

Training with the Pro's Tom Davies' Karate Funding Report



I would to thank the Kambukai for their generous support, allowing me to achieve so much and train with some *outstanding* karate practitioners. I'm confident the experience has deepened my knowledge of Goju Ryu Karate, which will translate into improved teaching practices as I pursue higher standards of personal and student achievement. This report gives an account of my karate related experiences over the last six months.

I would also like to thank my wife Sharyn who allowed me to escape to Amsterdam to attend the European Gasshuku during a period of heavy work stress.

Funding from IOGKFNZ has allowed me to do the following:

- Training with Sensei Terauchi at his dojo in Tokyo
- Training at Sensei Nakamura's Burlington dojo, including a one-on-one session with Sensei
- Running a two day self-defense course in Girard, Ohio
- Training on a regular basis in New York with Sensei Luis Tapia (Ruku-Dan)
- Attending three regional Gasshukus run by Sensei George Andrews, including a day of one-on-one training
- Attending a one day workshop with Sensei Herbert Allen in New York
- Training in San Francisco with Sensei Mirko Buchwald (Go-Dan)
- Attending the European Gasshuku in Wageningen, Netherlands run by Sensei Nakamura

Tokyo

After repeatedly getting lost, mis-directed, then lost again, I'm very proud to report that I can, now, confidently navigate to, and then find Sensei Terauchi's dojo from Kiyose station (admittedly with the help of a few of the locals and some former students!).

Training with Sensei is always a pleasure. It's not just the quality of the instruction, it's the whole experience – traipsing halfway across Tokyo on foreign trains, eating Japanese food (not to mention the cheap (if light) beer) and meeting up with friends and former students who have progressed appreciably, one of which has graded to shodan and another recently to 1st kyu.

Training with "The T-Man" is something everyone should experience. His training style is to torture you horribly while you almost pass out from the heat and the sweat dribbling into your eyes whilst ridiculing your karate in Japanese to the other Japanese speakers and laughing at your feeble efforts to keep up!

Strangely I didn't mind a bit because it's always lighthearted and, as an instructor, it's hard to get good feedback on your own karate as mostly you train others, so I lapped it up! The other endearing thing about Sensei is, I took my son Alfie, whom I'm proud to say, has graded to yellow belt recently, to train with Sensei and he's the best kids' instructor I've ever seen. It's obvious that Sensei is very Japanese in that he loves working with kids and Alfie clearly loved it too, despite the horrible heat! I think a sign of a top notch instructor is one that is not afraid to get down on the ground and roll around on the dojo with kids, laughing their heads off as they have a lot of fun practicing their punches and kicks – I've never seen Alfie have so much fun at training!

Training with my Son Alfie and Sensei Terauchi at his Tokyo Dojo



From Japan we flew to San Francisco and after getting the address wrong, causing me to be 20 minutes late I located Sensei Mirko Buchwald's (Go-Dan) dojo and trained with him. Again, always a good experience to train with different instructors as I learnt a new take-down and response drill, as well as making some new friends and contacts. He also knew a few people in common so it was good to make a new friend.

Leaving San Francisco, we flew to the small town of Girard, Ohio near Pittsburgh where I located a Taekwondo dojo to train at which was run by a very kind and humble gentleman called Al who I only later found out was 8th dan! Surprisingly, he asked if it would be OK if I ran a couple of self-defense sessions which I was happy to do. After drilling his students on forward rolls, break-falls and various take downs, I can report that Taekwondo practitioners don't appear to enjoy being thrown on the ground repeatedly or close quarter grappling techniques such as clinching, choking or eye strikes. It was later informally reported that some of the students felt that the session had been "a bit brutal." Good times!

After saying goodbye to Al and his students, we headed North up to Niagara Falls which is about a 4 hour drive from Girard. We got to the hotel later than expected so I frantically threw the kids, and my gear into the hotel room and sped off to Burlington, Ontario, which according to Google Maps is only a 43 minute journey (not). Naturally my Garmin craps out so I drove around Niagara in circles frantically trying to find a way out. Fortunately I spotted a garage and a nice man who sold me the three maps I needed to find Burlington. An hour and three quarters later I arrived late for the session, so I introduced myself and got to know some of the instructors and students.

From his schedule I knew Sensei was not going to be present as he was winging his way back from Okinawa where they held the world karate championships. So being late wasn't as embarrassing as it could have been. Despite his absence, I thought it worthwhile to make it to the dojo as I probably wouldn't be in that part of the world for quite some time, plus I would get to train with Sensei's senior students. Hi dojo is good to train in as it is large, airy and fully equipped with gear and a padded floor.

The following training session I turn up to the dojo and met Sensei. We went through our kata and Sensei comes over and says "come to training early tomorrow and I'll have a look at your kata" I couldn't believe what I was hearing! So the next day I rock up to the dojo and get into my gi and in walks Sensei. I was thinking he might spend a few minutes looking at my kata, most likely in a group or something like that during class. Instead he spent the next hour and a half working one-on-one with just me!!! He had me focus mainly on Kururunfa, but also ran me through Shisochin onwards. After the session he seemed happy with my kata, which was vastly reassuring!

I felt extremely lucky and grateful! My kata improved immensely and I've got much to take back to everyone. He didn't just take the time out to teach me but he actually took the time off his regular class (I think) as well, which made me doubly grateful. The only explanation I can think of is he took one look at my kata and took great pity!! I've also heard that this experience isn't unusual as he gets many visitors and often takes people aside for training who are willing to learn, which speaks volumes.

One on One with Nakamura Sensei at his Dojo in Burlington, Ontario



The day after my session with Sensei we packed up the car and headed back to the States, staying for a night with my cousin in Syracuse, New York. I checked my email to find a message from Sensei Luis Tapia, who runs the New York dojo telling me to get down to a seminar being run by Sensei

Herbert Allen (ruku dan) starting the following day. I'd seen Sensei Allen demonstrate his karate at the 2008 Budosai in Okinawa so I was VERY keen to train with him. So we got up at 4 am, sloshed back an American sized coffee roughly the size of an oil barrel, piled into the car and drove like maniacs to get to New York City by 10. Our introduction to NY drivers came early when we got caught up in a traffic jam on Interstate 498 where we had to get through a turnpike which was backed up and had come to a dead stop. I thought I'd experienced insane, aggressive, third world driving conditions, but this had nothing on places like Bangkok or Jakarta, when a number of motorists, after attempted motorized murder, crossed through/over/on top of a semi-permeable concrete barrier between motorways and jumped onto another motorway into oncoming traffic causing massive chaos - we naturally followed suit! So I arrived at Sensei Luis Tapia's (ruku-dan) dojo in The Bronx just in time for Sensei Allen to open the session and warm us up. His take on karate was clearly informed by Aikido as he ran us through some interesting new takes on the application of Saiunchen and I learnt a new finger lock and escape combination. We also did some ground work and an escape from the mount which was excellent, as well a blending drill which I'll take back and think about how it might be applied further. So all round a brilliant day's training!! Not to mention the spectacular pastrami I had for lunch from the nearby Italian restaurant.

In the following weeks I was able to train with Sensei Luis on many occasions despite taking 2 hours on the subway to get there, but it was well worth the effort as I got to practice my situational awareness of how to avoid being assaulted on dodgy subways and I couldn't have asked for a warmer and more informative reception from Sensei Tapia. We mainly did ground work and take-downs – which was fine by me as that's an area that I'm interested in improving. He's clearly an expert in his area and knows his stuff inside out and I learnt lots.

Blending Training with Senseis Herbert Allen and Luis Tapia in New York



After saying goodbye to Sensei Luis and his students, we flew to Cambridge, UK where I hooked with the local IOGKF club which is run by Sensei Martin Stockley who is a student of Sensei George Andrews. Sensei Andrews also runs monthly regional Gasshukus at his London dojo of which I've attended three. On one occasion only four of us showed up so I had effectively a one-on-one session for the whole day. On the Sunday session, there was about 20 of us (sandan and above) and we focussed on Sesan, which I'd not done before – so I learnt quickly! So I've been able to progress my understanding of Sesan Kata nicely.

Following that, we put on the boxing gloves and bashed the crap out each other for about an hour (it felt like much more) – actually it may have only been half an hour! I found this sort of training to be REALLY physically challenging as it's hard to sustain for any length of time, particularly when faced with fit, strong fighters of higher rank. One of said bigger, stronger and fitter fighters came in a bit hard so a friendly spinning elbow to jaw evened things up a little. Needless to say I lapped it up!! When I get back to my dojo I'm determined to inflict this sort of training on my own students!

Below is a picture of Sensei who was sick with the flu on the day so he ran the Gasshuku mostly from his chair. I like training with Sensei Georg as his training style is both, informal and entertaining as he tells us stories of his life and how they underpin his karate while we lie on the floor gasping for oxygen.

Learning Kata and Sparring at Sensei George Andrews' London Dojo



I've also been lucky enough to afford the time away to attend the European Gasshuku in Wageningen, Netherlands run by Sensei Nakamura.

Going to Amsterdam is always a pleasure as it's such a beautiful city with incredibly efficient and modern public transport, not to mention the spectacular beer!

At the European Gasshuku in the Netherlands With Sensei Nakamura



So I turned up at the Gasshuku, not knowing a soul other Sensei Nakamura and met Sydney Leijenhorst – the chief instructor in the Netherlands who is a friendly sort and introduced me to everyone. Word somehow got round that I'd come all the way from New Zealand just to attend the Gasshuku – I didn't go out of my way to disabuse them of this misperception, particularly when beers were being bought!

Overall the Gassuhuku was excellent, with Sensei in fine form despite having a bad back. Having now been to several of his Gasshukus, and trained at his dojo, I'm starting to gain an understanding of his focus i.e. on the ju aspects of Go-ju system. The Gasshuku was extremely valuable for me as I work towards my next grading, with Sensei focusing on Kururunfa and Sesan and how the ju aspects of opening and closing the body at various points of Kata is applied. And like other Gasshukus we went over a number of drills to practice these moves. Later over a beer, the subject of Fish-Ups came up and Sensei confided that since the Wellington Gasshuku where someone managed to give themselves a gash on the chin needing stitches whilst lying on their back, he'd shied away from doing them. In future I hope to integrate these types of exercises and drills into my practice and teaching of the Goju system.

Over the last six months, I've trained with some TRULY outstanding martial artists, made many new friends and look forward to sharing my experiences with my students and others. Once again, I would like to thank the Kambukai for their kind support in helping me to attend these events and deepening my understanding of Goju Ryu Karate.