



ZenQuest Martial Arts Center

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An Okinawa Karatedo Association, Demian Mata Jiu-jitsu Network and Sityodtong Boston Affiliate

NEWSLETTER

May 2023

What a Trip

by S. Mark Flynn

I recently travelled to Okinawa for some training, cultural exchange, and to see some old friends. This was my fifth trip to the birthplace of the martial arts known around the world as Karate. As with the other visits, this would turn out to be a blast and an incredible learning experience on several levels. I will try to cover some of the highlights here now.

Planning - The original idea was to return to Okinawa in 2020 or 2021, but the COVID19 situation threw a monkey wrench into that. Once travel restrictions to Japan were lifted, the new plan was for both Sensei Connie and I to make the trip in March of this year in time to see the 'Sakura' or cherry blossom season. However, with ZenQuest busier than ever and a sick animal at home it was decided that I would go it alone this time. At times it was a struggle to not get a little down about the fact that I would not have my partner with me to share in the new experiences and training, but I decided to just make the best of it and enjoy the trip.

Lost in Tokyo - What turned out to be an incredible adventure in many ways had kind of a rocky start. After over 18 hours of travel, I arrived in Tokyo to find out that my final flight to Okinawa had been cancelled due to a system failure at the airport. After checking in with the airline I was given some cash and told to find a hotel and come back for an AM flight. Being travel weary, what followed was about two hours of being lost in Tokyo. I essentially bounced from one hotel to another trying to find a place to crash for the night. Eventually, I was able to find a spot, get a few hours of sleep, return to the airport, and finally catch a flight to Okinawa. In a crazy 'de-Ja vu' I had to crash at a hotel in Washington, D.C for an extra night due to delays on my return.

The Training - In order to receive high level advancements from the Okinawa Karate Association candidates need to train a minimum of 30 hours in Okinawa with intense scrutiny from some of the highest-level Masters in the world. In this way the organization can maintain high standards for its advanced students and familiarize them with the history, culture, and spirit of Okinawa.

After losing a day in Tokyo I was left with ten training days before test day, which translates to an average of three hours of training each day. Since the workouts in the motherland are typically two hours long this meant most of the days would include two hours each morning, and two additional hours most evenings. With a variety of instructors and dojos to visit, this proved to be a grueling physical and mental challenge.



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Muay Thai Seminar

Kru Mark DellaGrotte dropped into ZenQuest to provide another great Muay Thai seminar on Saturday, April 29th. The Sityodtong Thai boxing Master focused on a variety of strategies in this clinic ranging from kicking fundamentals to clinch strategies. The group of about twenty were kept busy for over two hours of intensive instruction.

Kru Mark is widely known as one of the top Muay Thai masters in the world. His knowledge of Muay Thai is only surpassed by his ability to communicate and help others improve their game. For several years now Kru Mark has also worked directly for the Ultimate Fighting Championships. His job there is to provide technical support to the commentators about the techniques and strategies taking place in real time as the bouts play out.

Thanks to everyone that joined us for this one, and thanks to Kru Mark and Marie for a great seminar.



AC News

On Saturday, May 6th we hosted Advanced Concepts in Uechi-Ryu. After discussing some teaching issues, the clinic focused on some finer points of Sanchin Kata, advanced Kata, and pre-arranged sparring drills known as 'Yakusoku Kumite Dai Ni.' Sensei Mark also shared some insight and stories from his recent trip to Okinawa, the birthplace of the style.

An Advanced Concepts clinic for Sityodtong Muay Thai (for Blue Prajiet and above) is scheduled for Saturday, May 20. Qualified students are strongly encouraged to attend.

On the Hair

One of the important rules of hygiene in training is that "The student's hair must be kept so as not to interfere with training." This means that students with longer hair must take steps to keep their hair out of their eyes and face, and out of the techniques and activities required in their classes. In the worst cases, longer hair will wind up in the face or eyes of their partners. This can be resolved with hair ties, pony tails, buns, braiding, or even wearing an athletic cap.

This also applies to students with beards. Long facial hair can also interfere with training in different ways. This is especially true for Jiu-jitsu practice where longer facial hair can interfere with grips, and wind up in a partner's eyes or mouth. Short beard stubble can also be problematic because it will abrade a partner's skin or eyes in the heat of sparring and rolling.

Essentially, students need to keep facial hair at a length that is considerate for their training partners. Beards in the gym should be kept to about 16 mm or #5 clipper length maximum. A student in the process of starting a beard should refrain from sparring or rolling for about a week or until the beard is at least 3 mm or #1 clipper length has been achieved.

Ultimately, the chief instructors have final say about whether a student's hair is appropriate for training. Failure to keep appropriate hygiene and be considerate of training partners in the gym can eventually lead to dismissal.



IMPORTANT DATES

Sat, 5/20, 1:15p - Adv Muay Thai
 Sat, 5/27 & Mon, 5/29 - NO CLASSES
 Mon, 6/19 - NO CLASSES
 Sat, 6/24 - NAGA Springfield
 Sun, 6/25, 10:00a - Dojo Clean-up Day!!

NEW STUDENTS!

Welcome: Penelope Chavez-Norbury, Louis Silva, Carter Waldron, Mike Petell, Austyn Ryan, Tyler Mandell, Cole Sawyer

Welcome Back:
 Andrey Norin

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Antonio Sabato 5/5
 Craig Jones 5/7
 Marek Mackey 5/7
 Brody Mechek 5/8
 Robert Inesta 5/10
 Anthony Lizotte 5/10
 John Logsdon 5/10
 Kathy Petrucci 5/11
 Andrew Arce 5/15
 Mathieu Moreau 5/19
 Tim Noble 5/19
 Denise Devereaux 5/20
 Oscar Southard 5/20
 Myles Hamann 5/23
 Weston Aube 5/23
 Louis Silva 5/24
 Jedd Hall 5/25
 Amanda Saunders 5/25
 Connie Gordon 5/29
 Citlali Hernandez 5/29
 Gustavo Perez 5/31

RECENT PROMOTIONS**TIGERS:**

7kyu - Emma Bordonaro, Elijah Schrag,
 Noah Schrag
 8kyu - Tony Kennedy, Joel Ospina-Cruz,
 Jonathan Curinga
 9kyu - Logan Polk, Live Musayev, Axsel
 Robbins, Gracie Dufur

DRAGONS:

5kyu - Lizzie Sondrini
 9kyu - Grace McMeekin

COBRAS:**UECHI:**

9kyu - Kelsey Koldys, Andrew McMeekin

PYTHONS:**JIU-JITSU:**

3 stripe white - Elias Casey
 2 stripe white - Kyle Dube
 1 stripe white - James Ladd, Jim Losaw

MUAY THAI:

White prajiet - Cristyan Garcia, Elijah
 Southard, Noah Farevaag

Terminology**Friend**

Japanese: Tomodachi

Brazilian: Amigo

Thai: P'huen

**“Best Martial Arts Academy”
 ZenQuest Martial Arts**

Berkshire Eagle's
 Readers Choice Awards
**SIX YEARS
 RUNNING!**



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S'koshi Itami – Although I had trained for over thirty hours during my last visit in 2018 I was still required to put in another thirty hours before a major promotion. This was getting to be kind of a big deal after all. After five four-hour training days on top of jet lag, sleep deprivation, and wandering around Tokyo my hip began to break down. For those not familiar I had hip replacement surgery in August of 2022. Although my recovery was going well it was not nearly as far along as I had hoped when I originally booked this trip. After this type of surgery most people would just be happy walking the dog or shopping around the supermarket at this point. What I was doing was about the equivalent of doing a 3k run in the morning, cooling down, and then doing another one at night.

On training day five I was clearly limping and my main teacher, Master Tsutomu Nakahodo, asked about it. I said that it was a little sore or "s'koshi itami", but that I could push through without a problem. The next day I was told that I would only need to do two hours for each day remaining before the test under the circumstances. Doing a little math, that would give me the required thirty hours.

The Test - On the Friday night near the end of my visit Sensei Yamashiro and I went out to celebrate a bit. After some food he took me to a karaoke bar in Okinawa city. We arrived to find five local Okinawan people there, plus the owner. Sensei Yamashiro seemed to know the owner behind the bar, who was the only person who spoke a little English. Sensei explained that I was an American from Massachusetts, and they were all super nice.

We all hit it off well despite the language barrier. After a couple of songs by the locals and the guest, Sensei Yamashiro hopped from his barstool and said "Back in one hour Mark San" . . . and he walked out the door. After a moment of panic, I grabbed the karaoke remote and thought "I'm just going to karaoke until he gets back." So, I asked my new friends what American songs they wanted to hear and started singing. I sang Elvis, the Beatles, Creedence, John Denver, Barry Manilow...even the Carpenters. After almost two hours Sensei Yamashiro came back in to find me belting out John Lennon's Imagine with my new friends clapping and singing along. He looked around and gave me a big smile. I guess I passed that test.

Leveling Up - With my last Uechi-Ryu promotion happening in 2012 I had met the minimum requirements for the next level in 2019. The way things turned out I headed back to Okinawa for the first half of April of this year. I think I would've passed the test going into this trip, but with all the training and scrutiny I was definitely better prepared. On test day I warmed up a bit, and then it was time. I was able to focus well and include 90% of the critiques I had been given. I was very happy with the form, strength, and spirit I brought to it. The comments from the test board were mostly about taking care of my body going forward, promoting the art of Uechi-Ryu, and doing my best in teaching it to others.

Of all the martial arts that we offer at ZenQuest, Uechi-Ryu does have the most to offer for serious real-world self-defense. More importantly, it has the most to offer in the area of learning focus, self-control, and staying calm in our daily lives.

Ichariba Chode' - The Okinawans or 'Uchinan' people have a saying, *Ichariba Chode'* which means "When we meet we are family." On this trip I made many new friends including my new brother Kazuhiko Shinjo, who helped me tremendously on this visit. I solidified friendships with many of my other teachers and training partners from the past. I also had the pleasure of meeting a couple of new brothers from Germany, who are also long time members of the OKA . . . and countless new karaoke friends.

Fortunate – Although I am super happy to get to a level that I never imagined when I started training 40+ years ago, at this point promotions mostly mean responsibility to me. Responsibility to provide the best instruction, facility, and training atmosphere I can...and represent these arts well.

I am very fortunate to have a great dojo/gym, an amazing group of people to teach and train with, and incredible teachers, too. I am very happy to know these arts as well as I do, and to be able to share them with others. Most of all I am lucky to have an amazing partner who is willing to share the grind and face the challenges that come along. Thanks to her and thanks to everyone else involved in the crazy soup of my martial arts life.

