



Message from Kancho Matsui

- 2020-09-04

Dear IKO members,

I hope all of you are maintaining good health.

Coronavirus has spread around the world since the beginning of 2020, with nearly every country on earth affected. I would like to send my sincere condolences to the families of those who have passed away due to Covid-19, and wish all who have been infected, get well quickly. My deepest respect goes out to the medical professionals and first responders, who risk their lives 24/7 in this global battle.

Our way of life has changed drastically in the last few months and has tested us on many fronts. Maintaining social distance at a time when we face such challenges makes this period in our lives that much more difficult. IKO Kyokushinkaikan has had to cancel or postpone many annual events such as International Karate Friendship, Sosai Oyama's 26th Memorial Ceremony, as well as nearly all international and national championship events, training camps and gatherings around the world.

The Japanese Government declared a State of Emergency in April 2020; it was lifted at the end of May, but the number of infected has still increased this summer in Tokyo, and its rapid spread seems to have greatly increased around the world. During the State of Emergency in Japan, we pivoted to online Kyokushin class programming, using applications such as ZOOM for our domestic membership. We are an organization of karate practitioners, who rely on each other to train and improve. To be able to use technology to keep in close contact, has its limitations, but it has provided some excellent advantages and insight. I believe it will be a very valuable tool we discovered during this tough time.

IKO Dojos in Japan reopened this June with very strict Government limits on our curriculum and space capacity, in order to prioritize the safety and health of our members, families and staff. Now we are adapting again, as we navigate how to operate with new safety protocols in place.

Japan is a small island surrounded by ocean and has developed a unique culture and way of life distinctively over thousands of years because of its remoteness and rare instances of outside influence from the rest of the Asia, and the world. Karate, for example, was imported from China to Okinawa, Japan, and then to the mainland. Once in Japan, local practitioners elevated karate practice to an art form, and way of life. Other arts, such as calligraphy, (Shodo), flower arrangement, (Kado), tea ceremony, (Sado), followed similar paths. Originally, these arts were simply everyday methods, but over time, were cultivated to become revered and treasured art forms in Japan.

On the dark side, because of Japan's positioning in the ocean, it is strongly affected by catastrophic natural disasters such as earthquakes, typhoons and tsunami. These adversities have cultivated in the Japanese people, a deep respect for nature, and a natural resiliency, in order to prepare for, and deal with difficulties beyond one's control. "Osu no Seishin". The Covid-19 pandemic is a natural disaster of sorts as well, and Japan has been so far able to get

through this pandemic with a positive outlook because of our historical experience, and cultural development over millennia.

Though we had to cancel many events this year, I feel we, the IKO Kyokushinkaikan to be very fortunate to have been able to hold our pivotal event, The World Open Championship last November. At this time, we do still plan to hold the All Japan Open and International Karate Friendship this November 2020. We will make the final decision and announcement by the end of September. The Tokyo Olympics is postponed till the summer of 2021, and karate will have to wait for another long year to debut as an official sport on the world stage. Not only Japan, but the rest of the world are looking forward to the Olympics in July, next year.

All karate training should be geared to be strong in kumite, technically and spiritually. Kumite needs an opponent, but likewise would not exist without one. In that sense, karate training is a study in human relationships and social interaction. Kumite training however, is just one element of karate practice. If you only practice kumite, you miss the big picture. To face an opponent, you must face yourself first. You must know yourself, your strengths and weaknesses, before attempting to know others. Self-training is essential.

Due to the global pandemic, I canceled all my international seminars and travel, and concentrated on teaching in Tokyo. I was able to see very clearly things I have overlooked in the past, and it has given me great insight into the core of our organization and methodology. I believe now is the best time to go over all our basics, ido, kata, and all technical aspects of Kyokushin karate practice; not only to raise the bar on our kumite skill, but to go back to basics, review all the important elements and reasoning behind our movements, and further develop it as the art form it is. Karate training is a timeless pursuit and requires patience and perseverance to cultivate and improve. Nothing worth doing well is done in a hurry, and training likewise should be taken step by step ~ as Sosai Oyama said, 'studying the Martial Way is like scaling a cliff; keep going forward'.

Kyokushin members who compete regularly, participate in many IKO events each year to face a variety of opponents, sharpen their skill and elevate the organization as a whole. A competitor's training cycle is determined based on the championship circuit calendar, which is often of short duration. Some competitors, who focus strictly on tournament training, during the off-season, may not even go to the Dojo; they are controlled by the desire to win. Unfortunately, this starry goal results in a neglect of the path, and ultimately of the true essence of karate.

Now, almost all championship events are cancelled. There is no opportunity to compete. Competitors may look at this dire prospect and groan - 'no camaraderie, no challenge, no reason to train'. Sosai Oyama used to say, "Your opponent is also a human. If you feel pain, your opponent feels pain; if you are out of breath, your opponent is also". -You are not the only one facing this period in our lifetime. Though we may be far apart, we are sharing the same impact. The important thing to focus on is, how to deal with the situation you are faced with, and how you do overcome it? Going through adversity, gives you strength. You should take this hardship, not as a period of stagnancy, but as an opportunity for growth.

More countries are now reopening businesses, including Dojos. If you can operate your Dojo again, congratulations, please reopen smoothly and safely. One thing we've all learned through this pandemic, is, that the world is smaller than we think; the virus can spread from anywhere with no warning. Maintain the health and safety of your members, families and staff as your number one priority. I strongly encourage Branch Chiefs, Dojo Operators, Instructors, Members and Competitors, not to be in a rush. There is a saying, "Time flies like

an arrow". 1 to 2 years may feel long but is really just a short period of time in life. Be vigilant, patient, and strong, with positive Kyokushin Spirit, to encourage your fellow dojo members, friends, and family, as we go through this unprecedented time together. We will emerge from this experience with greater wisdom, harmony and strength.

I am looking forward to seeing you, and training with you all again soon.

Osu!

Kancho Shokei Matsui President, IKO Kyokushinkaikan

September 4, 2020