

# SEIZAN®

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## Back to the Future

The American Amateur Karate Federation celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2011, a rare honor by any measure for non-profit sports organizations, and first among amateur karate federations. Our members should take pride in this achievement. It was only through your support of Sensei Nishiyama's leadership and vision that we attain this zenith. With unity and common purpose, we can aspire to sustain this heritage for another 50 years and more 50s to come for future traditional karatekas.

An old Chinese saying (not necessarily Confucius') loosely translates as, "One gleans the past to learn of the future." *Seizan* celebrates our anniversary by visiting with Sensei Robert Graves, who recollects the early formative days of AAKF. The second part of his interview, including his counsel to young members, will appear in the September issue of *Seizan*.

Harking back to current events, we highlight the AAKF National Seminar held in

Minneapolis, MN on March 25-27, 2011. Gina Frances Wood and Jeffrey Harrison provided separate accounts of this well-attended event. In celebration of cultural diversity of our AAKF members, we present Saša Panić as featured AAKF member for this issue. Saša, a distinguished competitor, hailed from Belgrade, Serbia some 14 years ago.

*Seizan* urges everyone to join the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration to be held concurrently with the upcoming National Seminar and Championship on June 15-18 in Atlanta, GA. With years of preparation from the South Atlantic Tournament Organizing Committee, this event promises to be a once-in-a-lifetime occasion. For further information, please contact Dean NeJame at (678) 641-5199 ([nejame@att.net](mailto:nejame@att.net)).

Alex Tong  
General Editor

## Q & A with Sensei Robert Graves

*Seizan* interviews Robert Graves in honor of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the AAKF

*In celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> AAKF Anniversary, Seizan interviews with Sensei Robert Graves, AAKF President in 2008 and Senior Counsel of the AAKF Technical Committee. Mr. Graves recounted the early days of AAKF in the June issues of Seizan.*

**S:** Sensei Graves, what was your recollection of the genesis of AAKF?

**R:** There have been many stories about how this took place. This is what I remembered if memory serves. AAKF (then known as All America Karate Federation) was created by Nishiyama Sensei soon after he arrived in 1961. We called the organization "Southern California Karate Assn." at that time which may already be in place when Sensei arrived. Sensei presented a vision of an organization that was controlled by the athletes. Organized athletics at that time were closely controlled and athletes were tossed away when their competition career declined. He also recognized that organizations controlled by

a single person had no durable history of success after the central figure passed away.

The first AAKF tournament was held in 1961. I think it was called the "All American Karate Championship". James Yabe won over Tak Aoki. Jim also took first place in *kata* with *kankusho*. What a great job he did - I will always remember that day.

By late 1962, the concept of a national organizational body was underway but it had some snags. Previously, Nishiyama-san was invited to the US by students of Sensei Oshima who had left the US to teach in France.

By 1963 Oshima-san decided to return to California and many senior students, led by Caylor Atkins (our highest rank at the time with the rank of *nidan*) went back to Oshima-san's dojo. I really liked Caylor. He was very strong and a great teacher but he had to remain loyal to his heart. I respected that very much.

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Saša Panić



Gina Wood

## AAKF Member Spotlight: Saša Panić

Saša Panić (pronounced Sascha Panich)'s passion for physical fitness put him on a personal journey of knowledge into body mechanics and movement, a search that began in Belgrade, Serbia with the study of Traditional Karate with Sensei Dusan Marinkovic in 1994. He received his shodan in 1997 in front of Sensei Marinkovic and Dr Vladimir Yorga. Panić first competed in 1998, participating in the Balkan Championship and European Fudokan Cup (both tournaments held concurrently), and later that year at the Yugoslav National Championship.

Saša met Sensei Toru Shimoji in Atlanta in 2001. For 10 years now, he has studied

under Shimoji and competed in national and international tournaments. Most recently, Saša was a gold medalist in *fukugo* at the 2009 and 2010 AAKF National Championships, and went on to place second in *fukugo* representing the US at the 2009 Pan American ITKF Pan American Karate Championship in Brazil.

Saša is also an Atlanta-based personal trainer who earned his certification from the National Personal Training Institute (NPTI).

Saša strongly believes that the testing of skills through competition (*shia*) is a very important part of a karateka's development.

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## Current Events: AAKF National Seminar Minneapolis, MN; March 25–27, 2011 by Gina Wood

The Midwest Karate Association hosted a national seminar on *enbu* and *kogo kumite* by the AAKF technical committee during the weekend of March 25th-27th, 2011. Students and instructors across the country gathered to receive the wisdom and guidance of AAKF's senior leaders. Sensei Robert Fusaro, 8th Dan, began the seminar with instructions on inner connection, body dynamics, and correct angles for *mae-geri*. He discussed the balancing of the sphincter and the perineum while pulling up and in, connecting with the low stomach and hips to tie it all together. Sensei went on to emphasize the importance of the support leg and inner thigh muscles for core control and balance. The weight should not land heavily on the front/kicking leg but control should be maintained throughout by the strong support leg. As usual, his attention to detail and his understanding of the human body makes for an enlightening class.

Sensei Tong, 6<sup>th</sup> Dan, began with an overview of how *enbu* training bridges *kata* and *kumite*, and its relevance in training in general. He discussed *todome-waza* (finishing blow) as relates to *enbu* and *kogo*, a theme that recurred throughout the weekend seminar. Sensei Tong was insistent that we make our *enbu* realistic and maintain strong focus (*kime*) at the end of each technique. Sensei talked about also sustaining this concept during regular training post seminar, the importance of making each technique real, and I found myself growing as a karate student as he spoke. Then he discussed utilizing distance

shifting vs. engagement and blocking as two options in defense strategy. He concluded by instructing us to build *enbu* technique by technique, making each one realistic technically and with mental commitment. Many of our drills over the weekend were structured this way, building the attack combination exercise piece-by-piece, striving for good timing, realism, culminating in *todome-waza*.

Sensei Albert Cheah, 5<sup>th</sup> Dan, discussed the philosophy behind *enbu*, specifically how the composition of *enbu* allows the karateka to better understand technique applications. He pointed out that the "fighting spirit" is not always tangible in *kata* training where we have only imaginary opponents. *Enbu*, he said, allows for biofeedback from your opponent, such that we can better perceive threat. He defined *budo* spirit as having a sense of realism/reality in everything you do.

Sensei Richard Kageyama, 5<sup>th</sup> Dan, cleared the fog in our minds by jumping right in after lunch to review some of the drills we practiced earlier, after which he began a discussion of energy. He emphasized that technique execution is not just about physical energy delivery but mental energy as well, describing how he sets his own rhythm to draw his opponent in, to mentally direct them to a position that he wants them to be. He defined two Japanese terms that denotes different ways of harnessing mental energy. *Kyu-shin* is to gather information while *ho-shin* is to telegraph information on purpose to get a reaction from your opponent.

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## Q & A Continued

Sensei Nishiyama had made the decision to return to Japan but some of the senior students, and many of the newer students, showed up outside his apartment. They requested Sensei to stay and remain as their teacher. Sensei's reply was that they needed an organization with officers and also money reserve held by a treasurer.

Everyone sat in a circle, threw in whatever they had in the center along with IOUs. An election was held and "All American Karate Federation" was born. The people present that day became leaders of the organization. I was in Oregon then, but Nishiyama-san was at my home the following week. His recount of the events was followed by his assertion that, "This time, the energy was right!" Our organization's backbone in California was George and Gene Takahashi, Ms Aiko Torii, Jack and Pat Webb, Ray Dalke, James Yabe, Tak Aoki, and Greer Golden. Dan Ivan of Santa Anna broke away around this time and brought Demura Sensei in from Japan. There were of course also others who were training in Sensei's dojo then.

The weekend of President Kennedy's assassination was also the 3<sup>rd</sup> AAKF Nationals in San Francisco. This was

Sensei's final nationalization effort. Leaders of many different styles came, and listened to Sensei's plan to unify all styles under the AAKF umbrella. The room was full with I would guess 50 to 80 heads of different styles. Just about every style and then some were there. At the main table on stage were Senseis Nishiyama, Okazaki, Mori, Mikami, George Takahashi. Mr. Takahashi, our secretary did most of the talking, thank god! Sensei proposed to calibrate rankings from different styles. Instructors from many styles were ranked way higher than JKA, which used only 5 dan levels as also did Wado. At that time, students of Funakoshi Sensei would not go higher than he claimed at *godan*. However, other styles used a 10 dan system and Choki Motobu Sensei claimed 11th dan. However, Sensei's idea of rank standardization brought rancor and was not well received at all.

The first summer camp was held in 1964 in Oxnard, CA. It was a very hard training camp. Mr. Oshima also held a camp across town. It appeared that the two instructors were trying to outdo each other in terms of toughness.

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## Perspectives on the AAKF National Seminar Minneapolis, MN; March 25–27, 2011

by Jeff Harrison

The May 25-27 National Seminar was the first seminar that I attended. As a 4th *kyu*, my head still reels from all the information. But overall I felt that the seminar was exciting and highly informative.

At Sensei Fusaro's session on Saturday, I felt that I understood everything that he said until he had us generating force with our foot against a wall. This made me realize just how far I have to go to achieve the desired outcome. I really liked it when we were given an opportunity to connect the theoretical to practice, in order to better understand the desired body dynamics and the improvements needed. This is really the magic of a great sensei, so I'd have to say that my first session was more than I could have hoped for.

I was getting tired by the third session but Sensei Cheah got us really fired up. He got us moving with speed and emphasized, "Make it realistic... you must create a sense of danger." My partner Nancy Grindland and I were punching and kicking with great enthusiasm. This made the exercises much

more exciting and it made me generate much sharper techniques. Nancy and I both train together at the Minneapolis Dojo. When I asked her about this class afterwards, she said, "I definitely felt sharper and had greater speed".

There was a great deal of interesting things that happened in Sensei Richard Kageyama (5th Dan)'s afternoon class. One item that I will always remember was his demonstration of the effect of the mind, and directional mental force on the strength of the body or a technique. Sensei had another black belt trying to pull his arm down, and, depending on which direction he was looking, you could sense the energy levels in his body rising and falling. You have to see something like that to believe it, most enlightening.

*Kyo* was another new concept that I spent the remaining afternoon trying to understand. The concept built on the previous classes, the idea of getting your opponent off balance so that you can launch an attack.

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*"Saša strongly believes that the testing of skills through competition (shiai) is a very important part of a karateka's development."*

*Saša Panić*



*Jeff Harrison and student*

## Current Events Continued



*Sensei Robert Fusaro demonstrating the body mechanics of mae-geri at the AAKF National Seminar, Minneapolis, MN; March 2011*

*"If you give me energy, I give you energy. If you give me good spirit, I give you good spirit. You teach me, I teach you."*

*Mahmoud Tabassi*



*Sensei Mahmoud Tabassi explaining the concepts of kogo at the AAKF National Seminar, Minneapolis, MN; March 2011*

Sensei then discussed body dynamics, posture and technique in *kumite* and *enbu*, which he followed up with training exercises to maximize body connection. At session's conclusion, Sensei Kageyama mentioned that in *jyu-ippou kumite* training, a common problem is that the defense side always looks weak mentally. He referred back to the technique of mental energy and told us that the defense side needs to draw the offensive technique in to mentally destabilize the offensive side. These mental techniques are something that I struggle greatly to master but I know they'll be invaluable skills in my future in karate.

On the next day, Sensei Mahmoud Tabassi, 7<sup>th</sup> Dan, introduced the history of *kogo*. Sensei Hidetaka Nishiyama created *kogo* after he formulated *enbu* for much the same reason, which was to bridge the training gap between *kata* and *kumite*. *Kogo* is still *kumite* but with a predetermined designation of attack or defense for each competitor in order to amplify *kumite* strategy. After lunch, we trained again under Sensei Alex Tong. Sensei Tong discussed the way we should use our mental energy in *kamae* (fighting stance) to develop an energy "reverse triangle" to pull the opponent's *ki* in. This, he says, is our defensive posture. Then he instructed us to always conceptualize a cone of energy shooting from our own center to our opponent in counterattacks. By harnessing the opponent's energy, blocking defense can become much more efficient. Conversely, Sensei Tong also suggested that we should not simply construe striking blocks (*ukes*) as a defense, but a means to interrupt the opponent's timing and energy flow.

Sensei Shimoji also discussed the concept of energy, specifically internal energy. He talked about how energy inside our body should circulate continuously. He demonstrated the concept with rotation of the shoulder joint, followed by locking his muscles into place so that the body looked still, yet the feeling of circulating energy continued within. The exercise was enlightening, though I suspect that mastery of this energetic internal rotation may come slowly!

On Sunday morning Sensei Toru Shimoji started off with a discussion of stances, the base of all of our techniques and a topic of unlimited potential. Sensei mainly focused on the activation of muscles to stabilize our legs. For ease of memory and training, he

numbered the specific activations we need to make. As an instructor, I look forward to applying these ideas to train my students.

In Sunday's last session. Sensei Tabassi had some final words for motivation as our focus waned and the drills became wearing. Sensei urged us by saying 'If you give me energy, I give you energy. If you give me good spirit, I give you good spirit. You teach me, I teach you.' Essentially, Sensei Tabassi was rallying us to support each other physically and mentally in a positive way. The relationship between teacher and student is a circle, and without effort and intent on both sides, I believe that it is impossible for any student to reach their full potential in karate or any other discipline for that matter. As an instructor who mainly teaches children, I really appreciated Sensei's emphasis here on student attitudes.

One of the recurring themes of the weekend was how tense many of us are in our movements, especially in arm techniques and in general from the waist up. Sensei Tong pointed out that, to be effective, one cannot tense our shoulders during a block or attack until the end of the technique. I was lucky enough to get a little one-on-one advice on the subject from Sensei Albert Cheah as well. Essentially, he told me to fight more "feminine"- light, quick, and relying more on my legs and body versus my tendency to lock up arms and shoulders, resulting in a loss of connection to my hips and legs. I suspect that we are not the only ones who could benefit from his advice.

At Sunday's conclusion, Sensei Fusaro thanked everyone for coming and stressed how well and democratic the AAKF organization is now being run. He pointed out that, in future, it will be up to us to continue in their footsteps, to continue to build on the teachings of Sensei Nishiyama and additions and ideas from all the Senseis. Sensei Fusaro noted that we all have things to teach each other and that we should always train and cooperate with that in mind.

I felt that he couldn't have chosen a better message to end the seminar Both Jeff Harrison (see this issue's Perspectives) and I are incredibly grateful for the opportunity to train with these amazing senseis and karatekas, and also honored, to have been asked to share our impressions with people who love karate as much as we do.

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## Q & A Continued

Mr. Oshima would make students stay in *kabadachi* in hours without rest. If a student collapsed his partner was required to hold him up. Nishiyama Sensei demanded repetitions of *keri* training until exhaustion.

In the late 60s, karate competition incidents in Japan and in the international scene became controversial, convincing Sensei to preserve our competition rules "on the highest shelf that no one can reach". "Maybe we must go to the Olympics!" said Sensei. It was in 1970 or 1971 when Sensei came up to Eugene in an after dinner discussion that the topic came up as to how AAKF can spearhead an

Olympics sports effort. I suggested that perhaps we should look into affiliating with AAU, which had extensive national governing credentials in amateur athletics. Dick Allen, who at that time was training at the Portland (OR) Multnomah Athletic Club karate class and had attained the rank of brown belt, was in his younger days a national champion swimmer. I offered to bridge the connection, which led to Dick becoming President of the presentation Committee for AAKF's efforts. AAKF did successfully become an AAU Allied Member, partly also with the support of Jack Kelly (brother of Grace Kelly), then President of AAU and a friend of Dick's."

## AAKF Member Spotlight Continued

In terms of training philosophy; Saša always tries to be mindful of what he is doing and why, by visualizing an opponent and his attacks. Impact training by makiwara, punching bags, mits etc. is integral to Saša's training, in order to truly understand the dynamics of energy transfer. This is important for the practice of a "non-contact" sport as it is easy to forget the true purpose of traditional karate techniques. Though Saša has been successful mostly in *fukugo* and *kumite* events, he believes that *kata* and *kihon* training are equally important and regularly integrates these components in his training regimen.

Saša's tournament records are:

### AAKF National Championships

- 2003: 2nd place, team *kumite* (Georgia);
- 2005: 2nd place, team *kata* (Georgia);
- 2007: 1st place, team *kumite* (Georgia);
- 2008: 3rd place, *kata* and *kumite*; 2<sup>nd</sup> place, team *kumite* (Georgia);
- 2009: 1st place *fukugo*; 1st place team *kumite* (Georgia);
- 2010: 1st place *fukugo*; 2nd place, *kata* and *kumite*.

### International Competition

- 2009 Pan American Championship: 2<sup>nd</sup> place, *fukugo*;
- 2010 World Championship: Final 8, individual and team *kumite*, and *fukugo*.

## Current Events Continued

More Personal Notes. I truly feel that I learned a great deal from the seminar and I plan to take some of the concepts to the kids I teach. I actually introduced them to the concept of *zanshin* immediately after the seminar to fantastic results. They love trying to remember to stay focused on their opponent and ready for anything! The idea of true *zanshin* in a realistic self-defense situation is incredibly valuable to their long-term training and they have really taken to it. Though a great deal of the information is too advanced for the children, as a shodan aspiring to achieve nidan in the near future, I found the seminar uniquely geared toward my training. I was invited to train with the US Team under Senseis Toru Shimoji, 5th Dan and Brad Webb, 5<sup>th</sup> Dan.

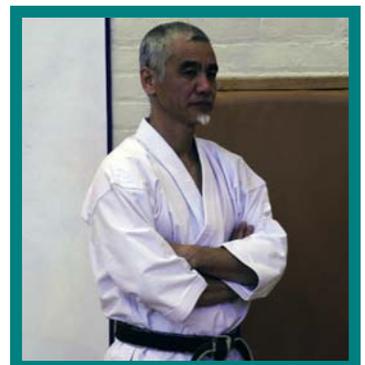
We worked on the different kinds of movement in sparring: shifting, stepping, ½ stepping, changing directions, etc. Sensei introduced us to the concept of changing stance as a way to control our opponent, which was revelatory to me as *kumite* has never been my strongest suit. He also discussed faking and ran us through some calisthenics and drills. Workout plan? Train regularly and often with Sensei Shimoji!

*Gina Frances Wood, 1st Dan, has studied karate for 17 years, 16 of them under Sensei Robert Fusaro in Minneapolis, MN. She has taught the children's classes at Sensei Fusaro's dojo for the last 8 years. Gina may be reached at ginafrances@hotmail.com*



*Sensei Richard Kageyama demonstrating oizuki at the AAKF National Seminar, Minneapolis, MN; March 2011*

*Stay tuned for the second part of Sensei Graves' interview in the September issue of Seizan, when he described Sensei Nishiyama's influence on him and the Pacific Northwest, and his vision for the future AAKF. Sensei Graves and his wife, Ms Sue Doyle (3<sup>th</sup> Dan) reside in Eugene, OR. The Graves celebrate their 43<sup>rd</sup> year as instructors of the Univ of Oregon karate class instructors.*



*Sensei Toru Shimoji overseeing training session at the AAKF National Seminar, Minneapolis, MN; March 2011*



*"The lesson was meditative and spiritual, and he taught us how to use visualization to manage our directional force, wow!"*

*Jeff Harrison*

At the morning session on Saturday, Sensei Toru Shimoji took one look at us and told us we were all too stiff. Sensei Shimoji's class was almost theatrical and he was very charismatic. At first he gave us all an imaginary ball to hold onto. He instructed us to close our eyes and begin to compress and expand this ball of energy with our arms, legs and torso. The lesson was meditative and spiritual, and he taught us how to use visualization to manage our directional force, wow! After we were given an opportunity to do some punching and I found that my hand position had changed and my knuckles and arm were properly aligned.

I felt that this seminar just got better and better by the time Sensei Tabassi started the 11 AM class. Though I had no prior experience with *kogo*, its training is

## Perspectives Continued

By tuning into your opponents movements, one can force them into mistakes, thereby setting up the counterattack as soon as they are off balance. We lower belts found ourselves missing opportunities when *kyo* presented itself but at least we were becoming aware. Sensei reassured all the students that "you are going to miss many opportunities, but when you catch one it will feel really good".

On the next day, Sensei Robert Fusaro worked on creating and maintaining a body base. I found it particularly interesting when Sensei talked about the relationship

between the skeletal and muscular structures. Sensei Fusaro is a scientist when it comes to generating force and building body structure. He demonstrated how to be the irresistible force at the beginning of a technique and the immovable object at the end. As Sensei demonstrated these relationships during a focused technique we could all see each muscle and bone coming together to build the ideal structure. At this point I was really kicking myself for not attending a seminar sooner!

what I'd call just plain FUN! For a novice, there was no better company to learn from. Sensei Tabassi asked a couple of black belts to demonstrate *kogo*. As they moved towards the center of the room, I recognized one of the athletes from a YouTube video and the AAKF website. It was Champion Soolmaz Aboali! (which she graciously confirmed when I approached her after the session). I realized that there were probably a lot of people that I should know in the room and my awareness of the opportunity we were being given was very high. We were learning from the best in the world. I really like the structure of the *kogo* competition, with being on offense for three 10 second encounters, and then being the defender for three 10 second. As we paired up in practice, the group's energy went higher and higher.

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*Sensei Alex Tong discussing the concepts of enbu at the AAKF National Seminar, Minneapolis, MN; March 2011*

## Perspectives Continued

In Saturday's last class I was exposed to another new idea which reinforced the emphasis on good body structures in reference to the speed and style of fighting of the opponent. It was really an exercise about where to look during *kumite*, how to pick up movement. It took a great deal of concentration for me to break some old bad habits, but Sensei Kageyama was able to get us to "look beyond our opponent to an area behind their head... about 3 feet." While doing this I almost initially felt like my eyes were in *kata* mode, but it really works, I was able to be more relaxed and pick up movement from my opponent much faster.

I had never broken my stance down for analysis as Sensei Shimoji discussed, but often I feel like I'm a little wobbly as I move or punch/block. This lesson was titanic for any karate student. All the lower belts that I talked to regarding this process expressed the same thing.

On the advise of Sensei Fusaro, I asked other people on their thoughts of the seminar. Tim Nyberg, 8th Kyu, of River Falls Wisconsin shared this thought – that he

"finds it amazing that people can progress in karate at all without going to these seminars." Everyone I spoke with felt the same way. " You get a lot more time and depth to focus on things like *kime'* and building energy from the floor than you get in a class. During a regular karate class senseis only have a few minutes to spend on these things;" said Tim. I couldn't agree more. Thanks, Tim.

In the final session of the day, Sensei Fusaro again amazed with a discussion of the specific bones and their relationship to the execution of a punch, particularly bones and muscles of the arm, shoulder, back and hips. He talked about how they all connect together specifically to create a solid structure. The amount of knowledge in this room over these last 3 days was off the charts and immeasurable!

*Mr. Harrison recently returned to training at Sensei Fusaro's dojo after a hiatus of 30 years due to an illness in the family. He attained the rank of 4<sup>th</sup> kyu in January, 2011. Jeff resides in Savage, MN.*



*At left:  
Participants at the AAKF National Seminar,  
Minneapolis, MN; March 2011*

*At right:  
Sensei Albert Cheah demonstrating the strategy of  
enbu at the AAKF National Seminar, Minneapolis, MN;  
March 2011 with Sensei Luis Ocampo.*



*"You get a lot more time and depth to focus on things like kime and building energy from the floor than you get in a class. During a regular karate class senseis only have a few minutes to spend on these things."*

*Tim Nyberg as quoted by  
Jeff Harrison*



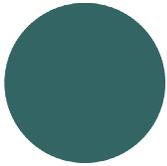
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*MN Senseis Art Wong (front left), Amy Sterling (front right) and Luis Ocampo, (back left) and Sensei Mark Minarik from Saskatoon, Canada (back right) at the AAKF National Seminar, Minneapolis, MN; March 2011*



## **AAKF National Seminar, Minneapolis, MN; March 2011.**

*Photographs of the AAKF National Seminar were provided by courtesy of Mr. John S. Bell, Dallas, TX*

## **Upcoming Events**

**June 15-16\*** AAKF National Seminar and National Judges' seminar

**June 17-18\*** 50<sup>th</sup> AAKF National Championship

**June 18\*** Inaugural AAKF Jr National Traditional Karate Championship

\*at Oglethorpe University, Atlanta, GA.