

JKS England October 2024 Courses with Yamaguchi Sensei and Watanabe Sensei



October 2024 was a bumper month with not one but two Honbu Dojo instructor visits to Nottingham, making it a veritable Oktoberfest of karate! Taking place on the 6th and 27th October, JKS England were extremely proud to be able to welcome Takashi Yamaguchi Sensei and Daisuke Watanabe Sensei respectively. The two sell-out courses only a few short weeks apart made it, without a doubt, an Autumn to remember.

The ability to be able to maintain a direct line to instruction at the Honbu Dojo aids both students and dojo heads alike, reinforcing everything done at their home dojos in order to maintain the highest standards which the JKS aims to diligently preserve. Both instructors brought a wealth of knowledge, sharing their experience and reflecting on the place which they currently reside along their own karate journeys.



Throughout the two seminars, many similarities could be identified. An eagerness to impart both detail and understanding was something which was central to both of their approaches. Differences in content made the combination of attendance at both courses hugely profitable as in conjunction, the ideas which were explored left no stone unturned! With only a few hours each, Yamaguchi and Watanabe Sensei covered many teaching points at a perfect pace, allowing students the

opportunity to grasp and practice each idea before it was built on further. Precision and clear demonstration from the instructors and when utilising JKS England students, meant the points raised were always crystal clear, avoiding any ambiguity. The composure which was also brought by both instructors made for a fitting environment to train hard in, whilst also exercising the brain cells when specific elements were being succinctly highlighted and justified.

The first seminar was taught by Takashi Yamaguchi Sensei, 7th Dan, Chief of the JKS International Department. It was a long overdue visit to JKS England for Yamaguchi Sensei and someone who has become such a popular name with his refined brand of karate and teaching delivery. Many would last have benefitted from Yamaguchi Sensei's instruction over Zoom when travel restrictions prohibited spectacles such as October 2024 would provide.



The course began with the warmest of welcomes from Alan Campbell Sensei, 8th Dan, Head of JKS England who would also repeat the same for Watanabe Sensei's first visit to Nottingham at the end of the month. Alan Sensei thanked both instructors on behalf of all in attendance and reiterated how fortunate JKS England members are, benefitting from the quality and frequency of Honbu Dojo instruction domestically, complimenting the world-class senior instructors of JKS England, soon to be showcased again at the Christmas Course on Sunday 15th December.

Yamaguchi Sensei began with a shoulder warm up and illustrated the many different ways in which the joint can moved. Explaining how the joint functions and the mobility which gives it great potential, Yamaguchi Sensei detailed a definitive way in how to exploit these characteristics by accompanying his explanation with several drills. These would explore the range of motion which students could achieve and then work on this to develop the co-ordination and speed vital to allow fast and fluid hand and arm techniques to result.

Yamaguchi Sensei discussed many themes and cited many examples where shoulder control is crucial to supporting a powerful offensive or defensive technique. Breathing was also considered and how short sharp breaths and deeper slower breathing can be recruited in training and execution to aid performance.

Students were encouraged to contract their shoulder blades to extend the joint to its optimal positions and enable the correct posturing required. The expansion and release of the joint was practiced with a focus on elbow snap towards a target.



The use of the elbow as a counter-attacking strike then dominated the early portion of Yamaguchi Sensei's seminar. A combination of empi attacks was then built into a sequence which involved spinning to help students start to understand the distance at which elbow attacks can be effective options to employ.

These different empi approaches were then performed as a defence to five incoming attacks. Students then generated more speed as their

confidence from the earlier shoulder exercises had loosened the arm and the drill had given the understanding of how to quickly respond with these destructive elbow counters. Each response engaged an alternative approach to empi, either through the footwork, target or pathway of the elbow strike.

The need for relaxation to add speed and allow the body to move fluidly was then carried over to kata training. Junro Shodan would be practiced first with Yamaguchi Sensei concentrating on the timing points needed to match the body movement in support of delivering the hand technique. A whole-body mantra was promoted and with the different turns in the kata,

students repeated the key movements which Yamaguchi Sensei had progressed towards from the very start of the lesson. Critical timing points such as the gyaku-tsuki kiai were explained thoroughly as Yamaguchi Sensei covered common misconceptions about how this is performed.



The comprehensive and methodical style with which Yamaguchi teaches ensures a clarity for everything that is mentioned or

demonstrated and is twinned with a desire to help others improve their own karate. There is a clear affinity towards the variety with which kata can be used to further develop many aspects of the martial art. The rarer Sensho was then covered, followed by Kakuyoku Shodan with Yamaguchi Sensei reiterating many of the salient details and how they relate to the different movements and techniques within the katas.

Yamaguchi Sensei drew many parallels to Heian katas in a very thoughtful way, particularly helpful to kyu grades whose exposure to the latter katas meant it would be trickier to grasp certain concepts. Illustrating his insight into the requirements of students at all levels would come as no surprise as Yamaguchi Sensei had delivered a truly memorable and densely packed course. Illuminating many aspects of body mechanics and how specific body alignment underpins a substantial amount of successful karate technique, Yamaguchi Sensei showed exactly how the students' physiology needs to be structured for powerful application to result.



The second seminar would see the highly decorated Watanabe Sensei, 5th Dan, Honbu Dojo instructor give an exciting exhibition of his current ability and how his extensive insight into kumite techniques, combinations and strategy in particular, can be mirrored by others to advance their own sparring performance.

What would be especially exhilarating to watch was Watanabe Sensei's incredible speed and acceleration. Having sharpened footwork skills and co-ordination, Watanabe Sensei would show each time how this quickness limited the time for an opponent to respond and took him from an apparent point of safety to delivering a clear and well thought out scoring technique.

Prior to the kumite practice which would dominate the session, Watanabe Sensei would display the necessary basic components that translate to this inspiring speed of movement. Students covered a number of basics early in the session to warm-up and began to combine techniques together. Moving with a grace, everything Watanabe Sensei did was deliberate and effortlessly balanced, achieved over years of training the body to be able to move at the highest speed whilst still retaining the composure and relaxation needed to remain in control.

Students worked through some punching and kicking combinations with use of the hips, something which Watanabe Sensei touched upon and would later reinforce. Common Shotokan stances would then be arranged in a drill which helped to warm up the legs and hips before kicking techniques punctuated the time in between the stance transitions. Moving into kiba dachi, kokutsu-dachi and zenkutsu-dachi allowed Watanabe Sensei to explore how control of one's balance and core was vital to complete the textbook techniques being sought. After mae-geri had been practiced, mawashi-geri and yoko geri keage and kekomi were introduced as students kicked to different angles before driving into the stances.

Watanabe Sensei then moved to reiterate many of the points made regarding stance transitions as Bassai Dai was studied. The enjoyment with which Watanabe Sensei appears to show when practicing any element of training was obvious to see, although there may have been just a tiny sparkle more in the eye as he moved to kumite, very understandable considering his success on the tatami at a world level.



Watanabe Sensei covered how to deliver kizami-tsuki first and it would be the first of many jaw-dropping demonstrations showing his astonishing speed but also very crucially his awareness of how this is achieved. Foot position, bodyweight distribution and timing of the footwork became central to student's practice as they attempted to mimic Watanabe Sensei's light-footed movement. The class was encouraged to feel like they were being suctioned to the target, supporting full commitment to each technique and preventing any action which worked to prevent this from happening as swiftly as was possible.

Watanabe Sensei began to feed the students with further thoughts on how an opponent might respond and how feints can be used to draw certain reactions and open up well-rehearsed scoring opportunities. Recognising what works (and what doesn't) to both the open and closed sides, students were given explanations which were as sharp and clear as Watanabe Sensei's technique. Students would thoroughly enjoy not only watching Watanabe Sensei demonstrate his idea but also fully appreciate the poise and intention behind every drop of the shoulder, raise of the hand and blistering attack.

The angle of attack was also something which was changed through manipulation of the front foot position and the movement which this would summon from the opponent. The conjuring ability of Watanabe Sensei to be able to manoeuvre himself into his ideal distance was something to behold as a gyaku-tsuki feint followed by a uraken score was shown. It is difficult to convey just how sensational Watanabe Sensei's movements are but what's for certain is that they are thrilling to watch for those lucky enough to have been there in person.

Watanabe Sensei proceeded to develop half a dozen attacking combinations, each with many facets needing to be understood to afford the best chance of success with the technique. Even when the offensive technique was being heavily deliberated on, Watanabe Sensei would often return to the need to safeguard against unpredictable movement from the partner or to fully acknowledge when in range of an expected a counterattack.

Influencing the partner's positioning was something Watanabe Sensei explained at great length, and it is this deeper appreciation that to make a technique or combination work the setup and momentum need to

comprehended. Watanabe Sensei would also cover how to disguise a rear leg mawashi to the body and how the body should rotate so that if not scoring the attacker would not have moved to a more vulnerable position. A lightning fast kizami-gyaku-tsuki combination would also be demonstrated as the timing of the hands and hip position were practiced straight after by the class.



Watanabe Sensei then brought the second bumper seminar to a close to a great round of applause as was given to Yamaguchi Sensei after the first one. Two fantastic instructors who gave students excellent advice and many memories to cherish as JKS England enjoyed more chances to broaden their knowledge and witness some exceptional karateka on a platform that they couldn't be more at home on. A huge thanks must go to Alan Campbell Sensei and Wendy

Campbell Sensei for making both courses happen and allowing so many students to gain so much.