qualifications? If all he can cite is what he is, as opposes to where and how he trained, maybe he “bought” his qualifications; yes, it’s often the case. What are his affiliations? Is the school a member of any organization of national or greater scope which pertains to the specific martial art taught, or is it entirely local? If the former, are there other member schools in the area, as opposed to a thousand miles away? Can you check them out in publications, on the internet, in any other ways?

6) Who actually teaches? Is it the top dog, or some teen? Are there women on the faculty other than the top dog’s wife? Is the average faculty member in his or her twenties or forties? How many of them are “quality” people, school teachers or professionals with other standing in the community? It is frightening to relate, but some schools have had

instructors indicted for abuse of children. We don’t point this out to deter from a valuable experience, but to be realistic. School teachers are licensed and vetted; who does so for these teachers? Does the faculty participate in continuing training and education?

7) Be willing to consider walking out and “thinking about it.” When you sense the salesman’s talons, that is the time to intensify your desire not to make a mistake.

8) Be willing to acknowledge that the amount of money you pay for an experience may not bear a close relationship to what you get for it. Some inexpensive schools are probably excellent, and some expensive schools a poor choice. On the other hand, if you want a heart surgeon, do you really want the guy who was last in his class?

9) MOST IMPORTANT. Does the school have a “track record,” and what do others who have attended the school, or whose children have attended the school, have to say? Was the experience positive, a value, or a rip off? Was the faculty nasty or kind, competent or incompetent?

Good luck on your search.

In next month’s Flash, important articles on the benefits of TaeKwon-Do for the mentally challenged by James Jasen and on the importance of self-control by Jordan Wagner.

Finally, a most important reminder: **Grand Master Sereff’s Fall Championship** is October 17th in CO. More information may be had at 303-466-4963.