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Nidan

August 16th, 2023

My Dojo Away From Dojo: A Karate Essay

This past year, I started a karate club at my college, Palm Beach Atlantic University. Running it as a satellite dojo to our karate school, I used it to introduce several of my friends and fellow students to Matsubayashi-Ryu. I provided them with gis, obis, and the quality of training that we black belts have received at our dojo in Orlando. In doing so, I learned that running a dojo was no easy business, but a rewarding one all the same. In this essay, I'm going to explain my reasons for starting the karate club and detail some of the concepts I borrowed from our karate school. I'm also going to give a summary of the karate club's first year and how my students and I worked together to make this club a true dojo.

I started the PBA karate club for two reasons. The first was to prove myself as a karate instructor. To become a nidan, I knew that I would need to accumulate a great amount of teaching hours and start instructing somewhat regularly. Given that I was away at college for eight months out of the year, this task appeared difficult to accomplish. My original plan was to practice my kata and brainstorm my bunkai while I was at college, and then put in a ton of teaching time once I was home for the summer. After some friends saw me practicing my kata at the PBA gym and expressed interest in learning karate, however, a new idea sprang to mind. With Kyoshi's permission, I would establish a karate club at my university that would serve as a satellite dojo to our karate school. There, I would teach my fellow college students Matsubayashi-Ryu the way we were taught, running them through various techniques, kata,

yakusoku kumite, and more. I would test them for higher ranks as they grew more experienced and give them opportunities to help newer students grow and learn as they had. I would do all these things in the hopes of spreading Matsubayashi-Ryu to a new generation of students and showing my capabilities as a sensei, not simply a martial artist.

The second reason I started the PBA karate club was because I sorely missed the camaraderie of our dojo. In my opinion, one of our karate school's greatest strengths is the solidarity between students and senseis of all ranks. The ways in which we help, support, and share our knowledge of karate with one another is something to be admired. As such, I wanted to recreate this camaraderie with my karate club; not only would it make college feel more like home, but I would no longer be the only Matsubayashi-Ryu practitioner at Palm Beach Atlantic University. Other concepts I sought to bring over from our dojo included the history of our style and its practitioners. To make this club a satellite dojo and not merely a self-defense class, I drilled my students on Japanese terminology, the backgrounds behind various kata and techniques, and the histories of great karatemens such as Shoshin Nagamine, Chotoku Kyan, Choki Motobu, Anko Itosu, and many more. This helped my students to better understand the legacy behind our style and its impact on the world, leading to a greater interest in the nuances of karate and providing them with a richer training experience.

Given that my first batch of students consisted entirely of white belts, I spent the first few classes teaching them basic stances, blocks, punches, and kicks. They were very quick learners. Most of them had prior experience in sports, dance, or some other physical activity. This experience helped them greatly with developing the speed, coordination, and muscle memory necessary for karate. As they grew more comfortable with the basic techniques, I began teaching them Fukyugata Itch, which helped them to link their moves together and transition between

techniques in a sequence. I also began to sow the seeds for future classes by having them spar with blockers and shields. At first, I used it as a fun activity to keep them interested after a grueling training session. As time went on, however, I put a greater focus on their footwork, sequencing, and reaction time. My goal was to prepare them for hand-to-hand kumite, using blocker kumite to develop the skills they would need when fighting in real time.

As the year came and went, my students and I helped each other truly grow. Those who were ready made it all the way to orange belt, and demonstrated tremendous progress in their transitions, hip motion, footwork, and more. I became more confident in my teaching abilities and learned how to instruct students based on their learning styles, whether they be visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or reading/writing oriented. Students became truly invested in their karate training, purchasing copies of Shoshin Nagamine's *The Essence of Okinawan Karate-Do* and asking deep questions about karate's applications, the history of our style, and the history of our dojo in Orlando. I became more invested in my students' growth, and worked on turning the club into a true dojo where everyone would help each other learn, grow, and sharpen each other's techniques. Before the year ended, I managed to teach my orange belts all seven yakusoku kumite and provided them with several resources on kata, yakusoku kumite, Japanese terminology, and more so they could continue to train and grow over the summer. Meanwhile, I set out to learn and train as much as I could this summer so that I could become not only a nidan, but a better instructor for my students when the karate club began again in the fall.

I started the karate club to prove myself as a sensei and bring others into our dojo family. With some inspiration from our own dojo, I ended its first year with an amazing group of students who helped me grow into a better, more experienced instructor. As the fall draws closer, I look forward to fostering a welcoming, encouraging environment for everyone involved.