



Mightier Than the Sword: A Kyokushin Karate Coming of Age Story

Nathan Ligo

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Just another unassuming undergrad? Yes, but this one carries a terrible secret . . . one that's driven him through seven years of hellish karate training and study so that he might learn to bear its weight. Seven years have already taken Nathan Ligo to Japan, where he spent 600 days in the most rigorous, monastic karate program in the world, training under the watchful daily supervision of Masutatsu Oyama, Japan's most famous living *karateka*. But it's not until he suffers a crushing defeat in Japan, and returns home empty-handed, that he comes to understand that the combination of three treasured sources of his ongoing education just might hold the key to unlocking an awesome truth.

The samurai-like do-or-die education he acquired from his karate teachers, the progressive liberal arts education he acquires at North Carolina's Davidson College, and the enlightened, open-eyed, and all-loving character education he received in the first decade of his life from his father: three sometimes violently warring components combine to show Nathan that he just might use the dark secret that he carries to enact a great good for the children of the future . . . that is, IF he's willing to make the necessary sacrifice.

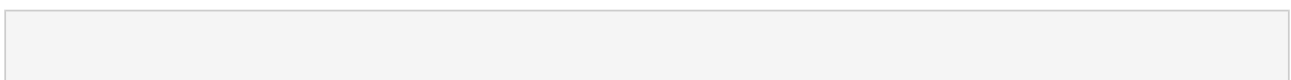
"Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat." -Theodore Roosevelt

The Only American Student of the Legend Mas Oyama> At the time of Masutatsu Oyama's death in 1994, he was regarded by many as the world's greatest living *karateka*. His Kyokushin Karate had spread to 133 countries around the world and was reputed to have touched as many as twelve million students.

Forty years earlier, the Korean-born "Mas" Oyama had, himself, become a virtual revolution in the world of Japanese karate, in that it was he who introduced stone- and therefore bone-breaking power to the highly stylized traditional forms of karate that had come to exist in Japan. Kyokushin Karate became known for its no-nonsense practicality, its fearsome physical power, and a theretofore unseen degree of spiritual strength conjured through a revival of Japan's do-or-die samurai personality.

Once Kyokushin exploded to such incredible proportions, Mas Oyama took on only a very few students that were his own, that he himself guided, day by day, in an attempt to ensure that his teaching would endure. *Uchi deshi* literally means "live-in disciple;" it is the opposite of the *kayoi deshi* or "commuting student," who merely visits the dojo regularly for training. Mas Oyama's *uchi deshi* program was a one-thousand-day monastic karate program for his small group of personal students who lived in the Young Lions' Dormitory, a small building attached to his world headquarters dojo in Tokyo.

In 1993, Nathan Ligo became the only American to hold a graduation certificate from this program, given to him by Mas Oyama in recognition of the 600 days he lived in the Young Lions' dormitory.



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