

My Karate Journey -- Part 3: The Dream Begins -- Training with Asai

I must have impressed the UH instructors, for I was awarded a training scholarship to our headquarters, where our chief instructor, Tetsuhiko Asai taught classes. Asai Sensei was a rather small and frail-looking man, which belied his reputation as a vicious and deadly fighter! He had just arrived from Japan after winning the All-Japan Championship Tournament. He spoke very little English, so communication was very difficult and limited. Even so, I watched him very closely. He was like a magician! His movements were cat-like -- effortless and smooth, and he seemed to float across the floor when he moved.

Seeing and meeting him for the very first time was like finally getting to meet my idol – thrilling, exciting, breath-taking, and AMAZING!!! JKA champions were sent to countries all over the world, taught for 2 years, and then were rotated to a different country to teach and spread the art of Shotokan karate. Knowing this was also true for Asai Sensei, I vowed to learn as much as I could from him before he left Hawaii.

Fortunately, I was still a student at the UH, so I scheduled my classes around the training times at the dojo. Believe it or not, I trained THREE TIMES A DAY when I knew he would be teaching classes -- in the mornings, afternoons, and evenings! This was the most intense, and yet, satisfying training period of my karate career.

Although Sensei was friendly and cordial with the members, he maintained a strict temperament and stayed mostly to himself. He avoided socializing with members in the dojo and classes, and was very serious and focused on teaching the art that he loved. In other words, he was quite aloof.

A bit more about Asai Sensei. As I had mentioned, he was a feared karateka. Many stories circulated throughout the dojo of his amazing feats and incredible control. One story told of how, during a kumite match in a national tournament, his opponent charged with a punch attacked. His quick cat-like reflexes allowed him to jump up and to the side to avoid the attack, ending up on his opponent's back! The referees were SO impressed, they awarded him the match.

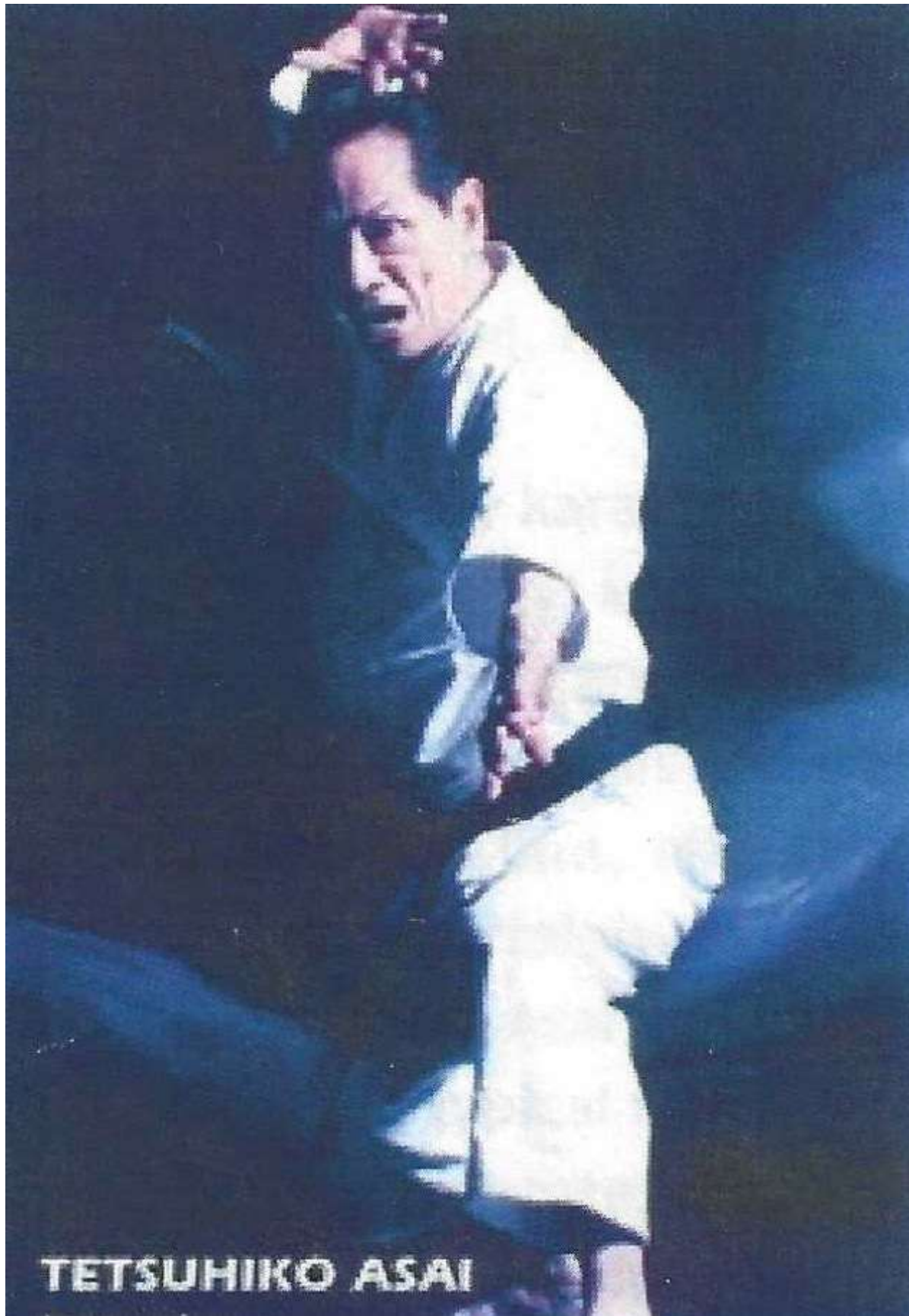
Another story speaks of when Asai Sensei first came to Hawaii to teach. As you recall, I described him as a “rather small and frail-looking man.” One of the larger veteran black belt members wanted to “test” this new sensei out and asked Asai to kumite with him. After a rather uneventful match, the black belt retreated to the locker room to shower. Upon dropping his underwear, he shrieked! When others rushed over to see what had happened, they witnessed a truly “amazing” sight – his testicles had swollen to three times their normal size!!! You see, as mentioned, Asai Sensei had just won the All Japan Tournament, so his speed, technique and CONTROL were off the charts!!! During his match with the black belt, he was able to score often and at will, flashing kicks and strikes with such precision and control that the black belt felt nothing ... UNTIL he dropped his pants!!!

Although Asai Sensei, rascal that he was, probably chuckled and reveled in delight with what he had done to the black belt, he also had a mean streak! If he did not like you for a number of reasons, you were put on his black list. Believe me, NO ONE wanted to be on his bad side -- especially when he drank!!! We had annual club parties, and when Sensei started to drink, people slowly and inconspicuously, started to move away from him, not knowing WHAT would happen if he exploded!!!

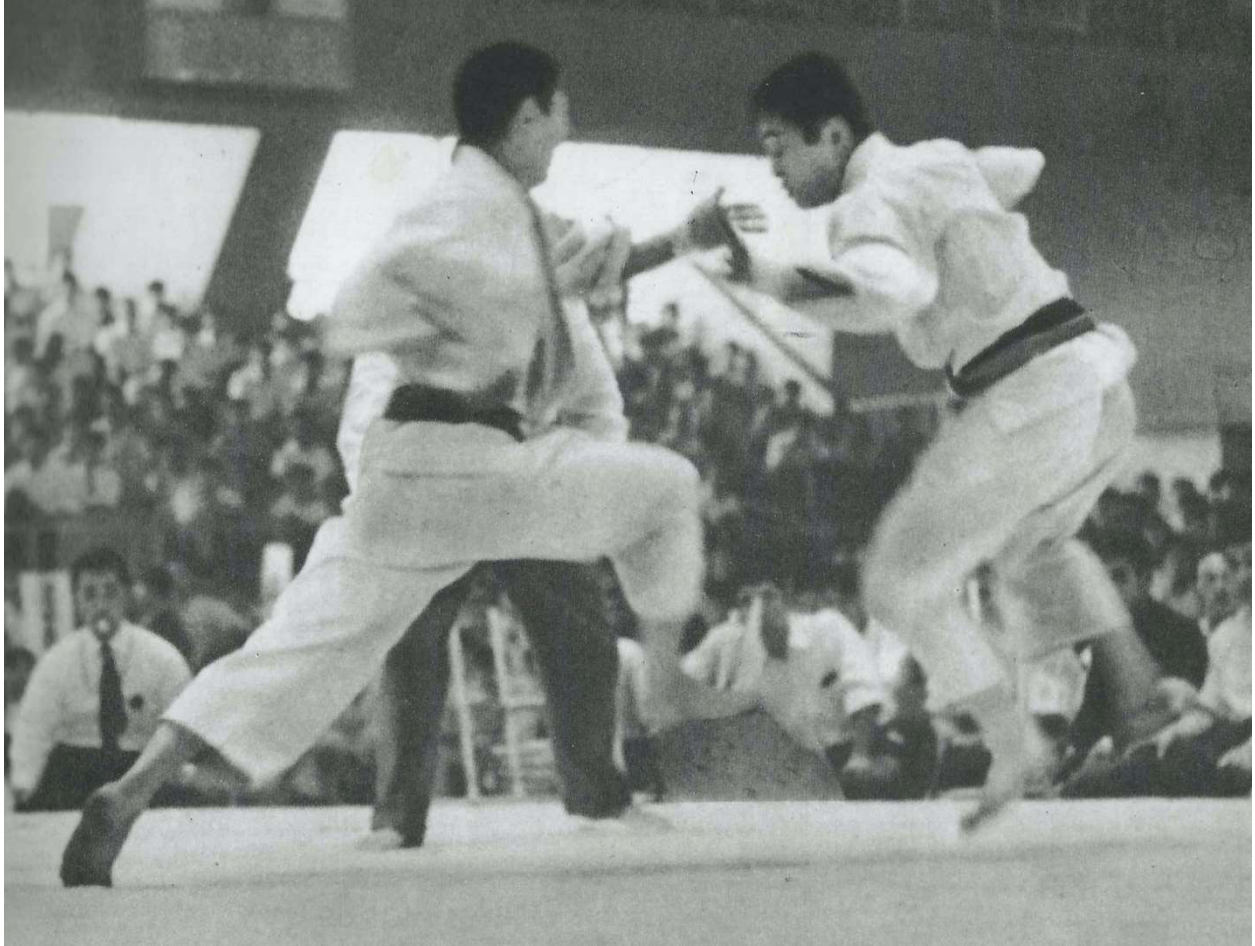
Fortunately for me, due to my training ethics and sincere dedication in class, he rather favored me. So, as others moved away from him as he drank, he would call me to have a drink with him. I would sit across the table from him, and he would pour me a drink. At that time I DID drink beer, but not scotch, which was Asai Sensei's drink of choice, particularly Johnnie Walker Black Label. However, I felt SO honored to share a drink with him, I never told him that I didn't drink whiskey! So, to tell the truth, Asai Sensei was the one who taught me how to drink scotch!!!

As you can obviously see, a year-and-a-half with Asai Sensei had an incredibly rewarding effect on me! Top-notch training, mixed with splashes of humility and fun, seriously affected my love and passion for this amazing art. In the dojo, Asai Sensei was a wizard! His demonstrations were truly amazing!! He could perform movements and techniques that most students found impossible to do themselves.

Unfortunately, Asai Sensei's unique and masterful techniques were too difficult and advanced for most of his students ... and even for ME!!! What I picked up from him before he left for Taiwan was just a page from his awesome BOOK, but I have used EVERY part of this page to improve and enhance my teaching of this remarkable art!!! BON VOYAGE, ASAI SENSEI -- and THANK YOU!!!



TETSUHIKO ASAI



Asai Sensei leaping to avoid attack ... AND ending up on the back of his opponent!

