



Scott Middleton sensei

AN INTERVIEW

Scott Middleton shares the story of his humble beginnings in karate, how his upbringing in Brandon, Manitoba, Canada, shaped his journey, and his evolution into a leader in the World Traditional Karate Organisation (WTKO). His reflections offer deep insights into the heart and spirit of traditional karate.

Middleton sensei, could you share how your journey in karate began at the YMCA in Brandon back in 1986? What initially drew you to the art?

I started karate as a young adolescent, so one can imagine that my decision to begin training was not highly conscious, well-informed, or well-researched. Thankfully, though, it was a string of fortunate circumstances that I ended up joining the dojo that I did. In so many communities the YMCA is a hub of activity, and Brandon is no exception.

Although the instruction I received at the YMCA in Brandon was not highly sophisticated, it was most certainly traditional and sincere. From the very first class at the YMCA, the training captured my youthful imagination. At such an early age, I wasn't fully aware of why I was so attracted to karate, but now, after decades of self-reflection, I can understand my motivations back then and why karate has woven itself into every fabric of my life now.

Once again, fortunately, the club at the YMCA in Brandon was connected to our Manitoba headquarters dojo in Winnipeg. That dojo had an incredible

pedigree and legitimacy that I would argue was the richest in all of Canada. For decades, instructors like Nakayama, Okazaki, Yaguchi, Tanaka, Osaka, Koyama, and Takashina taught up to four times per year in that space. Canadian National Champions were produced there, and one of the very few Caucasians to graduate the JKA Instructors Program started training in that dojo.

Although the dojo was closed years ago, for me, this building is still hallowed ground. I regularly visit the area whenever I am in Winnipeg, to let the memories and energy wash over me. My connection to this headquarters dojo and the close relationship I had with Manitoba's chief

instructor, Phillip Dingman sensei, was instrumental in my karate development and really gave me the solid roots I needed to grow my karate.

How did your upbringing in Brandon, Manitoba, influence your approach to martial arts and your development as a karateka?

I was born and raised in the City of Brandon. I have spent my entire life working as an employee for the City of Brandon, and my beautiful wife and our children were also born here. It is no coincidence that Brandon is known as "The Wheat City." As the second largest city in our Province, Brandon is surrounded by farmland for as far as the eye can see. The people who were born and raised in rural Manitoba inherently understand the values associated with the farming community. There is a simplicity to our lifestyle that will not be attractive to everyone, but it is steeped in honesty, hard work, community, and an appreciation for the land. I grew up playing and working on our family farm. In fact, I traced my family genealogy back as far as I can, and I am the first son in my family who is not a farmer.





PC. Y.Amos

The headquarters dojo that I mentioned previously was in Winnipeg, which is a two-hour drive from Brandon. For years, I would drive every weekend to stay with Dingman sensei, who was probably the hardest man I have ever met. He started training in 1966 and was a pioneer of karate in Canada, and I am sure he had JKA blood coursing through his veins. The lumpy futon I would sleep on in his living room could have been a bed of nails, and I would have happily done it just to spend time with him. When Dingman sensei would presumably tire of my endless queries, I would stay at his son's house, who was many times the Canadian National Champion. This pressure cooker of karate on the weekends but returning to Brandon during the weekdays forced me to reflect, internalise the lessons, and mentally prepare for the next weekend. I would say that the remote geographical location of Brandon has allowed me the time and space needed to grow my ka-

rate with my own two hands. Combining this with the ingrained hard ethic and honesty that is a part of our farming community has positively impacted my development.

You've described karate as a "way of life" and mentioned the concept of tsune. Could you elaborate on how this philosophy shapes your daily routine and mindset?

Tsune implies something constant, always, or everyday. You could consider tsune to be daily tasks that make up our everyday. We don't put a lot of thought into these regular daily chores, but also wouldn't feel right without them. Making your bed, brushing your teeth, taking a shower, whipping up a meal, and kissing your children are just things we do daily.

Over the past few years, I have embraced my introspective, quietly observant side, and I can't tell if karate unearthed it or just

"KARATE – THE ENDLESS JOURNEY!"

turned up the volume. What I will say is how I approach training may seem strange, motivating, or special to others but it's just something I do.

What aspects of karate continue to inspire and motivate you after decades of practice?

Cus D'Amato was a legendary boxing trainer, that played a pivotal role in shaping the careers of several world champions, including Mike Tyson, Floyd Patterson, and José Torres. To paraphrase one of his many quotes: "A spark of interest becomes a flame. I feed that flame, and it becomes a fire. I feed that fire until it becomes a roaring blaze." Like the quote implies, things that interest me will spark to life from the most unsuspecting of sources. A conversation, research, a breakthrough in training, or from endeavours that have nothing to do with karate on the surface. I feed that flame slowly over time until it becomes a roaring blaze, that consumes my mind and body in training.



For example, a simple bow is one of the very first things we will be shown in karate, literally within the first few minutes of beginning formal training. We are shown the mechanics of bowing, how deep we should descend, and probably a short philosophical explanation to tie it all together. My inquisitive side won't settle for a cursory explanation, and I need to plunge deeper into subjects that others seem content to just gloss over. While far beyond the scope of this interview, the reasons we bow can be traced back to the feudal era of Japan, and the samurai's lawful right to test their blade.

My point is that we can find inspiration from everything we do in karate, but the real crux of your question is, do you have the motivation that is required to feed that fire until it becomes a roaring blaze?

What qualities do you believe are essential in a student to truly embody the spirit of traditional karate?

Patience and perseverance! There is a Japanese adage that I am irresistibly attracted to, and that I often reflect on to guide me in my own karate journey. "Tenteki Senseki" alludes to that: over time even a single drop or a dribble of water will eventually penetrate stone.

I have seen many times over the years that a student is so enthusiastic so soon after they start that they eventually fade away. Others will quit after only a few months of training, because they feel they are not making any noticeable progress.

There are certain catchphrases that Yaguchi sensei used to use in and out of training. One of his favourites that he would gleefully recite was "take it easy." I now understand that he was trying to communicate that a high level of karate cannot be obtained quickly,

so relax, and be patient!

How has your training evolved over the years, and what aspects of your practice have remained constant?

I don't think of what has evolved, and what has remained constant in my training as two separate answers. My training has remained anchored in consistency, and this has allowed me to evolve.

A few years ago, Lyoto Machida said during an interview that "the first opponent he faces every day is himself," and I can really relate to this. If you are going to be consistent, you must be disciplined. I train mostly twice per day, every day for as far back as I can recall. I love the challenge of making simple things as pure as I can, and I am rarely ever satisfied with my progress. Consistency and discipline over time will produce results!

Could you share your perspective on the balance between traditional practices and modern adaptations in karate?

From my perspective we are always managing the undeniable conflict between the security of what is known and the thrill of new experiences. Perhaps it's human nature to crave something new or experience the latest in a long line of undiscovered innovations.

I often hear very intelligent, knowledgeable, and charismatic instructors claim that some traditional karate practices are useless, and a waste of time. They declare that pre-arranged sparring, the hikite (pulling hand), reigi saho (the formalized expressions of courtesy), and other practices serve little benefit to our advancement. I bring this up not to debate their bold statements, but to suggest that there is great value in polishing the "simple" things in karate, and



that we don't always have to look for something new or exciting. As Leonardo da Vinci said, "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication."

Can you recount the story of how you became involved with the WTKO and your journey to becoming its International Director?

I met John Mullin sensei at a critical point in my journey. Despite a year having already passed since I resigned from my previous organization, the wound still felt fresh and raw. When I left that organization, one must appreciate that I was willing to swim against a strong current, give everything up, and leave the only group that I had ever known. That decision was made to keep my karate pure, free from the political tensions of others, and to remain unobstructed in my journey as an artist. It's a decision that I remain incredibly proud of to this very day. It should be noted that I hold no ill will towards my former group, and I deeply cherish my time with them.

"CONSISTENCY AND DISCIPLINE OVER TIME WILL PRODUCE RESULTS."



When I first met Mullin Sensei, he reminded me that there are senior instructors that covet from karate what I do and are honest to the core. Mullin Sensei is exactly what I needed at the time. Twenty years later, he is a close friend, colleague, and mentor. I joined the WTKO based on his character.

The following year I travelled to New York City and met Richard Amos Sensei. I have absolute total recall on the very first class I took from him. It was akin to opening a door into a vibrant and uncharted world. Over the years I have quietly observed his brilliance, absorbed every lesson, mentally noted the discussions we shared, and injected everything into my own journey. I truly believe he's a karate genius, and I don't say that casually. I'm always chasing his level, and I fear I might never catch up.

In the Fall of 2011, I was invited to become a member of the WTKO Executive Committee, which of course was an enormous honor, and I accepted immediately. I believe in Mullin Sensei, Amos Sensei, and the WTKO very deeply. Investing in my colleagues, and the organization, I naturally want to see it be successful.

As the WTKO celebrates its 25th anniversary, what achievements are you most proud of, and what are your aspirations for the organization's future?

As we mark the 25th anniversary of the WTKO, I am immensely proud of the legacy we have built. Our unwavering commitment to the evolution of karate builds a solid foundation to aspire to the highest levels in our art. Our global community connects diverse cultures through a common passion for karate and inspires excellence both on and off the dojo floor. My aspirations for the future of the WTKO? I don't view "success" as having the biggest organization with the most mem-



bers, I view our success as being able to maintain our original vision or intentions.

Looking back over the past 25 years, how has the WTKO influenced the global karate community, and what role do you see it playing in the future?

Although I was not involved with the WTKO when it was first formed, I did join when the organization was in its early stages of formation. Looking back over this time I feel the WTKO has left an unmistakable mark on the global karate community and has been a turning point in the history of modern karate. The Executive Committee members all have roots planted in Japanese run organizations and have been greatly influenced by senior Japanese instructors. I feel our greatest impact on the global karate community is that we, non-Japanese, are not only offering Shotokan at the highest levels, but we are evolving it.

"THE WTKO HAS LEFT AN UNMISTAKABLE MARK ON THE GLOBAL KARATE COMMUNITY"

What message would you like to convey to WTKO members and the broader martial arts community as you celebrate this milestone?

My message is a simple one: "Karate - The Endless Journey!"

Along this journey we will bask in the elation of our highs while summoning our strength to overcome the inevitable lows. There is no destination in karate, just the continuous quest for self-improvement, inner strength, and deeper understanding. Recognize that progress is measured not in the belts we earn, the tournaments we win, or the techniques we perfect. It's measured in the daily commitment to evolve, learn, and overcome.

