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World Oyama Karate

Honbu Newsletter

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FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

By Founder Saiko Shihan Y. Oyama



The Three Musketeers and I in our new Russian hats

Sensei Naoi came from Tokyo and Shihan Saito came from San Francisco. I flew out of Birmingham to Atlanta, where I had a 3 hour layover. From Atlanta, I took a 9 hour flight to Amsterdam. Shihan Saito was on the same flight. As we prepared to land, I looked out the window. On my last trip, the ground was white with ice and snow. This time, there were only a few spots of white, but no green. The trees were all still bare and appeared to be waiting patiently for spring to finally come. Shihan Karius, some of the Russian Branch Chiefs and Sensei Naoi and Shihan Masa met us at the gate. As soon as we went outside to the parking lot, the cold air reminded me instantly that it was still winter in Russia. Shihan Karius gave me a coat and muffler and put a hat on my head. I guess he thought I was maybe too old for the Russian winter. On the last trip, Sensei Naoi showed up in a blazer and jeans, looking like a musician. But this time, he wore a t-shirt and sweatshirt with the Oyama Karate logo and was eager to make sure I saw it.

In the hotel lobby, about 10 of Shihan Karius's youngest students (ages 3 and 4), did a demonstration to welcome us. I smiled and clapped and had pictures taken with them. There was nothing on the schedule for the rest of that day except to relax and eat dinner. The following day we would start the clinics. Before showing us to our rooms, Shihan Karius asked if I would teach his advanced students Nunchaku Kata Kihon Sono Ni. I said sure, no problem.

Once we unpacked, Shihan Masa, Shihan Saito and Sensei Naoi came to my room. I asked them about how their dojos were. I also asked how they were feeling. "Osu! Best condition!" they all said. Of course, they knew that was how they should answer regardless of how

This year has been full of travel for me. In mid-March, I travelled to Japan to conduct a clinic and promotion testing. Soon after I came back, I left for Russia in April. We had the American Cup Tournament in Birmingham a couple weeks after I returned, then the Fighter's Cup Tournament in San Francisco a couple weeks after that.

It has been a crazy schedule so far this year, but I feel fortunate that I'm still able to travel and teach people in many different countries. Below is a recount of my trip to Russia in April:

April 20th-21st

I left for St. Petersburg. Along with students from the Russian dojos, people from Crimea, Estonia and Japan attended the clinics in April. Shihan Masa and

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they were feeling. I looked at the 3 of them. They were middle-aged now, but still looked young. They reminded me of the Three Musketeers—"All for one and one for all!"

"So," I said, "who's going to stand in front of everyone tomorrow and teach Nunchaku Kata Kihon Sono Ni?" I asked. Shihan Masa and Shihan Saito pointed at Sensei Naoi. Sensei Naoi started blinking his eyes compulsively as he always did when he was nervous. "What's the matter?" I asked, "you're just so excited about teaching nunchaku?" He just mumbled nervously. "Well, that's why it's a good experience for you." I made the 3 of them practice while I sat and relaxed and drank beer. After about 45 minutes, Sensei Naoi stopped blinking—he seemed more comfortable and seemed confident.

Shihan Karius took us to dinner near the hotel. He pointed out the architecture of the buildings in St. Petersburg and explained how the powerful Czar Nicholas had brought architects from Rome to design them, which is why they had statues in front and many other Romanesque features. We went inside a large department store, which looked the same as one you might find in New York or Tokyo. The 3rd floor was full of restaurants. We had no idea what to order, except we knew we wanted beer. The other diners were mostly young couples. We noticed right away that all of the waitresses were stunningly beautiful, like models. The Three Musketeers kept glancing away from their menus.

April 22nd



It's very strange how easily Sensei Naoi can get beautiful women to talk to him. Sometimes, both Shihans are jealous

The next day, at the first clinic, Sensei Naoi did a great job with Nunchaku Kata Kihon Sono Ni. He couldn't speak Russian, but just kiai'd. I told him that he should say "Harasho!" when teaching, which means, "Great!" in Russian. So, he taught with his broken English and shouted "Harasho!" periodically. At first, they had no idea what he was saying, but eventually they caught on.

When I saw Sensei Naoi in his dogi, I was struck by how dark and tan his face, chest and arms were. Shihan Masa and Shihan Saito didn't look like that at all. I wondered if Sensei Naoi had been running in Tokyo with shorts and no t-shirt to build up his condition, and that was why he was so tan. After the clinic, we changed clothes in Shihan Karius's office. Sensei Naoi's back was just as dark as the rest of him.

"Saito," I said, "Naoi looks really dark. I bet he's been training on the rooftop of his condominium."

"Osu, Saiko Shihan," Shihan Saito said, "I don't think it's a natural suntan. I think he's been going to a tanning booth."

"You think so?"

"Well, if we see his butt and it's just as dark as the rest of him, we know he's been going to a tanning booth. If it's white, that means it's a natural tan."

I wasn't about to ask Sensei Naoi to show me his butt. However, I was really curious to know how he got so tan. "Naoi!" I said.

"Osu?"

"Why are you so dark? You been training outside?"

"Osu, no."

"Then why?"

He said that he went to the gym with his wife twice a week. Before leaving, they went into the tanning booth. It was 500 yen (about \$5) for 10 minutes. He said it was very cheap and he liked it. Normally, people wouldn't just come out and admit something like this, but Naoi wasn't shy at all. He is a very transparent person.

Lots of young men working in host bars, body builders and models go to tanning booths to make themselves darker and more appealing. Host bars are full of young men with long hair and tight clothes that fawn over female patrons. I looked at Sensei Naoi—he was middle-aged, not young. His hair was shaved, not long. He wasn't fat, but definitely wouldn't look good in tight clothes. But I teased him anyway. "You have a

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side business as a host or something?" I asked Sensei Naoi.

"No, no, my wife would kill me!" He didn't get my joke and thought I was serious. He called his wife "Tsuma" which is a very old-fashioned word. Usually people say "Kanai". Even none of my friends say "Tsuma".

"You always refer to your wife as 'tsuma'?" I asked him.

"Osu, yes."

"Saito, what do you call your wife?"

"Boss," Shihan Saito said.

April 23rd

We had 2 clinics today—children/juniors followed by a Kumite clinic. The children's clinic was 90% white belts. There were a couple blue belts, but they were all beginners. Their parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters were all watching from the bleachers. We taught them Shi-Ho Kata and did a little fighting. The Three Musketeers, of course, couldn't speak Russian, but they communicated with their bodies and screamed and yelled so all the kids could follow them.

For the fighting clinic, I had everyone line up in two lines facing each other. We rotated the lines so that everyone got to fight with many different partners. The clinic focused on footwork and how to use sute waza/kime waza (set-up and finishing techniques). Most people think that good technique is the key to fighting. But before that, you need footwork and the ability to move without stiffness; you have to find your hyoshi (rhythm). I explained and demonstrated how timing, footwork and tempo give life to each technique. Without those things, an opponent can easily read what you are going to do. When most people are under pressure, they forget about those things and just try to deliver techniques with their dominant hand/foot. So, it's extremely important to train with timing and footwork so that you can maintain control of those things even under pressure.

April 24th

Today was the last full day. We held a Black Belt promotion that started in the morning. Under Russian law, whenever a Black Belt



Russia has a lot of very powerful children

promotion his held, doctors and paramedics must be present and on standby to attend to any injuries.

The level of fighters in Russia is one of the highest in the world. Last year, I attended the Kyokushin World Championship in Tokyo. There were about 128 fighters and the Russians dominated overall. The champion, although not Russian, was from the same general region (Eastern Europe). At the start of the promotion testing, I was unsure whether or not to have Sensei Naoi, Shihan Masa and Shihan Saito fight. I could see that they wanted to, but the students taking promotion were young and most had a lot of experience.

Shihan Saito is 50 years old and both Sensei Naoi and Shihan Masa are in their mid-40's. Also, they teach every day, so don't have much time to train for themselves and build up their abilities. Plus, I knew they wouldn't be at their best condition after traveling a long way and being jet-lagged. But in the end, I decided that gaining experience now is what they need for the future. I'm not going to live forever, so I want to pass on knowledge and experience to the next generation while I still can.

After the Kata and Kihon portion of the test, I had the 3 of them stand in front and fight. There were 16 people trying promotion—all younger than the Three Musketeers. I could tell the Russian students were excited. They'd already eaten meals and trained together, so there was a kind of friendship feeling there. So the first round of fighting wasn't at full power. But as it continued, they fought harder and harder. Their kiais became different. I wondered if those 3 guys could handle it or not, but in the end, they did great. At one point, Shihan Masa did a back kick that hit the teeth of the other guy. His teeth were fine, but Shihan Masa's heel was cut open. Russian teeth are very strong.



SUMMER CAMP 2016

Orange Beach/Gulf Shore, Alabama

July 14th - July 17th, 2016

Sweat ! Sweat ! Sweat !



<http://www.worldoyama.com/summercamp.htm>

That night, we had a Sayonara party. There were students from the Russian branches as well as Crimea and Estonia. Official members of the Russian Karate Association had also been invited and most everyone wore a coat and tie. Of course, the Three Musketeers and I didn't have anything like that, just World Oyama Karate shirts. Many of the students did various types of performances. It was a great time. At the end, 3 young Black Belt men performed a traditional Russian dance. It was an extremely powerful, dynamic and physically demanding dance. At the end of their dance, they invited the Three Musketeers to come up and try. Shihan Masa and Shihan Saito were very reluctant, but Sensei Naoi jumped right in. Of course he couldn't dance, but he

hopped around and punched and kicked and everyone loved it. Sometimes I really wonder which planet Sensei Naoi is from.

April 25th

We left for home in the morning. It was a great trip and wonderful experience. On a final note, the last time I went to Russia I took my own toilet paper because I'd heard Russian toilet paper was of very poor quality. This time, I didn't take any. And for the record, the toilet paper in the Russian hotel was far better and softer than that in the Amsterdam and Paris airports.



Can't believe Summer Camp is here !

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