



国際大山空手道連盟総本部

World Oyama Karate

Honbu Newsletter

Issue 9 - Fall, 2005

By Founder Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama

The Road to Japan

By Shihan Dai
Perry Burnett



Shihan Dai Perry Ice Breaking Demonstration

Surviving Japan Part 5

At the end of my last article, I still had about half of my stay in Japan remaining. Things in the dojo were going very well. I had a good rapport with Shihan Goda and the students.

As I mentioned in one of my earlier articles, I did not get along well with the other main instructor. As it turned out, it wasn't just me. We had certain classes that we were assigned to teach. When it was his time to teach, only about fifteen students would attend class. When I would teach, about forty-five students would attend class. He did not project a positive attitude in class, and he didn't stay with the new teaching system that I brought to Japan from Saiko Shihan. His attitude along with the low class attendance that he pro-

duced made it seem that he did not enjoy karate. On the other hand, I was having a great experience. Saiko Shihan had told me that if the instructor was excited about karate that the students would be also. The love and enthusiasm for karate that I learned from Saiko Shihan showed in my classes, and the large number of students that attended my classes was proof.

The Road to Japan ... Continue

Saiko Shihan had prepared me well for Japan. Every thing he lectured me on, warned me about and predicted have come true. The main thing that I came away with is that if you don't give up, things will work out. Give it your best effort, and you can be proud of your results.

Even though I was and still am proud of how things turned out in Japan, I wish I could be telling the story of a great knockdown fighter who came home a tournament champion, but I can't. In the last newsletter I told you about my first two tournaments. I had one more chance to compete before I was to come home.

My third and last tournament was on September 15th, 1985 in Fukushima, Japan.

Fukushima is a two to three hour bullet train ride north of Tokyo. I had a special invitation from the tournament director who was a famous world champion. This event, like many that I experienced, was a wild trip.

I almost had to go to Fukushima alone. At the last minute one of the black belts who had become my friend decided to go with me and be my coach. Having Tezuka with me turned out to be a great relief. Fukushima is an out of the way place, and I was the only foreigner in sight. But that was not the worst of it.

Each fighter was assigned a number that was attached to the back of his dogi. This number identified you and when you would fight in the line up. There were about one hundred fighters, and I was number one. We had to line up, do a formal march up to the mat to be introduced and had an opening ceremony. Since I was number one, I was in

the front of the line as we marched up on the stage and lined up single file. I stopped in the front of my spot and looked up. There stood Mas Oyama a few feet away from me. About two minutes into his speech he looked at my belt. It caught his eye because it said where I was from. He had not expected to see me there. I stood out like a sore thumb, and the very slim chance I had of doing well at that tournament just went down even more.

My first match yielded my one and only win. I won in overtime although I felt the judges should have voted for me in the first round. It was a long time before my second match because of the large number of fighters.

Before my second fight, I noticed that Tezuka was nervous and did not have much to say. I later found out why. The first couple of minutes of my second fight were going pretty well. My opponent was very strong but I had become a better fighter since my last tournament. He was a little ahead of me, but I was thinking I could get a draw. Then he caught me with a very hard



Shihan Dai lined up for Tournament

The Road to Japan ... Continue



Shihan Dai's Fighting Stance

low kick to my right leg. It stunned me to the point that I could not feel my right foot. He seized the chance and hit me with four or five more low kicks that I could not block. I went down and the fight was over. After the fight Tezuka told me that my opponent had been voted as having the best fight in the last All Japan Championship (the biggest tournament in Japan each year). That is why Tezuka had been nervous before the fight and didn't have much to say. He knew my opponent had made a name for himself and that my chances were not that good.

It took a couple of weeks for my body to recover from that tournament. I competed in three big tournaments in six months. That is a pretty hard schedule. If I had more time I could have improved my tournament fighting but my twelve month stay was over before I knew it and as I stated earlier, I was ok with the job I had done, all things considered.

It is now time to bring this story to an end.

The things I have written have been just an overview of my trip to Japan. I have touched on the aspects that would be of most interest to the people who enjoy karate and martial arts. As you can imagine, I had a lot of experiences outside the dojo. Most were good and positive. Some things happened that if I tell you, you would swear that I was lying. My whole life has been that way.

I have a gift (or a curse, depending on how you look at it) of attracting strange events into my life. The Japan trip alone is pretty unique. A lot of people in the U. S. consider Alabama to be a third world country. So a young kid from Birmingham going to Tokyo (one of the most advanced cities in the world) to teach karate to the Japanese would seem a little unusual to some people. But for my life it's not that bizarre. Believe it or not I knew at the age of seven that I would someday practice martial arts in Asia. I did



The Road to Japan ... Continue



Shihan Dai Perry with Mas Oyama and Shihan Goda

not know where or how but I did know. Saiko Shihan would say, "That is your destiny".

Destiny or not, I will say that it was the most important thing that I have done in my life so far. It was an education that I will never forget. It broadened my view of the world. And as I have revisited the experience by telling my story in this newsletter, I can see that even though it was twenty years ago, my one year stay in Japan still has a profound affect on how I look at life. I know it sounds a little heavy and philosophical but it's true.

Shihan Goda allowed me to take some short trips out of Tokyo so I was able to see more of Japan than just the big city. I visited beaches, mountains, hot springs and rivers. I don't have the words to describe the natural beauty of Japan. I also lack the writing skills to even begin to get into the rich culture and history of the wonderful people. Because of karate, I encountered a lot of people in Japan, and I can count on one hand the num-

ber of rude people I met. I run into more than that everyday at home in the US. Don't get me wrong, I love my country but the American people could learn a lot about respect from the Japanese people.

I returned home on January 26, 1986. I have been involved in karate for more than thirty years. Thanks to Saiko Shihan and Shihan Goda, I have had a deeper experience with my training than most people. Some nights I have dreams of Japan and not once in twenty years has one of those dreams been bad. One day I will go back. Even though the country has changed a lot, I know that I will find something familiar there.

I survived.

The End

Osu!

MEANING

Black Belt

Part 2 : Shodan - Struggle for Beginning

As I explained to you before, the first degree Black Belt, Shodan, is only the starting point. It is the beginning of your journey in the world of Karate.

First of all, Karate does not exist without physical action. That's why I always say to my students, "Don't think about it. Don't talk about it. JUST SWEAT!" Each basic technique requires that you use your upper body, your waist and your legs in a different way. This is true whether you are executing a punch technique, a kick technique or a block technique. It takes a lot of action – a lot of hard training and sweat – to understand the special points of each technique. After a little training, a student has an idea in his head about how each technique should be executed. He thinks it should be like this, or it should be like that. But then when I get the student to show me his body movement, he gets all mixed up. Usually what's in your brain and what you can actually do are very different. Often you will feel that the brain and the body - the mental and the physical world - are not connected at all. The only way to fix this is to train for each basic technique over and over again until you understand the basic point of that technique. Then you must train over and over again to understand how each basic technique connects to the other basic techniques. If you train and train and sweat and sweat in this way, your mental and physical world will finally begin to come into harmony. Only then will you begin to understand the point of each technique and how one technique fits with another. Also, this kind of training makes you understand yourself. You will clearly see your weak points and your strong points. I'm not just talking about your coordination either, although it is important that you understand your physical abilities. I'm also talking about your character. This kind of training makes you see deep inside yourself, whether you want to see it or not. So when you have trained for a very long time, your eyes begin to open. Each individual is different, it takes an average of four (4) or more years of intensive training



Saiko Shihan Demonstrated Nunchuku

Shodan - Struggle for Beginning ... Continue

before you are ready to test for Shodan. During this period you don't know nor do you understand karate. It's like living in a foggy world. Once you reach Shodan you begin to see the outline of the real Karate world. But it is only the contour of the world you are about to enter. This is why we say that Shodan is not the ultimate goal, but only the beginning. Shodan is only the starting point - especially for our style.

O.K., now I'm going to tell you about this struggle to the beginning. Many people begin training in our style of Karate with great expectation. But for every 100 people who begin this training, how many do you think actually get to the rank of Shodan? Based on my 50 years of experience, I can tell you about the probability of reaching that point. People begin training for many reasons, but let me tell you that no matter what the reason, everyone dreams about one day putting on that Black Belt. The very first time a student puts on that Dogi and White Belt, he or she looks in the mirror and

sees a gladiator! Then it's onto the Dojo training mat. Soon, it's "POW"! The student lands a punch to the chest protector and feels that first shock to the shoulder and body. Then it's the first knee kicks and round house kicks to the arm guards. This is power! "WOW! Awesome! Did I do that?" It is all so exciting! So for the first couple of months it goes on like this. Everything is so new, so exciting! I can still remember when I first started training in Karate. I was in school. Underneath my desk, my feet practiced kicking MAE GERI with CHUSOKU. In the street I practiced ZENKUTSU DACHI. I couldn't get enough Karate, and I just couldn't help it. It was so exciting - like a first love! I thought Karate. I ate Karate. I slept Karate. I breathed Karate. It's the same for many new students. At work, at school - anywhere - you might answer OSU! to anyone in the "outside world". But a few days later, reality begins to set in. Probably now you realize you can't follow the training so well. It's a struggle just to get your sore body out of bed in those first few days. "Oh, my shoul-



Saiko Shihan Demonstrated Seiken Technique to his Black Belt Students

Shodan - Struggle for Beginning ... Continue

der...my back!” Unfortunately, this is when some drop out. The majority, though, hang in there. They remain excited for about 6 months. It’s a little tough in these first days, but there’s always something new to learn, and the student continues to feel fresh and excited for the next class.

You decide at about 3 months you’ll go up for promotion. “I’m getting closer to that Black Belt now!” you think. The night before promotion, you’re so nervous and excited! You probably can’t sleep. You may watch a little television... may read a little Kyoten I... try to calm down. But when you close your eyes, there are lots of bugs in your head, and sleep doesn’t come. Then it’s promotion day. You go to the Dojo, but even that doesn’t seem normal. There are strange new faces there – many students from other Dojos – and that makes you even more nervous. Maybe when you finish the paper test you feel like you made it. But, wait a minute... now you have to go out onto the mat and face who knows what! O.K. You get through the basics, then your Kata, then show your skill in combinations. You are really tired, but now, finally, you have to face Kumite – free fighting. In your head you think, “O.K., I can do this. I’ll hit with SEIKEN, then a hard round-house kick, and follow up with a sharp knee kick. Yeah, that’s what I’ll do.” That’s what’s in your head, but then you have to face a real opponent. Every time you punch him once, he hits you twice. You kick him – he returns 2 or 3 kicks - and punches. And he really hits! All you had imagined about what you would do in promotion is gone – along with your breath! “Where’s my oxygen?” Whoa - you’re not dreaming now, and what a wake-up call! So, in the early days of training, you are really excited about Karate. But now, at this first promotion, your body and your ego take a hit. Your enthusiasm just might disappear. Most continue on after this test, but a good number of students drop out after the first promotion. This might not be true for other styles, but in our full-contact style, this is the time when some decide that Karate is not for them.

Yes, most students hang in there from White Belt to Blue Belt and even continue on to Yellow Belt. As I said before, students usually have a fresh feeling about Karate for about 6 months. But then about the time they are coming up for Orange Belt promotion, most of them always “hit the wall”. Many drop out at this time. There are several reasons for this. By the time they reach Yel-

low Belt, their conditioning is a little better so there’s not much challenge there. (They actually get pretty clever about pacing themselves and managing their effort rather than working to improve it.) Also, repeating the once-exciting basic techniques and combinations over and over again seems more like a routine. But there are very great challenges at this stage of training. Now they are learning new techniques and movements that require greater coordination and mental concentration than ever before. It’s hard for students to get their heads around the techniques and combinations introduced in Kyoten III (for the Yellow Belt) and Kyoten IV (for the Orange Belt). Also, there’s more in-fighting now and even attacks to the face. These are difficult lessons. Even though the student tries the techniques and combinations over and over again, he or she may not see any improvement. It’s frustrating and discouraging. And the biggest reason that people drop out of training at this time is that they just get burned out. They get tired, mentally and physically, and they just can’t see that they’re improving. This is a very critical time for every Karate student. Will the student face this challenge and push through, or will he take a walk – out the door for good? Karate is not like weight training. In weight training you can feel and see the results of your effort almost instantly. (That’s why there are so many mirrors in body building gyms!) In Karate, you must be patient and train hard for a long time to see the result. You’ll push forward and you’ll get knocked back – try again. Push forward even harder – get knocked back – try again... try again... try again. You must train and train and sweat and sweat and be patient. Even though you can’t instantly see it, there is a great force building up inside of you. You’re like a volcano – the power is building steadily within you. Then, suddenly, at a time when you are facing a great challenge, this power will explode and make you the champion. I want you to understand that I’m not just talking about a physical struggle. You must meet the challenge of your internal struggles as well. We all do. We all hear “the whispers”. Should I go to the Dojo today? Do I need to sweat? And then you hear a whisper... “Oh man, it’s a beautiful day. Let’s go to the ball game.”... “Hey, let’s go see so-and-so. I think there’s a party!”... “Oh, come on. It won’t hurt to miss training today. It’s no big deal.” There are many whispers. But, if you can put the whispers aside and continue faithfully with your training, you will be rewarded. Your Karate will be deep and strong.

But, unfortunately, most students listen to the whispers. We lose about 50% of all students before they are ready

Shodan - Struggle for Beginning ... Continue

to take the 4th Kyu (Green Belt) promotion test. More will drop out, of course, after meeting this challenge. A few students will even continue on to reach 2nd Kyu (Brown Belt). If you reach this point, you have at least seen it all. That doesn't mean you know it all by a long shot, but at least you have trained with all the basic techniques and combinations, you've learned the basic Katas and some weapons Katas, and you're training in fighting strategy. You should know Kyoten Volumes I-IV very well now. You are familiar with the special points of each. Now is the time to learn it all deeply! You do this not just by training hard, but also by working with the other students. You demonstrate your knowledge for them and help them to understand. But when you do this you are not teaching... you are learning! The challenge is to understand what each student needs, whether it is a child, a middle aged person, or a strong, talented athlete. You must study the strong and weak points, mental and physical, of each student you work with. Why is this movement difficult for this person? What strong abilities does he or she have? What combination of techniques would fit (or not fit) that body style? You show them that the special point of this technique is this or that Kata's special point is that. But then you must carefully observe and try to understand their reaction. It all comes back to you. This is a golden opportunity to learn your Karate more deeply. You see, you are actually the student!

Well, maybe you've promoted to Brown Belt. You're probably thinking, "I'm so close now. I can almost reach out and touch that Black Belt!" Wait a minute. Now you're in for even harder training. In our style, it's pretty tough and you'll probably hear those whispers more than ever. They can be so sweet... so soft... so inviting. "Why don't we just play outside." or "I know... let's just jog today. That's exercise." If you visit another style Dojo, you realize that you could be a 2nd degree Black Belt over there. Or you might hear the sweetest whisper yet, "Hmmm, you know what... I could just walk out and open my own Dojo! I'll just make myself a Black Belt... yeah, 2nd degree... or



Saiko Shihan Demonstrated Jumping Knee Kick

maybe more! That's the ticket!" Well, that doesn't make it true. It's a hard road to World Oyama Karate Black Belt and the only way to get there is by sweat and hard training. You will have to summon up all your passion for World Oyama Karate from deep inside yourself. This is what will give you the strength to reach "the point of beginning".

As I said before, when you start training in Karate, everything about it is exciting to you. It's all you can think about - Karate! Karate! Karate! For almost everyone, this is just a wispy thought. It's gone in the blink of an eye. But if you can make it to the level of World Oyama Brown Belt and keep training at that level through the Black Belt promotion test, then Karate is not just in your head. You have a deep passion for Karate that is the real thing. It is the hardest promotion you'll ever take. If you do get through the World Oyama Black Belt promotion test, you will feel like you have conquered the world. You will feel very proud of what you have accomplished. You climbed that mountain all the way to the top. You had to overcome many opponents and hardships along the way. But, when you look back on all of this, you will realize that the toughest opponent you had to face in all that journey was yourself. You could never have made it without challenging and overcoming yourself many, many times.

Shodan - Struggle for Beginning ... Continue

Now, because of these experiences, you are able to see the real world of Karate. You do not yet understand it all, but at least you can see the outline of its contour.

If you have reached Black Belt, you should know that your struggle and sweat are what make you strong. If you lose sight of this and don't challenge yourself by hard training, you will not only get soft physically, but your mind will get foggy as well. All your moments of discovery and all the beautiful results you've gained will fade away. A few students who reach Black Belt hear a strong whisper come up, "Hey, you got the Black Belt. You're done. You've already mastered Karate." This kind of person may have trained 6 days a week before Black Belt promotion, but after promotion they drop down to maybe 3 times a week. Then maybe once a week. Pretty soon a month will go by before they enter the door, and before you know it, they're gone – disappear completely! That's why every student who gets the World Oyama Black Belt is on probation for at least one year. Even though you may see them with the Black Belt tied around their waist, they are not really Shodan until they have proven over a long period of time that they will continue to maintain our high standards in their training, conduct and character. I take away the Black Belt and "bust" them down to Brown Belt again if they don't. I have done it! I have to do this to protect the quality of our organization and to protect the other students. Everyone has to understand this because I don't want others to lose their rank.

Not long ago there was a Brown Belt student at Honbu who just wasn't coming to class. He wasn't making contact with me either, so I knew something was up. I can't tell you his name, but he was a smart, talented businessman. He liked to talk a lot, but he wouldn't face me. Basically he was just chicken. Recently, he got together somehow with another student of mine, a Yellow Belt, and the next thing I heard was that they had opened a dojo in a new style! He "promoted" himself to an advanced Black Belt rank and made himself a "master". It sounds unbelievable, but this is a true story! Unfortunately, a lot of people think a Black Belt is a Black Belt. They think they're all the same. But as you can see from this story, they are definitely not!

I want you to remember that a World Oyama Black Belt is trained in a very traditional way. Our teaching is based on a great history, and we do not turn out "fast

food" Black Belts. I want you to also know that everything I tell you, I apply to myself as well. I train every-day. If I didn't, I know that my knowledge, my technique and everything else I have learned over a lifetime of teaching and training would quickly fade away. This will not happen. After 50 years of experience, I am still excited about Karate! It is still fresh and new for me each day! I feel that I am still at Karate's "point of beginning"!

Dictated to Senpai Jean Johnson



Saiko Shihan Demonstrated Mawashi Geri

Champion's Road “Karate Monogatari”

by 拳氣 一
ken ki hajime

Chapter 12

Continue ...

The black belt said "Both of you need to *ki ai* more!" He told us to begin, and my opponent delivered a right hand reverse punch. I stepped to the side and kicked a front snap, and all of a sudden my opponent was groaning and struggling for breath and holding his stomach. Sensei Ken ran up and told me to step back, with my back straight and my fists in front of me. I moved back as he approached my opponent and struck him on the back twice, right above the belt, to help him breathe.

I looked over at the black belt who was the referee, expecting surprise in his face. But he was completely calm. I realized that he'd probably seen this more times than he could count. I guess he knew what he was doing. Sensei Ken came over to me and said "Stand up straight. Just stay here." I hoped that now the fight would stop.

I heard the "*ya mei!*" which means "stop."

Sensei Ken came up to me to take off the headgear. He looked at me with a smile and said "Good." I felt like raising my hands in the air and shouting "I win!" But I got back in line and stood up straight. I looked over at Mike and caught his eye. He gave me a friendly, approving nod and subtle thumbs up. I nodded back. I guess he was thinking that, since we were from the same dojo, we were sort of united in our competition against the others. I looked into the crowd of people and saw Toby, who gave me the same nod, but was smiling widely.

This experience was different than anything I had ever known before in my life. The white belt promotion ended at about 1 p.m. That means the whole thing lasted just about 45 minutes. I felt like it had lasted a really long time, but at the same time like it went by in a snap.

After the promotion was over, Toby said to me "Let's get some lunch." But I wasn't hungry. I was just so tired. I wanted to just go home and take a hot bath. So that's what I did.

Soaking in the hot water, I thought about the promotion. I thought about the *Kihon kata* and how I had done it with a lot of tension. *Kumite* (free fight) created more tension than I had expected. As I lay there, I felt that my heart was still pounding from the fight. Before the free fight, I felt total confidence. But whenever I saw my opponent's eye, my confidence and everything else was gone. If Sensei Ken had not advised me, "front snap kick," I don't know what the result of the fight would have been. I guess black belt (*Senpai*) and *Sensei* experience this feeling all the time. This made my respect for the black belts grow greater and greater, thinking about how many times they had experienced that kind of fight.

I didn't realize that this part of me existed until today. I discovered something new during the fight. To me, the free fight was a big and important experience. Now I understood a little more what *Shihan* meant when he said that, in Karate, we would be challenging ourselves. He said "try to understand Karate not only in your head, but through your total body. Understanding with your total body is totally different than just knowing about Karate in your head." I felt like I understood a little bit. Oyama karate was wonderful, I thought. I was ready to train more. I knew at that moment that Karate could contribute tremendously to my life ... but I was still so tired.

Chapter 13

The days leading up to the promotion seemed like they had gone by so fast. I felt like I needed to rest a little bit, so I took off almost a whole week from training at the dojo.

The next week, Toby's body had started to heal, and he felt like training again, so we got ready to go together to the dojo one day. I felt a little bit guilty for not training for a whole week. But with Toby, I felt a little better, since he hadn't been there for weeks himself. I thought, maybe I could hide behind him, in a sense. When we

Champion's Road “Karate Monogatari” 空手物語 ... Continue

got to the dojo, I didn't see Sensei Ken anywhere, so I took a big sigh of relief.

After I changed into my *dogi*, I went to a corner of the room to do some stretches. I heard the bathroom door open suddenly. I turned to look, and in walked Sensei Ken. He looked straight at me and said "O-o-o-osu! You finished with your vacation?"

He walked straight up to Toby and me. "Let me tell you something." His mouth was smiling, but not his eyes. My body felt suddenly tense, and I was short of breath. "If you want to try for the next level of promotion, it's very important that you show a committed attitude. Sometimes, Shihan watches more than just the promotion itself. He pays attention to your attitude *after* the promotion. Your attitude is what makes you pass or fail. The point is, you or anybody else who takes the promotion goes through a tremendous experience. That experience will carry over to your training. But the more time you take off afterward, the more your experience fades away, every day, until it is lost."

I felt like somebody had hit me in the head with a baseball bat. I felt then far guiltier than I felt before we went into the dojo.

Sensei Ken's eyes saw all the way into the bottom of my heart. He knew my feelings. I



Saiko Shihan's Bo Demonstration

Champion's Road "Karate Monogatari" 空手物語 ... Continue

felt that he could read my mind. I knew I had to get onto the mat and start sweating. He said "Zac, do you know why I told you to do the front-snap kick during the promotion? Did you think about it?"

I just muttered, "Um.. Ah.. Osu." But really I didn't understand.

"Zac, you have a Karate *kyoten* book, right?"

"Osu."

"Do you remember page 82? Did you read it?"

"O.. um.. os... osu."

"Well, I tried to explain this before. Most beginners, when they fight, rely on their strongest hand or strongest foot. Your opponent was a very powerful guy, so he did a right hand reverse punch and a right foot roundhouse kick only. So whenever he delivered a blow, he always left his body open. Zac, you have speed. So you tried to kick the roundhouse kick to the face while he was open. But he kept moving closer to you, so the angle caused you to hit only his shoulder. So that's why I told you to use the front snap. Just as soon as his right hand reverse punch came up, you used the right timing for the front snap, and that's how you knocked his wind out. If the curve technique is working for your opponent, you need to counter with a straight technique. And also, you should use a curve technique for an opponent's straight technique. Of course, this won't always work, but it is a fundamental, basic strategy for *kumite*.

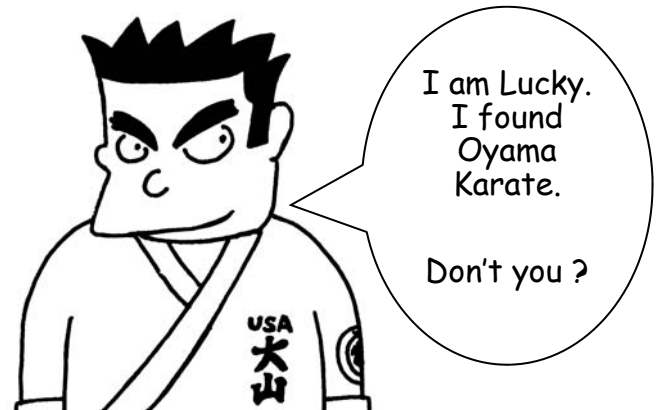
"Also, beginners tend to rely on the roundhouse. But they always worry about hurting their foot when they do a front snap kick. It is difficult to use the ball of the foot. So you and your opponent just kept roundhouse kicking one another. This is typical. When a roundhouse comes up, the fighter exposes the whole body to the opponent. So, if you get the timing perfectly, and get in the front snap, you can win. I know you think about this, don't you Zac." He was looking right into my face. I was sweating. But everything he said to me began to make sense.

I gave a deep "Osu." I was amazed by the clarity of his explanation. Toby just nodded, with his arms crossed, the whole time that Sensei Ken spoke. He acted like it was all obvious to him. This made me a little bit mad.

Sensei Ken said "Zac, you have a good sense of speed. If you keep training, you're going to be good." Then he looked at Toby and said "And ... You too." Toby was so happy that he said that.

I went onto the mat, and took a deep sigh of relief. I appreciated Sensei Ken paying attention to me. I want to work harder. I was ready to sweat.

To be continued.....



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