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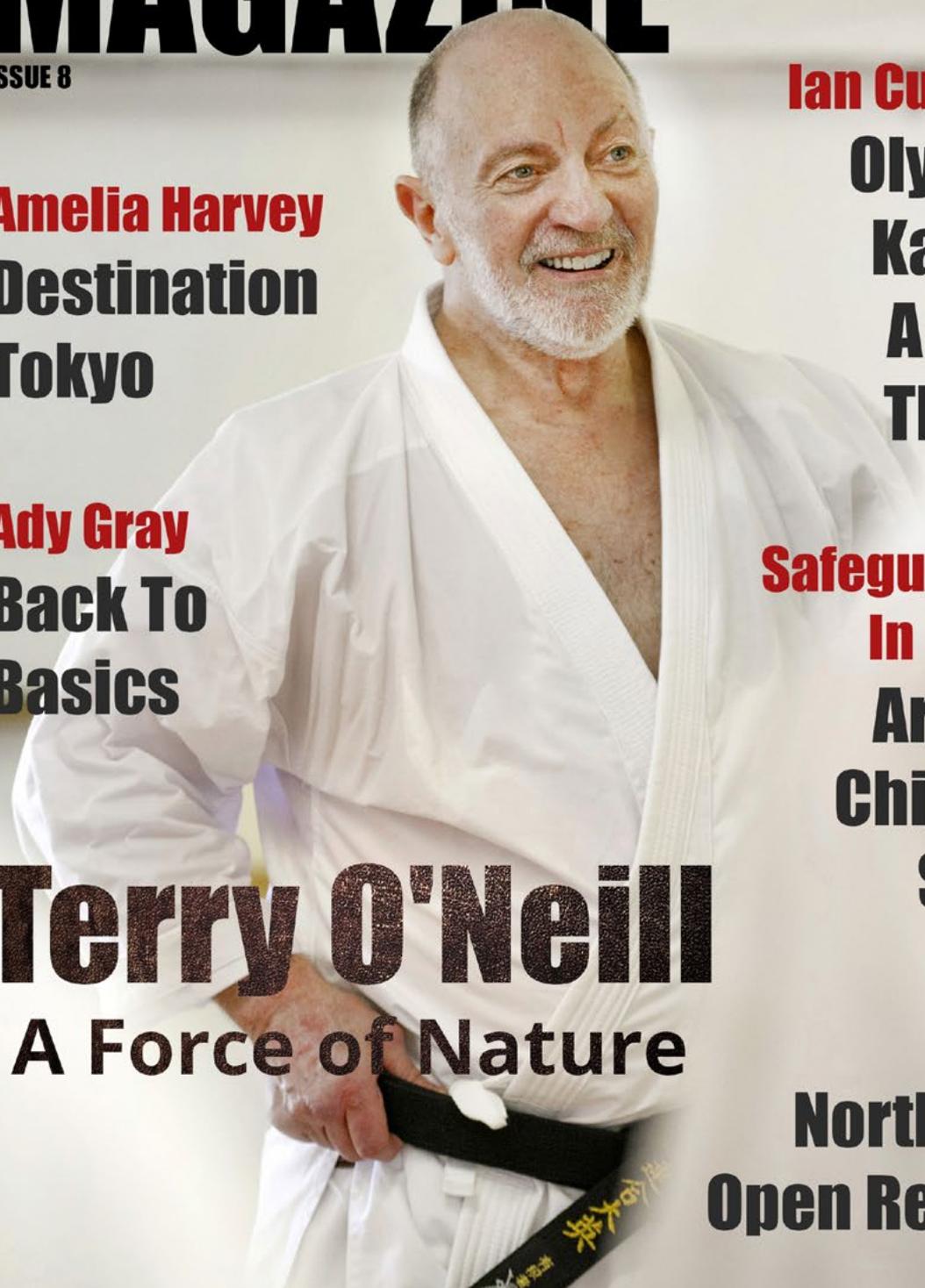
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Back To Basics

by Ady Gray
6th Dan



New Monthly Column

I have developed many students over the last 27 years, in my capacity as a Shotokan karate instructor. I pride myself on providing excellent participant-centred coaching that has encouraged the development of performance within karate and has nurtured much talent.

I founded the Byakko Shotokan Karate Association (BSKA) in 1999. I own and run my own purpose built dojo in the centre of Ripon, North Yorkshire alongside running several other clubs throughout the UK, teaching over 250 students a week.

With regards to my own Journey, I started training in karate in 1978 when I was 7 years old.

I was graded to black belt, 1st Dan in 1985 by Sensei Asano, 9th Dan. I have trained under many famous instructors in the UK, Europe and Japan.

On Saturday 20th May 2017, I was presented with my 6th Dan (Rokudan). This was awarded to me at the end of day one of a two day course that world renowned, Sensei Dave Hazard 7th Dan (Chief instructor to the Academy of Shotokan Karate) was hosting at my dojo in Ripon, North Yorkshire. I firmly believe that no Dan grade should ever be given, it must be earned. My award was in recognition of my continual personal development and tireless dedication to the teaching of my own group BSKA (Byakko Shotokan Karate Association) students and others.

To be awarded Rokudan by a world great in Shotokan Karate, was a tremendous honour, an honour that is truly amazing because of who Sensei Dave Hazard is and what he stands for. He has integrity like no one I have ever met before.

In 2004 I was awarded Sports Coach of the Year for North Yorkshire. In 2010 I was invited to be the EKF Assistant National Kata Coach for England by Sensei Wayne Otto, and in 2014 I went to the World Championships in Bremen, Germany, as the England National Kata Coach.

Most recently in June 2016, I was appointed as the GB National Kata Coach for WUKO-GB (World United Karate Organisation - Great Britain).

In 2014 I was interviewed by ITV News with regards to my views on supporting our Countries campaign for karate to become an Olympic sport. I personally believe that there is plenty of homegrown talent within Great Britain.

However, competitors must be coached correctly and developed correctly by the most senior and experienced of coaches, as is the case in many other countries i.e. Sensei Kagawa for Japan. These coaches at the very least, must understand the very fundamentals of karate.

In order to promote our own talent we need to ensure that karate remains true to its strong heritage and not forget the basics of why we do what we do. Regardless of style practiced, karate means many different things to many people. For some it may be just a sport, but for everyone, it must be a way of life. Everyone's karate journey is unique and along this journey, each individual will choose their own path.

“For some it may be just a sport, but for everyone, it must be a way of life. Everyone's karate journey is unique.



When I ask students to perform a basic punch (oizuki) or the first kata (Heian Shodan), I often sense that they don't see why we have to go back to basics. For some, every week, they think it will be a new move or a new kata. This is often the case for many students regardless of KYU grade. In an era where everyone wants to tick a box and move on as fast possible, a student can become blinded by all the box ticking.

It's about understanding that even with all the boxes ticked, if you don't know how to put the moves together, what good could it ever do? The fundamental basics (Kihon) are the very start of your karate journey and the more each move is performed, the more repetition of that move is done, the more solid your foundation will be. This foundation must be in place before you can move on through your journey. This foundation gives you strength. Consistent practice and effort affords a student the potential to make their karate look good. Good karate affords a student the chance to make it look even better by piecing the moves together and perfecting a Kata. It's not just about practicing a kata, it's about truly understanding the kata to know exactly what can be achieved by perfecting it. Perfection of a Kata can lead a student into practicing the Bunkai application (literally meaning "analysis" or "disassembly"). This is a term used in karate to process and analyse a kata and extract specific fighting techniques from the movements of a "form" (kata).

The simple fact is that no matter how good a move feels to you, it's how effective the move will be when used against an opponent. This must always be a student's objective.

The fundamental techniques which are core to karate will help a student develop muscle memory, correct posture, strength and longevity of training. Kihon techniques are the very foundation to more advanced Karate techniques. Timing is crucial in perfecting not only your fundamental techniques but performing a good kata. For example: setting your legs so that they move at the same time as your arms and hips, will not create the maximum impact. It will be both mistimed and detrimental to the impact on your own body. This timing should be practiced by way of basics in a lengthened manner.

Once this timing has been made it can then be shortened and used in Kumite or shortened again for close quarter. Basics are also used for conditioning and generating power as way of a plyometric movement.

Many students work extra hard in Kihon as it feels easier to master and gives you a good feedback of power. However, it can at times, be too hard, too strong and tensed and therefore not fluent nor effective. The real relaxed and effective fluent movement of karate, can then be found executed better when you relax (i.e. tired). This can be found in the repetition and quality of your Kihon basics, especially in line work, whereby, tiredness is an aim to achieve relaxed and fluent karate.

“Karate practiced correctly is for anyone and will remain with you for life



Ady presented with his 6th Dan from Sensei Hazard

