HISTORY OF KARATE

INSIDE

MAS OYAMA’S
HARD-CORE KYOKUSHIN KARATE CONDITIONING PROGRAM
Mas Oyama is a great barrel of a man, seemingly with the strength and constitution of an ox. Karate history in Japan is filled with stories of his feats of strength and his sensation-seeking stunts such as killing bulls and ferocious dogs with his bare fists.

Oyama winces a little now when reminded of his days with the dogs and bulls. He’s older now, in his 40s, and heads his own Kyokushinkai school with branches in many countries. He prefers the role of elder statesman of karate and leaves the publicity chasing to younger men.

But about one thing, Oyama hasn’t changed. And that’s his love for exuberant outdoor training that stretches the karate man, or woman, to the utmost in physical endurance. Blessed with a powerful frame, he’s always practiced this type of rugged training and thinks his students and followers should, too.
Kumite is practiced on rough rocks high in the mountains to improve the students' balance and toughen their feet.

DISCLAIMER
BLACK BELT COMMUNICATIONS, an Active Interest Media Publication, as publisher, does not endorse and makes no representation, warranty or guarantee concerning the safety or effectiveness of either the products and services advertised in this magazine or the martial arts or other techniques discussed or illustrated in this document. The publisher expressly disclaims any and all liability relating to the manufacture, sale or use of such products and services and the application of the techniques discussed or illustrated in this document. The purchase or use of some of the products, services or techniques advertised or discussed in this document may be illegal in some areas of the United States or other countries. Therefore, you should check federal, state, and local laws prior to your purchase or use of these products, services or techniques. The publisher makes no representation or warranty concerning the legality of the purchase or use of these products, services and techniques in the United States or elsewhere. Because of the nature of some of the products, services and techniques advertised or discussed in this document, you should consult a physician before using these products or services or applying these techniques. Specific self-defense responses illustrated in this document may not be justified in any particular situation in view of all of the circumstances or under applicable federal, state or local law. Neither Black Belt Communications nor the author makes any representation or warranty regarding the legality or appropriateness of any technique mentioned or depicted in this document. You may be injured if you apply or train in the techniques illustrated in this document and neither Black Belt Communications nor the author is responsible for any such injury that may result. It is essential that you consult a physician regarding whether or not to attempt any technique described in this document.
Although a little older and heavier, Oyama still takes a band of his more adventurous followers into the outdoors twice a year for a hair-on-the-chest type of training rarely practiced outside Japan. Every winter right after the new year, he can be seen chugging along barefoot at the head of his troops as they trudge across the snowy slopes of Mount Mitsumine. During the summer, the hardy band either continues mountain training or descends to the shore and gives battle against the mighty waves that roll in from the sea.

**Strength and Power**

Oyama’s views on the benefits of outdoor conditioning tie in with his general philosophy of karate training. Until recently, he believed in strength and power. It has certainly not been a soft style of goju karate that he has taught. Strength, combined with speed and technique, have been the three pillars of his system.

It’s only been lately, as he’s grown more mature, that Oyama has begun to appreciate increasingly that brute strength alone is not enough for great power but that a focusing of the mind can help accomplish the same ends. Nonetheless, in his outdoor training, it is the Oyama of old — with a simple and less complicated philosophy — that heads to the mountains for the type of training that tests a man’s endurance.

Oyama has always loved the mountains, ever since he spent a year and a half enduring their most primitive hardships when he was in his early 20s. At that time, he was seeking to discipline himself and perfect his karate. He’s written eloquently of the trials he underwent on Mount Kiyozumi.

**Young Pupil Can’t Take It**

Oyama originally went into the mountains with one of his early students, but after some months, the youth could take no more and ran away. It’s easier to understand why after one reads a brief description of their training.

“We rose at 5 in the morning, trained ourselves by running up and down the steep hill, practiced seiken tsuki 2,000 times against the stumps of trees, and broke sprigs down with shuto, looking upon them as opponents.”

“We continued our training every day. Moreover, to cultivate the strength of our arms, we practiced the bench press several hundred times daily with a barrel made of stone weighing 130 pounds. We pounded on sandbags thousands of times, and we practiced jiyu kumite.”

Being deep in the mountains and alone during the first several months was a test of their courage. At night, “the wind sounded as Satan’s footsteps,” Oyama says. “We had nightmares and were awakened many times. Every night we felt solitude and horror as if we were left behind at the end of the earth or in some abyss of hell.”

But when Oyama came down off the mountain that first time, he was a superb
physical specimen. His stay in the wild had taught him discipline as well as technique, as he soon showed. Shortly after his descent, he entered competitions and beat everyone in sight in Japan. (Oyama was born in Korea, but at the age of 15, he came to Japan, where he has made his home ever since.)

Today, in winter and summer, it’s back to the mountains for training, this time to Mount Mitsumine where he maintains a dojo at the Mitsumine Shrine. The shrine and dojo are located 90 miles west of Tokyo in a pine-forested region where the first shrine was said to have been founded some 2,500 years ago.

For his summer training, Oyama usually attracts about 125 men and women. In the mountains, they make runs of several miles up and down narrow roads every morning. The days are spent in long sessions of exercise and kumite, interspersed with periods of zazen meditation.

Karate for the Mind and Body

“Karate is a training and discipline of the mind and body,” Oyama says, and neither is neglected in his outdoor sessions.

The students sleep in special quarters set aside for them at the shrine. The women are quartered in one section and the men in another. Otherwise, for the summer training, the women participate right along with the men in the full program of exercises and conditioning.

The days begin early, before daybreak, when the students arise and cook their own meals. Then they clean up the dojo before setting off for a run through the mountains and the day’s exercises. Oyama is a strong believer in training in rivers and streams. He believes it builds good balance in the students and forces them to extend themselves to the utmost as they try to follow through on kumite and forms when bucking the resistance of the water.

Because of his delight with water training, he’s started bringing his group down from the mountains during the summer to the seashore to test themselves against the waves. This is water training at its most difficult. The waves are high and can flatten a man or woman who isn’t in top physical condition.

The pull of the waves, both going in and rolling back out to sea, builds the leg muscles and teaches a sense of balance. A person trying to resist being bowled over by their force and still keep up kumite against an opponent is going to be ready for just about anything that comes when he or she is on dry ground.

The waves roll with such force that when members of the group practice in the surf, they have to tie a long rope around one another to keep from being sucked out to sea.

Winter Training Demands Endurance

The summer training is a pleasant outdoor excursion for Oyama and his followers, but it’s the winter training that separates the men from the boys. It’s incredibly demanding, and only some 30 of the toughest karateka choose to accompany him and endure the week of hardship. Occasionally, one or two women will go along, but their training is restricted.

The temple grounds are poorly heated, and the karate men sleep under thin blankets during the freezing cold nights. It’s all designed to discipline the mind and body.

After rising around 5 a.m., the group engages in meditation with the temple priests from 5:30 to 6:30. Needless to say, it’s quite cold when the meditation begins, yet the karateka are expected to sit immobile and show no sign of cold or discomfort. After that comes breakfast and the cleaning of the dojo and temple grounds. The group then engages in outside exercises and kumite for the rest of the morning. All this is done while clad only in a thin gi. Coats and sweaters are never worn, and neither are shoes.

After lunch comes the high point of the day as far as sheer physical endurance is concerned. With Oyama at the head, the group takes off for a run and hike through the woods and down to a waterfall several miles distant. At the edge of the lake, the group plunges into the icy water and engages in forms and kumite. The men then remove their gi jackets, and one by one they wade across the water to stand under the waterfall.

There, with the freezing water pounding on them, they try to stand rigid and endure the cold by concentrating furiously and attempting to meditate away their discomfort. Needless to say, it’s not all that easy to ignore the cold, and few ever do completely. The experience can be quite taxing. One of Oyama’s students,
Tadashi Nakamura, explained to Black Belt what it’s like:

“It’s quite painful to stand under the waterfall. It’s not only the cold, either. The force of all that water coming down beats on you. And since you’re already so cold and your skin is blue, the water strikes you like thousands of needles, each stinging terribly.”

While women come along to participate in waterside exercises, they don’t go under the falls. This is reserved for the men.

After coming out from under the falls, the men don a dry gi jacket that they’ve carried along, and the group hikes back up the mountain. The round trip takes about two hours, during which they never go inside to get warm or even approach a fire to thaw out chilled bones and flesh.

With such rugged training, it’s a wonder the participants don’t come down with pneumonia. Surprisingly, few even catch colds. One reason is that most of those who go for winter training are in top physical condition before they assault the heights of Mount Mitsumine.

Frostbite for the Beginners

The white belts who insist on coming along suffer the most, often from frostbite. A member of the group who’s had medical training is always there to care for those who get frostbitten and to provide any other medical aid.

“But advanced students — the black belts — usually don’t suffer from frostbite,” Nakamura says. “They are used to this kind of training, and they have hardened their bodies and trained their minds. Their ki is developed and strong.”

After hiking back from the waterfall, the group still does not go inside and warm up. Instead, they participate in more exercises in the snow to “cool off” after the exertion of the hike.

Any who have suffered from frostbite during the excursion are allowed to go inside, of course, where they’re given lukewarm baths. If the injured tissue becomes infected, medication is applied. Every year, no more than four or five people come down with frostbite.

But they don’t quit and go home. They stay around the temple a day or two practicing their kata inside. Then they often plunge right back out into the snow and under the falls again.

Once the exercise is over, there’s still no time for rest. First, there are baths, and then the evening meal has to be prepared and eaten. From 8 p.m. to 9 p.m., the group holds a meeting and perhaps engages in a little more meditation before retiring to bed. The next morning, they’re at it again.

This is the type of training that Oyama has always loved and understands best. It’s the sort of thing that demands of the karate man that last bit of effort, of which he might never have thought himself possible. As long as he’s able, Oyama will be climbing that mountain, searching for something better in himself and teaching his students to do the same.
FULL-CONTACT KARATE:
ADVANCED SPARRING TECHNIQUES AND HARD-CORE PHYSICAL CONDITIONING
by Kenji Yamaki
Kenji Yamaki is one of only 14 people in the world to have endured the 100-man kumite, the ultimate test of martial arts mastery devised by Mas Oyama. In this new two-DVD set, the bona fide warrior demonstrates his stylized yamaki-ryu take on kyokushin. The techniques include blocks, counters, double attacks, feints, front-kick combinations, jumping kicks, roundhouse-kick drills and side-step attacks. The DVDs also include extensive drilling for improving the strength and variety of your front-leg kicking techniques, as well as body-part-specific exercises and demonstrations of power-building heavy-bag and body-shield drill barrages. Bonus features include audio options for English or Japanese plus an exclusive interview with Kenji Yamaki delving into the meaning of self-respect, student behavior in the dojo, his personal experience with bullying, how meditation can enhance physical performance, the history of his school and his future goals as a martial artist. (Approx. 78 min.) DVD Code 9619 — Retail $45.95

SHOTOKAN'S SECRET EXPANDED EDITION:
THE HIDDEN TRUTH BEHIND KARATE’S FIGHTING ORIGINS
by Bruce D. Clayton, Ph.D.
Book Code 512 — Retail $19.95

TRAINING SECRETS OF CHAMPIONS
by Jon Valera, Larry Lam and Richard Branden
Representing the arts of taekwondo, wushu, kung fu and karate, Larry Lam, Richard Branden and Jon Valera present their individual winning workouts. (Approx. 58 min.) DVD Code 7749 — NOW ONLY $9.99

BLACK BELT: THE FIRST 100 ISSUES
Black Belt: The First 100 Issues (Covers and Highlights 1961-1972) celebrates the genesis of one of the longest-running and most influential sports magazines ever in a large-format, softcover, color coffee-table book. As a commemorative compilation of Black Belt magazine’s industry-defining material, it features the cover art and content highlights of the first 100 issues. Cover photographs and illustrations include such martial arts luminaries as Bruce Lee, Chuck Norris, Mas Oyama, Joe Lewis, Gene LeBell as well as celebrity practitioners like Sean Connery and Toshiro Mifune. 208 pgs. (ISBN-13: 978-0-89750-173-6)
Book Code 499 — NOW ONLY $4.99
SAVE 86%

PHILOSOPHY OF FIGHTING:
MORALS AND MOTIVATIONS
OF THE MODERN WARRIOR
by Keith Vargo
The thoughtful writings of Keith Vargo entertain readers by examining the trends, traditions, cultures, fields and thinkers that shape the martial arts. 231 pgs. (ISBN-13: 978-0-89750-174-3)
Book Code 500 — NOW ONLY $5.99
SAVE 65%

STAY IN THE FIGHT:
A MARTIAL ATHLETE’S GUIDE TO PREVENTING
AND OVERCOMING INJURY
by Danny Dring and Johnny D. Taylor
Based on the personal experiences of the authors, the book teaches readers how to achieve and maintain athletic health through a variety of mental, physical and emotional means. The book also contains personal anecdotes and recovery facts from medical professionals, career athletes and martial arts legends like Joe Lewis and Bill Wallace. 150 pgs. (ISBN-13: 978-0-89750-187-3)
Book Code 511 — NOW ONLY $9.99
SAVE 55%

ALSO AVAILABLE
MARTIAL ARTS E-BOOKS STARTING AT $9.99
MARTIAL ARTS DVD DOWNLOADS STARTING AT $14.99