
NO MERCY:

Six Hours of Japanese Karate Training Under the 'Takushoku Trio'

Report: Ian MacLaren. Photos: Josephine Wynn



Master Enoeda taught two versions of the kata 'Tekki Sandan'.

Largs has a reputation for being one of the warmest and sunniest resorts on Scotland's Clyde coast. As Karate-ka from all over Scotland gathered there on a Saturday in late 1990, it was to experience a different kind of heat. Three of the World's top Shotokan Instructors, **Enoeda**, **Tsuyama** and **Tabata**, all Japan Karate Association *sensei* and all graduates of the infamous Takushoku University in Tokyo, had been brought to Largs by the KUGB's senior Scottish representative, **Paul Allan**, for a course and grading.

I have to confess that it was with a mixture of anticipation tinged with trepidation that I drove through the Borders towards the Firth of Clyde. It was now three years since carbon fibre implants had been inserted into my right knee and that was the time required for my own ligamental tissue to grow into the fibre lattices. This course would be the first time I would be attempting to use full power on my right leg – no excuses now!

Sensei Keinosuke Enoeda needs no introduction to British Karate-ka. His

power and technique are legendary, and his dynamic methods of teaching are well known throughout the Shotokan World. **Sensei Katsunori Tsuyama** is also a teacher of international repute. Chief Instructor to Takushoku University Karate Club, and ex-coach to the Japanese National Squad, he is renowned for *keri waza* (kicking techniques), in particular his *mawashi geri* (roundhouse kick). **Yukichi Tabata, Sensei**, big and friendly with an infectious grin (especially when he sees you flagging at the end of 200 leg lifts!) has

gained many fans from his teaching at the Crystal Palace Summer and Autumn courses over the years. For many years he was a leading member of the Japanese National team.

Paul Allan (in a momentary fit of madness, I suspect), arranged for three hour training periods, each instructor taking the class for 1 hour, with the overall class being divided into three grade groups. The *dan* (black belt) grades received Master Enoeda first. After a warm up we were immediately into action – *Kizami tsuki/Gyaku tsuki* (lead hand jabbing punch/reverse punch) combinations – “Keep low – use your hips – more power!” was the

West is most apparent in techniques like this. The Japanese, from birth, sit on the floor and very early on develop the ability to rise from the floor without using their hands. This naturally develops hip and knee strength and flexibility, giving them a distinct advantage. In the West we use chairs and therefore do not develop the same degree of flexibility. It is for this reason that certain techniques are more difficult for the occidental. It was also apparent as the course developed that the three instructors had reached the same conclusion and decided to do something about it.

Enoeda Sensei drove the class without mercy – “Attack strongly – use

Again, repetition to the point of exhaustion.

Once these basics had been developed to Tsuyama Sensei's satisfaction, it was pair-up time again. The emphasis of the lesson was on attempting to get us to understand the correct use of the feet (*Ashi Sabaki*) in the *Tai Sabaki* – pulling in with the front foot, pulling out with the rear. Again, a very hard session.

Tabata Sensei took over a very tired class. As we bowed to him, he gave us his broadest smile and shook his head slowly from side to side. Many of us smiled back, taking this to be a gesture of sympathy. We were wrong. There was



Master Tsuyama puts the black belt class through a series of punching drills.

cry from Enoeda Sensei. Next, *Ura Mawashi geri*, (reverse roundhouse kick), turn *Ushiro Mawashi geri* (spinning back roundhouse kick) – “Balance, power, speed!” exhorted Enoeda Sensei. No one was going to refuse his ‘requests’, so the sweat flowed freely and from the expressions of those around me, I could see that they were also having doubts about surviving the first hour, never mind the three hours that we were expecting. Then the theme of the lesson was made clear to us – Enoeda Sensei demonstrated his flexibility by showing how to duck and sway under the *Ura Mawashi/Ushiro Mawashi geri* combination. *Tenshin* (avoidance) *waza*, one of the elements of Japanese *kumite* (practice fighting) was what we were required to understand.

After practising the complete sequence, it was “pair up” time, time to make it all work. The difference in hip/knee flexibility between East and

your hips – sink lower” and that dreaded word – “again!”. At the end of the hour we were wrecked!

Enoeda Sensei handed the class over to Tsuyama Sensei, who took one look at the *dan* grades and smiled wryly to himself. He knew what we had been through. He then proceeded to show why the Takudai club got its reputation. First an exercise to strengthen knees and hips. Standing on one leg with the other knee raised we punched *Gyaku tsuki* – change stance and punch with the other hand. Next the same thing but this time taking a large step forward and slightly on the diagonal. It sounds easy, but just you try it. After 50 or 60 of these, our legs felt like jelly. We then did the same sequence with *Mae geri* (front kick) added. Next, he gave us an introduction to *Tai-Sabaki* (body evasion). *Kizami tsuki* first, moving the front foot slightly forward – then *Gyaku tsuki* but this time moving the body back by pulling the rear foot backwards.

those in the class who later told me that they were certain that Tabata Sensei had decided to assassinate the class by working us to death. First, *Heiko tsuki* (parallel punch) in *Heisoku dachi* – “Fast, only 50 times!”. Then into *Zenkutsu dachi* but this time punch 5 times on each count “very fast”. Ten counts, then change to right *Zenkutsu dachi* and another ten counts.

I later asked Tabata Sensei the purpose of the exercise. He explained that it “relaxed” the shoulders and upper body and so encouraged you to concentrate on the *Hara* (abdomen), hips and legs. It certainly relaxed us – we could hardly move our arms afterwards. Satisfied that we were suitably ‘relaxed’, Tabata Sensei moved on to the main part of the lesson, and again the theme was *Tai Sabaki* and *Tenshin*. The first part of the exercise started with a *Hiza uke/Kizami tsuki* (elbow block, lead hand punch) combination, and then a second *Mae*

geri was added. The final touch was a *Kizami geri*, but stepping back from the kick. Next, a step to the side while blocking with a *Gyaku Uchi uke* (reverse inside forearm block). The leading foot was then drawn straight back into *Kiba dachi* (horse-riding stance), while delivering a *Yoko empi* (side elbow strike). A subtle weight change altered the stance to *Zenkutsu dachi*, and the hands used an *Uraken/Gyaku tsuki* (back fist/reverse punch) combination. The rear foot was then shifted 90° to face the front and again *Uraken/Gyaku tsuki* was the hand technique required. We then partnered up, and Tabata Sensei explained, half in mime, how a small shift of the body was used to evade an attack. We combined the above combinations to produce a fine example of *Tai Sabaki* and *Tenshin* (body shifting and evasion). We were worked very hard on this combination till the end of the session. As we lined up, expecting to bow, Tabata Sensei had us lie down and place our legs in the air. He then invited us to do leg scissors – "Very fast!". For what seemed an eternity, we scissored wildly, reaching, and then going beyond the point of exhaustion . . . then "Yame!" ("Halt!")

We had survived the first three hour session, and the class was really a sight to see. Twenty or so *dan* grades, sweating, panting and very, very tired, yet elated and still actively discussing the details of what we had learned. Although the course had been organised by the Scottish Region of the KUGB, Mr Allan had also invited prominent Scottish Karate-ka from other Shotokan groups, and it was good to see people of the calibre of **Alistair Mitchell** and **Eck Duncan** training alongside seniors of the KUGB Scottish Region.

After half an hour in a very hot bath, it was on with the Kilt and off with the Teachers and Seniors for a meal. **Paul Allan**, with his usual flair and efficiency, had arranged a game of golf for the Japanese sensei, and afterwards, we all met for a meal at a classy Chinese restaurant in Gourrock. During the meal, I managed to ask Tsuyama Sensei a few questions, and in effect, started an interview which I was able to continue over breakfast on the Sunday.

Sunday morning at 10.30 am saw us all back in the gymnasium at Largs Academy. Enoeda Sensei started the day for the *dan* grades with the kata '*Tekki Sandan*'. He first took us through the kata in great detail, and then explained the timing and sequencing of the hand movements. Satisfied that we understood the movements, we did the kata many times, with Sensei correcting a hand position here, a stance there, and then again "No count – *hajime!*" After many repetitions, Enoeda Sensei then showed us a different version of the kata – different hand movements based on the same form. I questioned him later about this, and he explained that the first version that he taught was the official JKA version. The second form of the kata was a version discovered by **Nakayama**



Master Tabata was a formidable fighter in the J.K.A. Championships for many years.

Sensei (the late Chief Instructor of the JKA). Because of the differences in the *Bunkai* (application), Sensei Nakayama felt it important that both versions should be taught.

We then moved on to the kata '*Wankan*', and again the kata was dissected in fine detail by Sensei Enoeda, paying particular attention to the large sweeping steps up the *Embusen* (performance line). He then demonstrated the application of the third move of the kata, the *Hasami uke* (scissors block) by catching the opponents punch with the forearms. We were all drenched in sweat by this time and although I blocked Paul Allan's punch, I realised that it was still coming – it was slipping through the block due to the sweat on our forearms. Yes, head movements are important in kata, especially to the side!

With wet gi's and red forearms, we

Master Tsuyama, the chief instructor of the Takushoku University Karate Club, is renowned for his kicking techniques.



were handed over to Tabata Sensei, and once again we received his disarming grin as we bowed – no one smiled back this time, we simply looked worried. Straight down to business – more fast combinations of blocking, kicking and punching, over and over again. Then a strange exercise: from *Kiba dachi*, we went down on one knee slowly and then back up slowly. The easiest way to describe this is to refer to the opening move of '*Empi*' kata, it was a similar leg action and this was combined with the dropping action from the Kata '*Unsu*'. He then added a *Gyaku tsuki* as we rose from the ground. Tabata Sensei then placed us in *Zenkutsu dachi* and we did the same exercise, but this time dropping to the rear, and then rising up from the floor and delivering the *Gyaku tsuki*. This demanded great flexibility from knee and hip and really generated a lactic acid burn in the quadricep muscles of the thigh. "Pair up – face partner". The *Hiza uke* (knee block) was used to block a *Mae geri* attack, and as the opponent stepped back, the *chudan Kizami Tsuki* "assisted" his rearward motion. He then attacked again with a *Chudan Mae geri*, and we were required to drop to the rear to evade the kick, and then rise from the floor and deliver the *Gyaku tsuki*. To say that this was difficult is an understatement. After many repetitions, the lesson was concluded with light freestyle practise.

Our third and final hour saw Tsuyama Sensei teaching his two favourite kata. First '*Meikyo*', in detail and then '*Gojushiho Sho*'. He finished the class off with an unusual technique – the *jodan Ura Mawashi Tsuki* (back roundhouse punch), explaining that it was a good technique for scoring in contest.

The course finished with the groups all together in the main hall, and after *mokuso* and *rei* (meditation and bow), the three instructors were given an enthusiastic round of applause.

This was one of the best weekend courses that I have attended recently. Apart from my personal satisfaction that my bionic ligaments held together, the venue was excellent and the joint organisation of **Paul Allan** and **Dave Gillies** ensured that everything ran smoothly. I would personally like to thank the Gourrock Karate Club for their hospitality and facilities. The sessions with the instructors were well planned so that each teacher displayed his speciality and personal skills within the overall theme for the weekend, that is, *Sabaki*, *Tenshin* and *Kata*. The three instructors seemed to enjoy the course as much as the students, and their enthusiasm was apparent in their teaching. I am sure that everyone is looking forward to a return visit.

Paul Allan will be running several such courses in the future. If you would like further information on these events, or about the Scottish Region of the KUGB, contact Paul Allan, Huntley Karate Club, 5a Gordon Street, Huntley, Scotland. Tel: (0466) 84203.