

# SEIZAN®

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## Editorial Staff:



Alex Tong



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Flyer for 53<sup>rd</sup> National  
Championships

## Editorial: Keepers of the Art

The founding of AAKF by Sensei Hidetaka Nishiyama in 1963 represented a major watershed in the nationalization of traditional karate-do training and competition in the US. "Action" movies in the 1960s and 70s further fueled the popularity of Asian martial arts, to the point that karate now connotes generically all striking-based Asian martial arts<sup>1</sup>. The population of karate enthusiasts in the world is said to be 50 million according to Web Japan, a website sponsored by the Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs<sup>2</sup>. Apart from the multitude of training styles, the focus of karate training also varies as art, as a sport, combat sport, or as self defense training.

In addition to expectations of high technical standards in traditional karate training and competition, our members are held to the emphasis of *budo*, i.e. the element of self-development through the practice of martial arts. It is imperative that these tenets be passed along, undiluted, to future generations of karate-ka.

In this issue of *Seizan*, AAKF pays homage to all the ranking instructors in our midst who continue to spend countless hours in educating young students. To this end, we polled representative thought-leaders within our community to gain a perspective on children teaching. We thank Senseis Joel Ertl, Anita Bendickson, and Meghan Ertl-Bendickson of the N. Central Region, Senseis Barry, Darrell and Brian Power of the Central Region, and Sensei Marcus Wenner of the Southwestern Region for sharing their experience and ideas. Also, please also feel free to send *Seizan* your input. We all have a responsibility to be the Keeper of our Art.

Alex Tong  
General Editor

<sup>1</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karate\\_-\\_cite\\_note-16](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karate_-_cite_note-16);  
<sup>2</sup>[http://web-japan.org/factsheet/en/pdf/e16\\_martial\\_art.pdf](http://web-japan.org/factsheet/en/pdf/e16_martial_art.pdf);  
March 2014



Sensei Nishiyama with Children Karate-ka and Sensei Nick Salcedo

## Forum for Children's Karate Training

By Senseis from North Central, Central and Southwestern Regions

### North Central Region

*Senseis Joel Ertl & Anita Bendickson*



### Central Region

*Senseis Barry, Darrell & Brian Power and Brian Power Sr.*



### Southwestern Region

*Sensei Marcus Wenner*



### **Seizan: How are the children classes structured?**

Children's Beginners class is a one-hour class that meets three times a week. Students go through warm-ups with adults; then the classes are split according to age and experience. Children's Intermediate classes meet 4 times per week, again stretching with adults and split by age and rank and class work. Sometimes students are divided by age regardless of rank, and sometimes by rank regardless of age to focus on *kata*, *kumite* or *kihon* specific for that rank.

In our *dojo*, youngsters are split into 4 to 7 year old groups and 8 to 13 year old groups. In our experience, children should train no more than once or twice a week. Often brothers and sisters train in the same class to make it easier for parents in terms of logistics.

I think twice a week is perfect. More is overkill and less is an awful grind to get them to retain anything. I recently took away the one day per week option and it has worked like a charm. My youngsters range from 6-12 in age and they are all in the same class.

### **Seizan: What is the average age of your youth students? Do most initiate their own learning and were the parents the primary motivation for joining your dojo?**

Students are 5 years old on up. The average age of students is around 8-10 years old. Most expressed an interest to their parents. Very often the parent joins the classes with them. Sometime the parents bring a child with an improvement goal: self confidence, concentration, etc.

The average age is 10 to 12 years old. For the most part, parents initiate the children's training. Children need to develop discipline, focus, confidence and leadership skills. These are the buzz words I always use when talking with parents.

Among my kids there have been a few who are really self motivated. But most are not.

### **Seizan: What do you find to be the biggest difference to promote learning traditional martial arts to children vs. adults?**

The issue of concentration is key. Adult beginners are much better in focusing and avoid distractions. Children usually learn more through imitation, so it's best to keep explanations to children short and simple.

Children need to have fun. They need to enter the dojo with a smile and leave the dojo with a smile. If an instructor accomplishes this they will have the student for a couple of years, hopefully.

I completely agree on the fun and smiling. There actually have been studies done on the fact that if something is FUN our brains retain it and latch onto it better. This is especially true with kids. I tend to be successful with a class comprised of 15-minute warm-ups, 30 minutes of karate and 15 minutes of exercise and games.

Forum for Children’s Karate Training, Continued

North Central Region

*Senseis Joel Ertl & Anita Bendickson*

Central Region

*Senseis Barry, Darrell & Brian Power and Brian Power Sr.*

Southwestern Region

*Sensei Marcus Wenner*

**Seizan: Do you offer the same ranking structure for children as adults- given that children may have a different learning cycle and/or a prolonged tenure at your dojo?**

Yes.



Same ranking structure with addition of yellow stripe. The yellow stripe is awarded for kids 4 to 8 years of age as a pre-8<sup>th</sup> kyu grade.

I have manipulated and massaged my grading structure over the years. Basically at the lower ranks if they can complete the *kata* with minimal mistakes they are doing well. When they are in the *Heian Yondan* stage I start to get a little tougher on them. Jury is still out on whether this is a good strategy or not.

**Seizan: Do you consider competition as a necessary part of youth development in martial arts? If so, what are your thoughts of the frequency and mode (intra-dojō, inter-dojō, regional, national) of competition? How about competition categories and how they are conducted?**

No. Although we offer a small *shiai* once a year, we do not emphasize competition. We are more focused on self-improvement and rank advancement.



Competitions are the best way to lose students in my opinion. A select team should be chosen and train separately from the regular class.

Most students have no desire to compete. Especially after they compete and they do not win a medal. Generally the same students win all tournaments. The rest have a very negative experience. I have found that I have lost more students than I have gained from tournaments, which is the main reason why we do not promote them at the MKA. If you do hold a tournament be sure to give every kid a medal somehow.

USA Hockey has one of the best youth development programs in the country, complete with Sport Psychologists advice for dealing with kids. Kids like to play; they do not particularly enjoy competitions where they are potentially eliminated. National competitions are a huge financial drain on families and I am not sure are relevant.

Competition can be very good or very bad. I think the current progression of *kata* and *kumite* classes for competition is fantastic for kids.

I think competition is lacking in kids sports these days and I tend to feel it that competitive-ness makes them a lot better in the long run.



### Forum for Children’s Karate Training, Continued

North Central Region

*Senseis Joel Ertl & Anita Bendickson*

Central Region

*Senseis Barry, Darrell & Brian Power and Brian Power Sr.*

Southwestern Region

*Sensei Marcus Wenner*

**Seizan: Parents automatically cite development of discipline as the key benefit of youth martial arts training. From the instructor’s perspective, what do you consider to be the major benefits for children participating in martial arts training?**

Discipline is important. We teach the kids to carry though in their training, even though they may not feel like it. Being able to do this is a major component of discipline. Also, the development of strength, agility, flexibility and balance. Psychologically, training improves their development of focus and concentration on chosen goals. This carries over into other pursuits and enhances self-image and self-confidence and assertiveness.

Major benefits are developing social skills, building strength, building confidence, and public speaking such as subject presentation in front of a class.



I tend to hate the fact that parents want to bring their kids to me to learn discipline. I have 3 kids and I discipline them all the time outside of karate.

I also feel kids today react differently to hardcore discipline-based karate training. Maybe I'm too nice. Again this is a learning journey for me too.

**Seizan: Would you like to share any additional comments?**

Another benefit of training, especially for children, is learning to focus long term. The repetition needed to develop the skills that karate requires and the ability to look beyond immediate gratification is a huge benefit going forward in academic, sports and career achievements.

Building a youth program involves help. You'll need to have senior students learn to teach AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. Dealing with kids is exhausting...so focus on teaching the teachers...if you start teaching 15 to 20 classes per week you will quickly burn out and your students will feel this and start to leave you.

My basic advice for growing a kids' program is to grow it slow and make sure you love it.

Children are amazing in their ability to recognize you are having a low-energy day and capitalize on it. Their attention span is short and they want to have fun. They won't appreciate the fact that you understand connection to the floor really well and can prove it to them.

You ultimately have to make sure YOU have fun, THEY have fun. Along the way someone learns something.



If a student leaves for University...help them start a class in their college town at a local school/ youth center. If you do not focus on people who can help grow your student base you will not grow. I may be wrong but this strategy works for me.



*Seizan would like to thank various senseis for contributing photographs of their children karate-ka*



*Placement of children's photographs in the previous article does not connote regional affiliation*

## Upcoming AAKF Events

2014 AAKF Spring Seminar  
**April 25-27, Evanston, IL**

Hosted by  
 AAKF Great Lakes Region &  
 Northwestern University Karate Club




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*We're on the Web!*

*See us at:*

**[www.aakf.org](http://www.aakf.org)**

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**Photographs published courtesy of:** Marcus Wenner (Southwestern Region); Joel Ertl (North Central region); Barry Power (Central Region)




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Information: [john@jbdirect.net](mailto:john@jbdirect.net)  
 Details: [2014AAKFNationals.com](http://2014AAKFNationals.com)

**KARATE**

Hosted by the AAKF Southwest Region