

TAKESHI TAMAKI

Heart and Soul

By Jerry Figgiani



In 1991, I had the honor of traveling with my Sensei Joseph Carbonara to Okinawa and be a participant in the ceremony and demonstrations of the 55th founding anniversary of the World's Shorin Ryu Karatedo Federation. It was also the 85th birthday celebration for Grandmaster Shoshin Nagamine. During that time, as a participant, several seminars were being held during the course of the two-week period and different senseis were leading various segments of the training. One of the senseis who was on the Board at that time was Sensei Tamaki Takeshi. Now, fast forward 22 years later and I'm back in Okinawa training in the Tokashiki Shorin Ryu Karate Dojo while Sensei Tamaki is now overseeing the workouts for my stay here. Shogen Ryu founder Kensei Taba 10th Dan had passed since my last visit in 2009. Since Taba Sensei's passing, Tamaki Sensei has stepped up to oversee this organization. The senior of the "Shogen Ryu Karatedo Association" at 73 years of age he possesses an incredible ability to demonstrate the physical techniques of Shorin Ryu Karate as well as Yamani bo that was taught to him by Kishaba Chokei Sensei. His personality is one that has always made him one of the favorites in Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu. His demeanor is unassuming while carrying himself with a great deal of confidence and humility and in social environments carried himself with a great deal of class and leadership. Very approachable and willing to share his skill and knowledge of the martial arts. Here is a glimpse into this fascinating sensei.



I noticed you still possess a lot of speed and power at 73 years of age. What do you attribute to this?

Tamaki Sensei –(chuckling) Of course, my karate training being consistent. That is the secret. And to always keep moving. I take pride in my personal karate training and try to be an example. I had a good foundation at an early age. I started training at 15 years old; I started because I wanted to be stronger. (chuckling)

I want to thank you for this opportunity. Not only for me but for having my students with me as well. Sensei, how did you get involved in the martial arts?

Tamaki Sensei – As a child, I wanted to become stronger, and I knew that the martial arts was a way to achieve that. I started training at the Grandmaster's first dojo. Sensei Nagamine's dojo was at Tomari in Naha. After World War II in 1953, he moved his dojo to Naha City. I have continued ever since.



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What was your early training like?

Tamaki Sensei – Before “The Essence of Okinawan Karatedo” was published, training was different. There were variations in the way kata was performed. It was more of the old ways of doing the movements. When the book came out, it gave people around the world a guide to which to refer to. Master Nagamine designed this so people could follow along a lot easier using the book as a reference. Before the book, it was really more technical; the book made it more fundamental to help spread the art of Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu.

What do you remember from Shoshin Nagamine’s teachings?

Tamaki Sensei – I trained with Grandmaster Shoshin Nagamine from when I was a young boy and I watched the Honbu dojo grow and produce a lot of good karateka. One of the most inspiring times for me personally was when the Grandmaster wrote his book, “Essence of Okinawan Karate”. I along with other people supported him in his efforts to help spread Okinawan karatedo to the world. His teachings have influenced many people and his legacy with continue to live on. It is very exciting to think that I was part of that history. Note: A young Tamaki Sensei could be seen on page 269 in the “Essence of Okinawan Karatedo” demonstrating Tuifa techniques.

Who are some of the students you have trained with in the Nagamine Dojo who have made an impression?

Tamaki Sensei- The individuals who have made an impression and inspired me in the Nagamine Dojo were Kensei Taba, Chokey Kishaba and Masao Shima. Also, in the dojo, was Ansei Ueshiro. All of these gentlemen have helped me in my growth in my continued study of karatedo.

What was your impression of Ansei Ueshiro?

Tamaki Sensei – Ansei impressed me very much with his physical skill and determination. The disability to his hands never limited him in his training. Everything that he demonstrated was always with 100 percent effort; he never held anything back.

What skills should a beginner focus on?

Tamaki Sensei – Number one would be to create a foundation first, especially with children. They will get bigger and stronger. If these fundamental skills (strong stances) are developed at any early age, they could stay with them for the rest of their lives. Also, focus and concentration at this early age is very important in the mental development of the student.

How has martial arts personally helped you?

Tamaki Sensei – Karate has become my life and has kept me healthy. I have rarely ever been sick. The movement I have now at age 73 is because of the benefits martial arts gives a person. Some people my age have a hard time moving because of the lack of physical movement and exercise. Martial arts not only develops the physical, but also the mental attitude to keep going, but the spirit as well.

How has your journey changed from when you first started?

Tamaki Sensei – In the beginning, it was all physical skills to develop my body and make myself stronger. At my age now, I want to help spread karatedo to future generations. I want them to understand that there is no secret to karate, just hard work.

What are your thoughts on modern sport karate or mixed martial arts?

Tamaki Sensei – When there is a sport and it is rule-bound, it is totally different from real karate. Most people who compete in the sport, which is really a small part of it, do not have the longevity. The true meaning of martial arts is longevity...to continue training into the later years of your life. This is a true component in the martial arts. I also see a lot of misunderstandings - the essence of karate is kata. Many Westerners like to fight but they don't have kata. This is a missing element. Kata can teach you to fight but it can also give you longevity. This will give you keep you in the martial arts for life.

Tamaki Sensei, thank you for your time and hospitality during this stay. I look forward to seeing you again shortly. It has been an honor. 🙏

