



KYOKUSHIN

hakoah dojo

excellence . tradition . honour

Gasshuku OLD SCHOOL STYLE

Excitement is always at an all time high when one leaves for a weekend away: friends and fellow *karateka* cracking jokes in the car pool, crammed in between doonas, pillows, *dogi* and the whiff of shinpads... But if we take a moment to be still we all notice a sense of anticipation, not unlike anxiety, just beneath the surface of that exhilaration. Those who have been to many *gasshukus* know that, like gradings, we walk away changed: altered in some profound martial arts way.

With Shihan Trevor Tockar as host, the Sydney *gasshuku* kicked off at Elanora Heights Conference Centre on Friday night with a karate crew from Hakoah, Cujic, Blue Mountains and Griffiths *dojos*, and included special guests from Shotokan, Shin-Kyokushin, and Wing Chun.

[Shihan Kenny Uytendogaardt](#), renowned and respected martial artist and IKO head of Southern and Central Africa, ran the grueling weekend *gasshuku* that left *karateka* of all levels exhausted and depleted but wholly inspired after just the first Friday night session.

A 06h00 hill run set Saturday's session in motion - the group transformed to ghostly figures, gliding in silence in military formation, the crunch of feet on gravel and jagged breath echoing in the cool morning air.

Saturday's first session saw Shihan Kenny focus on his speciality: movement dynamics and fighting combinations, leaving us with forearms and shins airbrushed a rich purple color. Shihan Kenny's explanation and application of *hara* movement (movement from centre) gave the group a lot to think about and even more

to practice. Bewilderment, amazement and concentration were etched on every face for the duration of the day and discussions lasted well into the early hours of Sunday morning.

The area around the bungalows looked like a graveyard for Kyokushin *dogi* as we hung our equipment out to dry between sessions. Some had enough energy for a quick dip in the pool and in so doing managed to bring some cool relief to their strained muscles and abused bodies.

Our demanding and lengthy kata session saw us revisiting *bunkai*, perfecting technique and focusing on movement, as well as learning new kata. More thought, more application, more practice!

Saturday's sessions seemed unending as we were called to assembly again and again, but somehow the instruction left us all wanting more and inspired us to push past our physical boundaries and indulge in our addiction and desire to learn more. By close on Saturday, some people were too tired to eat, and some too tired to even sleep!

On Sunday morning our fatigued bodies were dragged from their beds with much groaning and moaning, and during training reaction times were a little slower. Anyone who knows anything about Kyokushin will know that this is when the instructors push you the hardest, and it was at this point that we were led outside for outdoor training under a baking sun.

The outdoor session had us extending the fighting combinations and did a good job of bruising our bruises. During the strength exercises and stretching we admired our now charcoal coloured arms and shins and made

mental notes to stop at pharmacies on our way home.

The Sunday finale saw the group stand together in Kyokushin solidarity for a test where Sigung Rick Spain, Sensei Darren Parrott, Sensei Jonathan Chriqui, Sempai John Barker and Sempai Michelle Albert would be evaluated. Unfortunately, Sempai Digby Beckley was unable to participate due to an inconvenient and inopportune injury.

For those who have never witnessed a senior grading in Kyokushin, the evaluation session was an eye-opener. The (outdoor) *kihon* session included all basic techniques, was relentless and lasted for more than an hour. *Ido-geiko* was even harder, and was done at a fast pace with many advanced combinations being included. The whole group fell into a rhythm and worked like a single machine. The second outdoor session was conducted by Shihan Kenny, and comprised partner work and hundreds (thousands?) of kicks, punches and blocks were exchanged. Then came the kata session, which was very tiring. Every kata was performed (often more than once), from Taikyoku Sono Ichi to Sushi-ho. The katas included all the kicking katas and the *ura* katas. There was no respite, and, in particular, the performance of Sensei Jonathan Chriqui was outstanding.

By the time we had completed the kata session, the training had endured for no less than 4-5 hours. At that stage, the *kumite* session began. In Kyokushin Karate, the emphasis is on hard, realistic fighting. Kyokushin is "fighting karate", and is not known as "The Strongest Karate" for nothing.

We were privileged to have such people as Sensei Graham Rose, Sempai Stephen Cujic, Sempai Simon Kennedy and Sempai John Whitford take part, together with Sempai Anthony Tockar and big Dave Solomovic (recently returned from *uchi deshi* training in Japan). There were 32 fights in all, with some of the fighters being rested during the last 10 fights - but no rest for Sigung Rick, Sensei Darren, Sensei Jonathan or Sempai John. The standard of fighting was high, with excellent techniques being displayed. Hard, strong, clean and contained. The fighters were left exhausted, with bruises all over their bodies and not a few broken ribs. After the test, Sigung Rick, one of Australia's most respected martial artists, publicly expressed the hope that he had done enough to earn "THE HARDEST BLACK BELT ON EARTH".

This article would not be complete without particular mention of Wilson Dulieu and Alex & Hannah Danon who kept up with the adults and went way beyond the mental and physical capacity of children their age at this level of training.

A very special thanks to Sempai Graham Levy who organized the entire weekend and worked tirelessly to ensure its success. Shihan Tockar extends a warm thanks to Shihan Kenny, Shihan Nic, our special guests, and all attendees.

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Photos on the website gallery kind courtesy of Digby Beckley, Jonathan Chriqui and Alexandra K.