



Lots for Everyone

Glen Davison Editor

It's all happening this year, people!

Mike celebrated 20 years in Western Australia, Myriam's group have moved from Bullockhead Creek to Springfield Lakes, Steve Henderson opened a new dojo, Lismore hosted the third North-east Region

Seminar, Shuji Ozeki Sensei visited Sydney in autumn ... and Maruyama Sensei is coming in October, along with a number of overseas visitors! It feels as though there's something significant happening in aikido every other week.

Not to mention, this newsletter breaks the record for length! Don't forget about Spring Camp in October with Maruyama Sensei. Start getting ready now!



Northern Region Seminar 2014

Reflections

by Cat Milton Brisbane Dojo

If aikido is a path, it's one students arrive on from many different directions. For the Northern Region Seminar held on July 5 and 6 at Aikido Kokikai Lismore, the concept took on a very literal meaning with participants travelling from as far afield as Brisbane, Sydney, and Perth to join together for a weekend of training led by Mike Sinagra, fourth dan.

My own path to the seminar was relatively short and straightforward in that sense – I began training with the Brisbane dojo under James Moss a little under a year ago, so my first experience of camp was just an easy drive from home through the calm green of northern New South Wales.

On other levels, the path of aikido is for me a very counter-intuitive journey.

Essentially I am a person who is highly anxious, particularly socially; and anxiety makes me clumsy – which in turn makes me more anxious. I have a tendency to think through problems rather than feel for answers, and the answer to many of the questions in my life is quite often 'apply more force'.

Over the course of the past year, I have learned a handful of techniques and passed my 6th kyu grading. I like to joke with my friends that I am pretty much unstoppable now, as long as you attack me very slowly in one of about four specific ways - preferably with some warning. I have become friends with my teachers and fellow students, and developed a sense of joyful connection with my dojo. It's somewhere I fit – with all my personal quirks and awkwardnesses,



This Issue

- Welcome
- North East Regional Seminar
- Opening of the UQ Dojo Brisbane
- Autumn Camp with Ozeki Sensei
- Don't forget to breathe



- Silver lining for Bullockhead Creek Dojo
- Mind the Gap.
- Dojo Leaders meeting
- 20th Anniversary of the Perth Dojo



Before I stepped on to the tatami in the Lismore PCYC, I understood I had come to rely on the trust I'd developed in the teachers and students in my own dojo. When I partner with someone from my own dojo – black or white belt – I feel safe. For an anxious person with an over-active 'fight or flight' mechanism, that's quite a big deal.

What I had not understood was just how heavily I rely on that sense of trust: the sense we are on the same path together, we respect each other and are careful with each other.

At the seminar, the first time I was tapped on the shoulder I had a moment of apprehension. I knew I had come to Lismore to train with different people, and I had also come to learn from experienced teachers. But now I had to actually start doing it: turn around and face a new partner, and blend my energy with a stranger's.

I turned and saw my new partner was Allen lu from Sydney. He introduced himself with a smile and asked my name.

I am not going to lie: for a fraction of a second my insides turned to water.

I find myself clumsy and awkward enough when I'm training with a partner I know well, but when an unknown fourth dan offers his wrist to me (however genuine his smile), I have a moment where general social anxiety combines with the sudden realisation that this guy could pretty much paint the floor with me, that leaves me staring at my own limbs in confusion wondering how I haven't actually just fallen over already.

Mike had already spoken to us about 'positive mind', which was the focus of the weekend seminar. I took a breath, engaged my own positive mind, and reached out to take Allen's wrist. I can't even remember now which technique we were practicing: what I do remember is he was a calm, patient, and gentle teacher. I was left with absolutely no doubt he could indeed paint the floor (and walls, and ceiling) with me if he chose to – but within moments of our temporary partnership I found myself relaxing and learning. Occasionally I even remembered to breathe.

Over the course of the seminar, teachers from each dojo took turns to lead sessions and guide the participants through techniques – all the while focusing on developing positive mind. In each session, I changed training partners: sometimes partnering with someone from my own dojo, but often with people I'd met only that weekend. I was surprised at how quickly I felt rapport with people who were strangers only hours previously.

I learned the spirit enlivening my dojo is not unique to us: as aikidoka, we don't only blend our ki when we partner on the mat, we connect as people both in and out of the dojo. We were there to learn about positive mind, but the lessons I learned most deeply were more about the nature of aikido – especially about 'ai', joining together as one.

O Sensei said, 'When an opponent comes forward, move in and greet him; if he wants to pull back, send him on his way.' While this is certainly true of aikido techniques, this describes my experience of meeting, training, and socialising with other aikidoka during the seminar weekend.

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Northern Regions Seminar - 2014



By Ian Newton

Lismore Dojo

This was a collaboration of the Brisbane, Bullockhead Creek, University of Queensland and Lismore dojos. We had 26 people attend and I would again like to acknowledge the support of UNSW, Rockdale and Avalon dojos.

Mike Sinagra developed the theme around exploring what positive mind means in practical techniques. We were very fortunate to also have Allen lu and Glen Davison who conducted sessions to reinforce this theme. Mike, Allen and Glen all ran sessions detailing how the principle applied to techniques with great tips, insights and tweaks to help understand and develop the principle.

All the other dojo leaders demonstrated a technique to look at a particular practical aspect of the principals. Another great weekend of training! Thanks to:



All those who participated. I hope you gained as much from the weekend as I did. Thanks to; The Northern Region dojo leaders James, Julie, Myriam, Steve and Ann for helping organise the weekend and to Tzaddi, Mimi, Peach and Aurora for all their logistical support on the weekend.

A very special thanks to Mike, Allen and Glen for generously sharing their many years of experience again.

New Kokikai Dojo opens at University of Queensland

Steve Henderson

UQ Dojo

After years of discussions, investigations, planning, hopes and dreams it has finally happened. A new Kokikai Aikido dojo has opened at The University of Queensland in Brisbane! The University of Queensland is situated at St Lucia, just west of Brisbane City. With over 45,000 students enrolled and surrounded by residential suburbs there is an opportunity to see a significant number of new Kokikai students in Brisbane.

The dojo leader is Steve Henderson who has trained under James Moss at Brisbane Dojo. Steve is also the lead instructor.

Classes commenced on May 23rd and a grand opening was well attended. The Martial Arts Gym at the University Sports Centre has nearly 200m² of fixed mats and a high ceiling for weapons training. New mats were installed at the end of July!

Classes are each Friday 6:00 – 7:30 pm and a number of visitors have shown some interest in training. Semester 2 market day will see 500 fliers distributed to newly enrolled University students. Marketing also commences soon in the surrounding suburbs.

On 4 July we welcomed Mike Sinagra for a training seminar. This event was well attended thanks to James and Julie Moss from Brisbane Dojo and Myriam Raymond from Bullockhead Creek Dojo



who brought a number of their students along for the seminar. A great night's training was topped off with a visit to a local Japanese restaurant where Mike Sinagra met a long lost neighbour from Nagoya who was delighted to engage Mike in conversation.

A big thanks to all those who have supported UQ Dojo in its establishment phase with sound advice, etc. We look forward to a positive Kokikai experience for many UQ students.

See you all at camp in October



<http://www.kokikai.org.au>

Autumn Camp with Ozeki Sensei

Vidhya Sethu

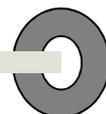
UNSW Dojo



Every autumn, the UNSW dojo plays host to Shuji Ozeki sensei and aikidokas from Kokikai dojos around the country for the annual autumn camp and this year was no different. Ozeki sensei, founder of the UNSW dojo, ran the camp which involved a weekend (April 12th and 13th) of hard and enjoyable training. With more than 30 people attending, the camp also provided everyone with the opportunity to train with many different ukes and learn to deal with a variety of weights, strengths and skill levels.

This year's camp also saw a fairly large number of new students attend the camp. If my experience from my first camp was anything to go by, I imagine they would have been somewhat nervous about what to expect. However, Ozeki sensei took

special care with them, teaching and encouraging them. He got them to demonstrate their techniques and put them at ease, which would have helped ease their tension and enabled them focus on learning.



Inside Cover

Coming up on the national calendar:

- **National Camp in Sydney at UNSW with Maruyama Sensei 4th – 7th October**

Other news

- **Membership time is upon us ensure you have paid your membership**
- **Do you have any of the kokikai merchandise?? See your Dojo leader for T-shirts or caps**

Ed

Iron is full of impurities that weaken it; through the forging fire, it becomes steel and is transformed into a razor-sharp sword. Human beings develop in the same fashion

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Training at the camp involved practising a wide variety of techniques, some practical street techniques', some that emphasised timing and some that helped us work on our posture. Interspersed among the techniques were also a number of fundamental ki exercises and tests. The emphasis being on learning the principles involved, rather than a disparate set of techniques. Training and learning is an important element of the camp, however it is not the complete camp experience. Ozeki sensei brings his mix of enthusiasm, skill and knowledge to the mats along with his stories and there is much to be learnt from watching him and listening to him. This is the seventh autumn camp that I have had the pleasure of attending since I started my training and each time I see something new when I watch sensei's demonstrations and I expect this to be true for future camps as well.

Breathing and Kokikai

Thersia Hall

UNSW Dojo

During Ozeki sensei's visit last April, he did a lot of breathing exercises with us. What is the purpose of this breathing exercise (one may ask)?

One asked, it is easy, isn't it? Just breathe in through your nose and out through your nose, and inhale and exhale and the pattern repeats.

Well, breathing is breathing. It is the process that moves air in and out of the lungs or oxygen through other breathing organs. It is essential and is vital to us because, why? We can live without food and water for 3 days but we can't live without oxygen for 3 minutes.

As human beings, we require oxygen to release energy via cellular respiration, in the form of the metabolism of energy-rich molecules such as glucose. Breathing is only one process, that delivers oxygen to where it is needed in the body and removes carbon dioxide. Another important process involves the movement of blood by the circulatory system.

Being a yogi and practising yoga daily for 5-6 years, I can relate to this. Breathing is almost vital for every yoga posture. As when we hold a posture, we compress and block blood circulation to certain parts of our body. And as we release from the posture, we let the blood (fresh blood and nutrients) flow quickly to the area where it is needed, hence flushing the blockage and removing toxins and impurities from the body. This acts to heal the body, so we have a nice, good flow throughout our body without any blockage. Whenever you feel pain or bruise or discomfort, this means the flow is distorted, or your 'ki' is disturbed, until that area is fixed or healed.



Breathing leads to focus --

When we are able to control our breathing, we can focus better. To focus, in my dictionary anyway, means to see (and concentrate) on one thing and one thing only. This 'one' thing is 'one point'; in a martial art like Aikido, it means focusing on what is happening around you, within your space, on the mat. (i.e, in randori attack for example). (I must admit that despite writing about breathing and the importance of breathing in randori attack, I do, occasionally, if not often, forget to breathe. This is something that comes with practise and maturity in my aikido training.)

Taking this breathing to your Aikido martial art training; with breathing, we can perform techniques better because as we breathe, we generate energy in the form of 'ki'.

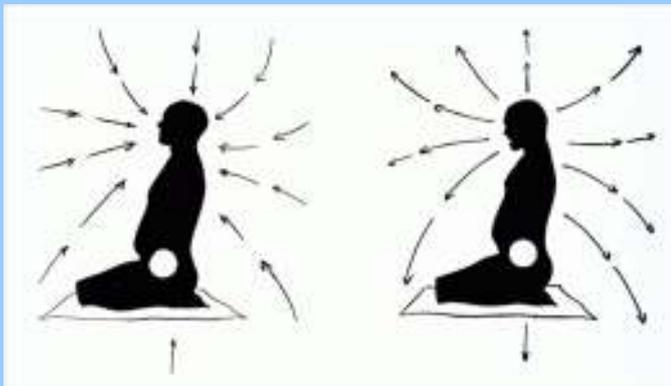
With breath comes focus. With focus comes strength and stability. When you can focus, your body and mind can work together and over time you will develop strength. When you can focus better, you will have a calmer mental state, increased coordination as well as strength. The strength can come from your mind (virtual) and your body (physical). Over time, as one trains and progresses further, he or she can defend him or herself in an effective manner.

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Coming back to the purpose of breathing

Thus, the purpose of breathing exercises is to enable you to bring awareness to your breathing. When you are aware of your breathing you can use it to maximum effectiveness. The change from unconscious to conscious breathing is accomplished by thinking about your breathing and becoming aware of your own body. Most of our behaviour is unconscious. We walk around in our bodies, doing things, rarely noticing how they feel unless there is pain. Seldom do we consciously think of the body as feeling good. Feeling good shouldn't be an absence of pain. It should be an invigorated, energetic state where you are comfortable and happy in your body. Becoming aware of your breath is a way to reach that feeling. Expanding your breathing ability is a way of extending that feeling.



Try to become more aware of your breathing during training and at other times. Take deeper breaths, do regular abdominal breathing where you fill up your lungs completely. If you feel yourself getting tense or angry, do some breathing (attention breathing) where you are focusing your awareness on the natural rhythm of your breath, not to control it but simply to observe it as a bodily function and notice how your feelings change. If you are bored or sleepy, do some nose panting to reenergize yourself. No matter what you are doing, breathe. Make conscious dynamic breathing a regular part of your life and you will find it naturally benefits your martial arts training.



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As The Water Rises, So does the Ship

Myriam Raymond

Bullockhead Creek

Sometimes, great things happen in slimy grey packages. But there are always, always, and always – silver linings. Of course, bad things never seem great when they happen: they are awful, and finding your way through them can sometimes be confounding, and daunting. You know about the opportunity thingy, in the face of the adversity thingy, but it can be hard. You suddenly find yourself needing to be creative, tenacious, and to be digging deep into your character. You get to be brave. You get to test out your aikido.

Five years ago, we made Bullockhead Creek Kokikai a spark of a dream in September 2009, and a true reality in January 2010. We had three students.

When the floods came in January 2011, we narrowly missed devastation at the dojo, but our students were affected badly at their own homes. My home was destroyed too. We just rebuilt. Our homes and our lives were rebuilt, and our dojo got stronger, and we got stronger. We started children's classes in January 2013, and we grew to over fifty students by June 2014.

But we did lose our dojo on 17th July 2014. After a year-and-a-half-long campaign in conjunction with the Darra Community group, it became apparent that we had lost our battle to save our training space from redevelopment. The land was sold and we had to move out. My students are pretty special people, always offering to help with anything, and I hate the telephone, so I gave some of them a spreadsheet of places to phone, and we found our new home in one day.

On 18th July 2014, we started our first class at the YMCA Springfield Lakes Community Centre. It's a real change from our old space, and it's going to take a bit of getting used to! Like every other Kokikai dojo in Australia we now rent by the hour: we put out the mats and put them away before and after class, just like some of the rest of you. It's a real drag (pardon the pun!) because our mats are heavy! We do miss having a permanent



space. However, having a permanent space did come with some added responsibilities, and expenses, and we are free of those. Also, there are no spiders in the corners.

Widen the Gap

Gregor Erdmann

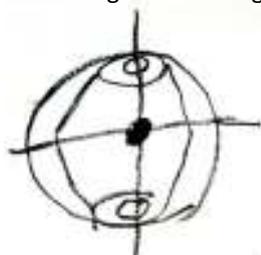
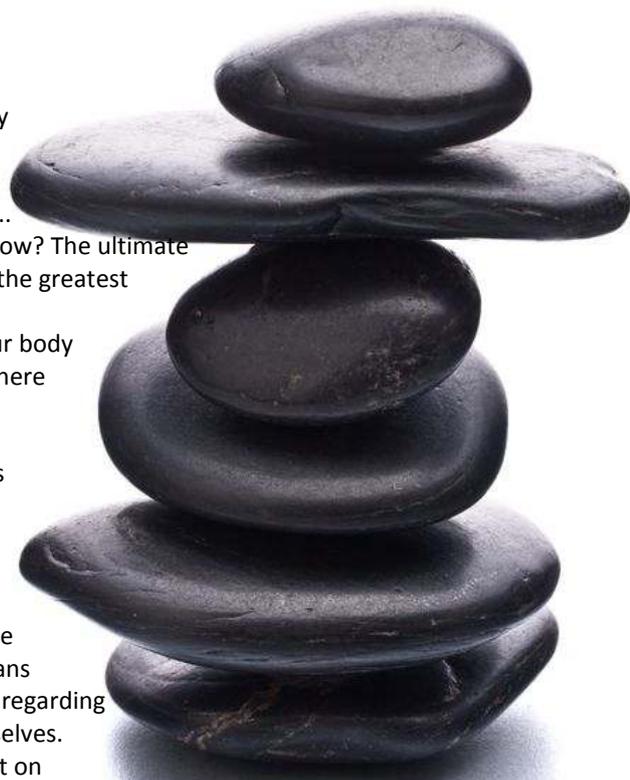
Burwood

This 'gap' is the difference between us and our attacker in terms of their ability to resist, and the amount of effort required to perform a technique.

Continuing with this line of thought, we can separate any technique into two parts. Let us examine both of these parts independently and in greater detail...

1. What actions do we need to perform on our attacker to execute a throw? The ultimate goal is to perform the action which is the most difficult to resist, has the greatest effect on their balance, and is as quick or direct as possible.
2. The second part is how do we perform this action? How do we use our body and mind most efficiently to make this action easy to perform, and where do we position ourselves to remain safe throughout the technique.

The first part is concerned with making our attacker as weak and vulnerable as possible through correct body positioning, application of physical force and perfect timing. By practising basic (kihon) techniques we can explore the correct application of forces. Generally, forces along the bone line are easily resisted and those applied at 90 degrees to the bone line require a great deal of effort from the attacker to maintain their structural integrity. Joints too have varying degrees of movement and can be quite complex. Fortunately, all humans are roughly the same in their physical structure and so any questions we have regarding the easiest way to move a body can be answered through examination of ourselves. In addition to applying forces in a direction which will have the greatest impact on our attacker, we need to position ourselves such that we can access our attacker's vulnerabilities while keeping ourselves safe. In other words, we should attain a position where our arms and legs have access to our opponent's weaknesses such as kidneys and ribs while keeping out of the range of their counter attacks. Once the physical aspects of a technique are understood, the intricacies of timing can be explored. It takes many years of studying the rhythm of breath and the various stages of an attack. This emphasises the importance of authentic and realistic attacks to gain an in-depth understanding of timing. We can supplement our understanding with training in striking arts such as karate and wing-chun.



Part two of this study is concerned with ensuring that we are as strong as possible both physically and mentally. Curiously, this is the same as part one.

We will always have the same strengths and weaknesses as long as we remain as human as our attackers. This is great news! For each weakness we discover in our assailant, we discover our complimentary strength and vice versa. Where we can widen the gap with our attacker is in this knowledge. Through diligent training, we can discover the full uses of our bodies, and perhaps in some cases overcome some weaknesses through strength or flexibility exercises.

When it comes to timing, it is important that we have a clear and open mind so that we are able to capture the correct timing of a technique and take the initiative even when we are attacked. Through meditation and breathing practice we can improve our ability to foresee our attacker's actions, and maintain our mental clarity during moments of duress.

When we look upon a master, we can see and feel this gap even if we are unable to put our finger on what it actually is. By regularly attending class and constantly polishing our spirits, we can widen our awareness, deepen our knowledge of human nature and improve our ability to use all the physical strengths and weaknesses we are born with in an intuitive, natural way.



New Official Kokikai Merchandise

can be purchased at any Dojo. Ask your Dojo leader to see any of the caps, T-shirts or badges



Dojo Leaders Conference

Steve Henderson

UQ Dojo

The Dojo Leaders' Conference was held on the weekend of 14th & 15th June 2014. The business meeting was held at UNSW on Saturday. All dojos were represented:-

A full day's discussion ensued around issues including finance and support for dojos, insurance, marketing, gradings, mentoring, business planning and organisational efficiency. Mike Sinagra led a workshop analysing core aspects of Kokikai in an examination of key reasons students come to Kokikai and what they find in Kokikai dojos which makes them stay. The completed Junior Curriculum was submitted and contains a full scope and sequence, grading and minimum requirements for student progress. The marketing committee continues to pursue promotional opportunities and strategies including internet and social media and a range of marketing ideas for dojo leaders. A new application form for establishing an AKA dojo was tabled, containing 3 sections - the proposed dojo, the proposed dojo leader and instructors, the business plan. A risk statement document was included with this submission. These documents were adopted as AKA process documents. A training session was attended by all on Sunday along with several other black belt students.



Mikey knows how to make you an offer you can't refuse. With him being a renowned Sicilian heavy man I knew I had to accept his invitation to come urgently to WA. I didn't want to go 'swimming with the fishies', so I took the next flight. I heard word on the street that something big was going to go down for celebrating his 20 years as Top Dog of his turf, which he claims to be everywhere west of Tamworth. Pretty much 95% of Australia.

When I arrived the Sicilian was there to greet me personally. This made me nervous. When he greeted me he slapped my chin and gave me a big hug. By his embrace I knew I was going to make it back to Sydney. He couldn't be setting me up to get 'hit' with such a genuine welcoming cuddle, could he?

In the car on the way to WA Kokikai Aikido HQ, Mikey explained what was going on. He was putting together a secret underground Kokikai fight show.



Everyone of influence in the Sicilian's Kokikai world was invited to come along to a hidden location to see his top dogs fight against all comers to show how tough they were, and in turn how incredibly tough the Sicilian must be. The show was to be followed up by dinner for the most important guests and any survivors of the fight show. The next day at WA HQ I heard word that two other big bosses were coming to town. Glen from the Rockdale Dojo was on his way. Rockdale is one of the toughest places in Sydney. You don't get to the top dog in a town like that without being one tough dude! James Moss, or 'Moss San' from Brisbane had also hit the Perth tarmac and as he passed by, the crowd at the airport were reaching for their phones and asking for autographs, even though they couldn't quite place who he was. It's just that the people of isolated Perth hadn't seen any dude so well dressed since the Prince tour of 1998.



A couple of nice meals and a sleep later we were blindfolded and taken to the secret fight location. We entered this huge hall greeted by a crowd of Mikey's friends cheering and calling for the show to start. There was a large matted area, and the acoustics in the big room set a scene where the spectators were right up in the face of the fighters and you could hear every breath and swish of a gi.

Next up were Mick and Jamie. Mick (and his wife Penny) were Mikey's first ever black-belts. Mick showed a maturity of technique that thrilled the crowd. All comers were thrown through the air so far that some landed in another post code. I was quite jealous hearing some guy from the crowd coming up afterwards saying how he was his favourite of all the top dogs. Jamie for those of you who don't know is known as 'the golden child'. He is so close to the Sicilian who has been guiding and teaching him since he was in the Little Kokikai Kiddies Crèche. Jamie was so impressive for his young years. Everyone that got up to attack the golden child was put in a wrist lock faster than when the Police arrive at a forest protest.

Moss San, Glen and I were next up to take on some especially fierce ukes Mikey had saved up for us. I was nervous up there. Everything felt a little chinky and about 1 thousandth of a beat out of time. I didn't want to bring shame on the Sicilian so I dug deep, thought about Maruyama's teaching and how to relax. I found my rhythm and before I knew it I was effortlessly flicking ukes off me like a kid getting rid of a booger on their fingertip.

Now Moss San, he just loves being in the spotlight and you couldn't get the smile off his face as he was up there getting attacked from all angles, casually tossing people around like they were casino dice. He lapped up the crowd's appreciation and Glen had to physically push him out of the way just to get a go up there.

Glen put on a real show and Mikey purposely kept him for one of the final acts. For those who don't know, Glen is a human encyclopaedia of Kokikai Technique. He threw everyone around for a good 10 minutes. The attackers were having trouble getting up and finding the courage to attack again. By that stage, he'd only used up less than 1% of all he knew and hardly had a bead of sweat on his brow.

The last one up was Freddy. Freddy is one of Mikey's oldest aikido buddies in Perth. Freddy got attacked by an especially large and ferocious uke. I don't know where he got the wooden samurai sword from, but as he came running across the room to attack Freddy, I noticed that Freddy's pupil's didn't so much as dilate as he stood his ground. At the last second he jumped around, took the sword off the poor young attacker and at the same time tapped him on the head with the hilt and opened him up like a can of sardines. It was like the finale of a pro wrestling fight, when they munch on their fake blood capsules. There was literally blood everywhere. Mikey stood up and called 'enough'! The crowd were cheering and were so primed up that some of the old ladies in one corner were pushing and shoving toward the mats trying to get in on the fight action.

Watching from the other side of the room were Katie Node and Noriko Shimada. They thought they could get the attention of the crowd and proceeded to pull out samurai swords and faced off against each other, circling like jungle tigers with careful footwork. The crowd hushed and gave the two princess warriors all their attention. Suddenly there was a flash of light as Noriko lunged at Katie's abdomen with a lightning fast tsuki. Without even seeing Katie move everyone realised that she had avoided the attack and had her sharp blade pressed against Noriko's throat. She turned to Mikey and asked if she should 'finish her off'. Mikey decided that Freddy had spilt enough blood to mark the occasion and gestured to let her go.

The crowd spontaneously cheered at the mercy of the Sicilian and all together slowly bowed to him. I don't think I've ever seen him look happier than he looked up there with so many of his friends in that room and a belly full of aikido fight action. Everyone managed to survive the fight show, even the ukes. After a few quick stitches, bandages and a shower, the dinner was on. The speeches were up straight away once everyone was seated. The Sicilian thanked everyone for supporting him and his family and he said we all helped 'make it all happen for him'. He started tearing up when he talked about his beautiful wife, knowing all she has put up with, and when he tried to talk about his teacher, Shuji Maruyama Sensei, the world's real Top Dog, he choked up completely and just couldn't get any words out. In that moment of awkwardness, the drinks came out, the music went on and we all ate, danced and drank till we hit the wall one by one. Everyone went to bed reliving the big night, then drifting off into very sweet dreams. Some of us may have swam with fishes in our dreams, but no-one woke up with concrete boots on.



Brave' Matthews. Dave was one of Mikey's top dogs but had left him to serve another big boss. Not only did Dave the Brave not get 'hit' for leaving, he remained very close to the Sicilian's heart. I could tell Mikey was touched that he wanted to go first. Dave stood there and a tough looking uke came in fast and attacked him. Dave stepped off line smoothly and chucked him like a rag doll. Dave showed his prowess and Mikey watched him move across the mats gracefully and thought of all the happy times they had spent together.

Next up were two of the Sicilian's WA top dogs, Andy and Julian. Andy seemed to slow the pace of the clock on the wall down as ukes came in fast to attack him. He was so relaxed that the way he moved was having the effect of hypnotising his opponents. That was ok, but it actually started to also work on some of the audience who were slipping into a trance. Jules saw what was going on and jumped up to tag Andy and take over. For those that don't know, Julian is actually twice as strong as a normal human being. When he was out in the middle I could see he was only using 1 eighth of his power which, when combined with just an ounce of pure Kokikai technique meant he was flipping ukes like burger patties. All the while, Mikey sat on his big throne out the front beaming with pride watching the spectacle unfold.

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Watching from the other side of the room were Katie Node and Noriko Shimada. They thought they could get the attention of the crowd and proceeded to pull out samurai swords and faced off against each other, circling like jungle tigers with careful footwork. The crowd hushed and gave the two princess warriors all their attention. Suddenly there was a flash of light as Noriko lunged at Katie's abdomen with a lightning fast tsuki. Without even seeing Katie move everyone realised that she had avoided the attack and had her sharp blade pressed against Noriko's throat. She turned to Mikey and asked if she should 'finish her off'. Mikey decided that Freddy had spilt enough blood to mark the occasion and gestured to let her go.

The crowd spontaneously cheered at the mercy of the Sicilian and all together slowly bowed to him. I don't think I've ever seen him look happier than he looked up there with so many of his friends in that room and a belly full of aikido fight action.

Everyone managed to survive the fight show, even the ukes. After a few quick stitches, bandages and a shower, the dinner was on. The speeches were up straight away once everyone was seated. The Sicilian thanked everyone for supporting him and his family and he said we all helped 'make it all happen for him'. He started tearing up when he talked about his beautiful wife, knowing all she has put up with, and when he tried to talk about his teacher, Shuji Maruyama Sensei, the world's real Top Dog, he choked up completely and just couldn't get any words out. In that moment of awkwardness, the drinks came out, the music went on and we all ate, danced and drank till we hit the wall one by one. Everyone went to bed reliving the big night, then drifting off into very sweet dreams. Some of us may have swam with fishes in our dreams, but no-one woke up with concrete boots on.

