



GKR KARATE JOURNEY

KUMITE TIPS

1. Apply Sanchin To Your Kumite

We all know the word sanchin. The question is, what goes through your mind when you hear the word? Do you think of the stance? Do you think of the many sanchin kata (to which sanseru belongs)? Or do you think of its meaning; three battles?

» Sanchin translates to three battles (san = three & chin = battle) and most agree this refers to three ongoing battles a karate-ka contends with - the development of their body, mind and spirit.

» You may ask, "Why is it a battle to develop these?" or "Why would they refer to developing the body, mind and spirit as a battle?"

» In short, because everything worthwhile takes effort. You may have heard the saying, "If you want a great view you need to climb the mountain as you cannot sit and slide uphill."

The Battle Of The Body

How are muscles developed? By people putting them through struggle (push ups, sit ups, karate training etc). It's only through struggle that our muscles develop. On the other hand, if we take it easy or do nothing, what happens? We lose muscular strength and endurance. Ultimately, the development of the body is a battle. But we all know this.

The Battle Of The Mind

How is our mind developed? By being challenged. Teenagers often complain to their high school teachers with arguments like, "But we will never use this in the real world!" Perhaps they will not need to use their geometry knowledge directly in their adulthood to get by. But they most certainly will need their minds. And what do the various subjects we cover at school teaches us to do? They teach us to use our minds.

» School teaches us to problem solve, to look for solutions, to use our brain, to understand that the answers are there if we just look. School develops our memory, our ability to adapt and our ability to concentrate and focus. School teaches us to learn and reminds us to stay teachable. All the battles we have with subjects at school helps to develop our mind.

» We've all heard that crosswords keep a person's brain sharp. That reading the dictionary will develop our vocabulary. That learning keeps us young. Why, because the more the mind is challenged the stronger it gets.

» The same applies to karate. Expecting to be spoon fed

Brown Belt (1st Kyu)



every piece of knowledge is one way to learn, a far better alternative is to develop your own understanding through your own analysis.

» Equally, developing your mind to look for solutions when the odds are against you in kumite is essential. Controlling the chatter that goes on inside your mind so that it supports and encourages you (rather than criticises) is a battle you must fight to win. But the rewards will be worth it.

The Battle Of The Spirit

We all wish life were easier. We all wish that our lives would not be filled with ongoing problems. Yet our spirit (our character), like the body and mind will only develop through struggle. It is our battles, our struggles, our challenges, our downtimes where we learn the most about ourselves.

"Character is not made of sunshine and roses, like steel it is forged between the hammer and the anvil."

Renowned speaker Jim Rohn once wrote, "Don't wish it was easier; wish you were better. Don't wish for less problems; wish for more skills." He understood that our challenges were invaluable to the development of our

mind and spirit.

How Does This Apply To Kumite?

Many students have the ability to throw a punch good enough to beat their opponent's defences, yet they do not attack. Why? Because they don't believe in their ability to do so. Have you ever held yourself back from attacking because you assumed your opponent had your measure? This means that your body has developed faster than your mind or spirit. It does not matter how good your body becomes, until you balance it out with the development of your mind and spirit you will always hesitate.

» The biggest error most karate-ka make is developing their body ahead of their mind and spirit. You must look at your own kumite and make an assessment as to whether each battle is developing in balance.

2. Develop Your Hissho No Seishin (Your Winning Spirit)

This does not mean that every time you spar you must be competitive. As a 1st kyu you will find that your sparring partners differ greatly:

1. Sparring lower grades whom you can dominate very comfortably: You will find that you can dominate lower grades with much less effort than ever before. These are the students to work your weaknesses on (eg right foot forward, evasion etc). You also coach these students while you spar. In short, you hardly show your hissho no seishin (winning spirit).
2. Sparring advanced students who are of similar ability: With these students you can certainly increase the intensity, but you should still be experimenting and concerning yourself with progress rather than victory. You should still work on weaknesses and look to develop your senjutsu (strategies).
3. Sparring people much better than you. Being a 1st kyu, it's likely that higher grades may push you a little more, increasing their intensity when sparring. This will happen for two reasons:
 - i) Because you are good enough to take it.
 - ii) Because pushing your comfort zone will help you to continue developing.

It's when sparring karate-ka who are better than us that we should develop our hissho no seishin.

» Too often a student will assume they will have zero hope against a higher grade because they focus on their opponent's advantages (eg experience, speed etc). They may also experience this when sparring similar grades that have a distinct physical advantage over them. The problem is that this attitude may follow them if they are ever attacked on the street (eg the opponent is bigger, stronger etc).

» Developing a winning spirit is different to developing a winning strategy, although they are closely linked.

When we spar someone who is much better than us, we can find self-doubt creeps in. When the mind gives up the body soon follows. Developing our hissho no seishin means that no matter how much we feel out of our depth we will:

- a) Look to avoid their strengths and continue to look for a weakness and exploit it; no matter how many times we have failed to come up with a winning strategy in the past. So long as we are still in the bout we should keep trying to find a way to win.
- b) Maintain a winning spirit. A winning strategy is one thing, but if the strategy is filled with self doubt it will inevitably fail. A winning spirit requires us to manage our self-talk and eliminate any negativity that will lead to poor execution (such as hesitation, lack of kime, failing to commit our whole body in a technique). A winning spirit is backed up with winning self-talk. The inner voice should be encouraging you, telling you that you can do it.

This spirit is often referred to as karate-spirit and should transcend into your every day life outside the dojo. It is character based and is built on persistence, resolve, determination and positive self-talk.

3. Prepare For Your Black Belt Grading

You have likely heard many times that Black belt is really the beginning of the karate journey. We have already discussed previously in 'The Journey' section of this website that each and every grade is, in many ways, a new beginning. It's where we re-visit all our previous techniques and strategies with new eyes, a more knowledgeable perspective and greater mastery over our body. This level should be raised much higher as a Black belt.

» But with a greater sense of self mastery, we can also embark on developing more advanced tools as a Black belt. No doubt when you get to these you will have a lot to be excited about. In the meantime, you want to ensure that you are prepared for your Black belt.

» To embark on a new journey as a Black belt you want to ensure you have a stable platform (solid foundations) to build from. Without this you become a jack-of-all-trades and no Black belt should be such a thing. They should have a mastery over the basic techniques, principles and strategies.

» We highly recommend that you visit each grade section of 'The Journey' again and go over all the techniques, principles and strategies suggested to date and assess yourself on each. This will give you an excellent indication of where you are at and what you need to work on.

Techniques:

Are you well rounded in many kumite techniques? Or do you have just two or three techniques you still use 90% of the time?

» Have you developed various ashi sabaki (footwork) or do you only use one type of footwork? Or perhaps, have you neglected footwork and run to attack?

Have you developed the advanced techniques suggested since brown belt (eg Hook kick, etc)

Principles:

Have you eliminated all your telegraphing?

- » Have you developed your ikken hisatsu kumite (the attitude and ability to move in with a fully committed technique, then immediately move out of range to safety once again)?
- » Do you stay down in stance at all times (even when moving) or do you stand up out of stance to strike, block or retreat.
- » Do you use zanshin (a continued state of awareness) when attacking and/or defending?
- » Have you developed the balance between ikimi and itsoku (being light and speed and then suddenly returning to a state of being stuck to the ground and immovable)?

Strategies:

Do you have a wide range of strategies that you can use against a wide variety of opponents? Or do you spar with the same strategy regardless of your opponent's style?

- » Do you adapt as your opponent changes their strategy? Or are you slow to adapt to a changing environment?
- » Do you use feint tactics? Do you disturb your opponent's guard?
- » Have you studied and practised the various senjutsu (combat strategies) offered?
- » Have you developed your own senjutsu?