

## My Karate Journey -- Part 2: Beginner to International Competitor

I trained super hard to learn as much as I could about Shotokan karate. Within a year, I had achieved the rank of brown belt, just below black. In 1968, I was chosen as a member of the All-US Collegiate karate team and was sent to San Diego, California, to compete in the 19th Olympic Commemoration Goodwill Karate Tournament. This was the very first time that I traveled somewhere other than between the Hawaiian Islands! We competed against the All-Japan national team and the All-European international team. Needless to say, I was star-struck, meeting both the competitors and the masters whom I had read about while training. I now got to meet them IN PERSON!!!

Keep in mind that I had just gotten my brown belt, was 5'7" tall, and weighed only 140 lbs. In the tournament, held at the UCSD gymnasium in La Jolla, CA, the US team was required to wear red belts. I competed against a 6-foot second-degree black belt from Italy. He was quick and charged with a flurry of punches. I quickly stepped back to avoid being scored upon. On his second attack, I blocked his punch, grabbed his gi and twisted, executing a perfect shoulder throw on him. As he struck the ground, I punched to his face to score. The entire arena roared out with a cheer for me, but the chief referee called off the point, claiming that he had already stopped the action. The cheers quickly turned to "BOOs!" The Italian was able to score a point before the match ended, 1-0.

My second match was with a third-degree black belt from Japan who was 5'11" tall and 194 lbs. He quickly scored the first point on a front kick. Knowing I had nothing to lose, I quickly stepped ahead and executed a body punch. The judges' flags snapped out, and I was awarded a point! Time ran out and the match was declared a draw.

The excitement continued even after the tournament! Following the competition, I was both surprised and overwhelmed by the number of fans who came over to me to get my autograph, and to tell me that my throw and punch to the face SHOULD have been scored a point! Later, back in the locker room to change, I heard the Japan team exclaim with disbelief when they saw me wearing my brown belt as I walked in. Translated to English, they said, "Hey, look! He's ONLY a brown belt!" These events following the tournament had more of an impact on me, my confidence, and my attitude than did the actual competition!

I received my black belt the following year, 1969, and was again selected to the All-US Collegiate team in a competition with the All-Japan Collegiate team. This tournament was held at UCLA's Pauley Pavilion in Los Angeles. Although the talent and competition were outstanding, I don't remember much of it. For some reason, it did not have the same flair and excitement, nor the memories, that the previous year's tournament had.

Upon my return to Hawaii, I found out that this very same Japan team would be making a stop here for another goodwill tournament before returning home. So, within two weeks I was participating in yet another international competition! There were two Hawaii teams, one made up of KAH members (Team A), and the other comprised of the champions of different clubs in Hawaii (Team B). In the team competition, Japan beat Team B by a 5-2 margin, but lost to our team 5-1, with one draw. I defeated Yoshihara Osaka, the current collegiate champion that year.

In the individual championship, I finished in 3rd place, beating Delroy Griffith (Team B), then Azuma Kato and Ichiro Seki before losing to Kazuaki Hino in the semi-final match. All in all, it was a great tournament for me, as I was the ONLY Hawaii competitor to place!

WHAT AN INCREDIBLE TWO-YEAR JOURNEY — FROM BEGINNER TO INTERNATIONAL COMPETITOR!!!







Alan Sekiguchi, April 25, 2022