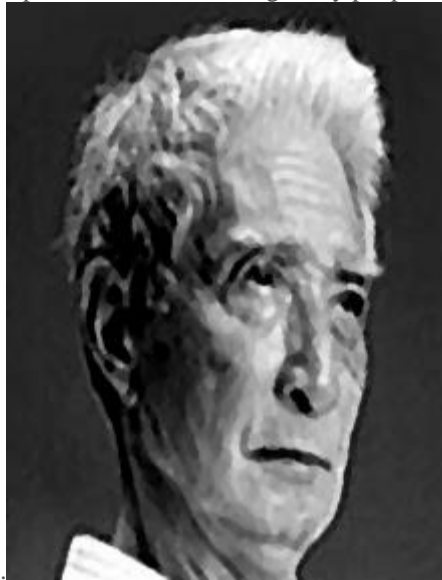


Spotlight: Hidetaka Nishiyama – The Traditionalist

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It is fair to say that [Hidetaka Nishiyama](#) can be considered one of the most influential Shotokan masters of his era. Alongside [Masatoshi Nakayama](#) he was responsible for the growth of Shotokan Karate around the world. His book, “*Karate: The Art of Empty-Hand Fighting*” has been responsible for introducing many people to the art of Karate. For a long time he was a beacon for



the practice of “*Traditional Karate*”.

Hidetaka Nishiyama was born on 10 October 1928 in Tokyo, Japan. He was the only son of a Tokyo-based lawyer. He had two sisters. His father was a master of Kendo and the young Nishiyama began practising the art when he was five years old, under Moorira Mochida.

Through his Kendo instructor, Mochida, the young Nishiyama developed a keen interest in martial arts. In 1938 he started practising Judo. However, he soon realised that his slim frame was not suited to Judo.

By 1943, aged only 14, Nishiyama had been graded to 1st Dan in Kendo. It was around this time that he started training in Karate under a Mr Toyama. Six months later he started training under [Gichin Funakoshi](#) at the famous Shoto-Kan.

Nishiyama enrolled at Takashoku University in 1945 to study Economics. He soon joined the University’s strong Karate club. However, with the war hotting up he studies and training were curtailed when he enlisted in the Japanese Navy.

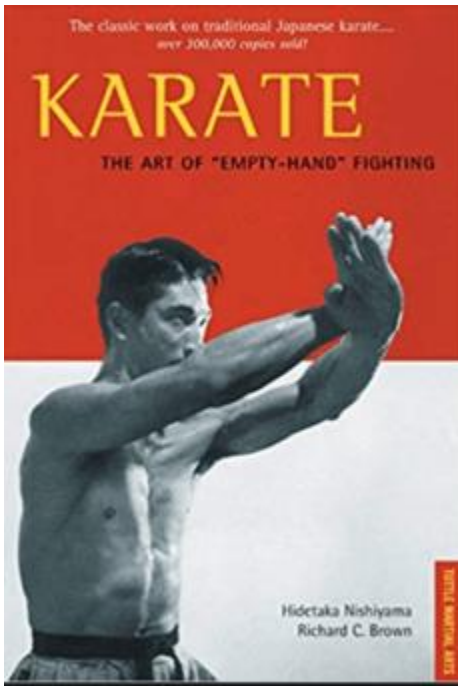
At the end of the war Nishiyama returned to his studies and Karate training. By 1946 he had been graded to 1st Dan. Two years later he was graded to 2nd Dan.

Takashoku University had a very strong Karate club. In 1949 Nishiyama was given the honour of captaining the university’s Karate team. It was around this time that he started showing his administrative and organisational skills. He co-founded the All Japan Collegiate Karate Federation and was elected its first chairman. That same year he helped with the establishment of the Japan Karate Association (Nippon Karate Kyokai).

Nishiyama graduated from Takashoku University in 1951 with a Masters Degree in Economics. Although he began working with Shell Oil he soon started working full time for the JKA. He was elected to the JKA’s board of directors.

In 1952 Nishiyama was selected as a member of the martial arts combat instruction staff to teach martial arts to personnel of the United States Strategic Air Command (SAC). Instructors were selected from the martial arts of Aikido, Karate and Judo. Nishiyama was selected to represent Karate, alongside Isao Obata and [Masatoshi Nakayama](#). The following year he was selected as part





links with Japan.

In 1965 Nishiyama organised the 1st United States vs Japan Goodwill Games, held in Los Angeles. The event took place after that AAKF's National Championships. The American team featuring the likes of Frank Smith and Ray Dalke faced a Japanese team comprising of the All Japan Collegiate Karate team. Japan 4-1. Ray Dalke defeated Masaru Tokai in their bout. At the 2nd Goodwill Games, held two years later in Tokyo, the United States managed to win 3-2. Frank Smith and Paul White both won their bouts.



Nishiyama was tasked with organising the 1st World Invitational Karate Tournament in 1968. The event was held at the Los Angeles Sports Arena, in conjunction with the Olympic Commemorative Tournament in Mexico, which was hosted by the Mexican Karate Federation. During the tournament an international conference also took place. This culminated in the formation of an international Karate organisation that would hold the 1st World Championships in 1970 in Tokyo.

1970 was a big year for Nishiyama and the AAKF. In April 1970 the AAKF became a member of the US Olympic committee. It was Nishiyama's dream that Karate would become an Olympic sport.

The 1st World Karate Championships took place in Tokyo in the October of 1970. There were only two events, with only Japan, Canada, France and the United States taking part. Koji Wada of Japan won the individual kumite event against John Carnio of Canada. Tony Tulleners of the United States and [Dominique Valera](#) of France were joint third. Japan had a clean sweep of the team kumite event with three of its teams winning gold, silver and bronze.

Politics reared its head at the 2nd World Karate Championships held in Paris in 1972. Six nations took part in the championships. There were disagreements around the lack of proper international organisation. This eventually led to the formation of the International Amateur Karate Federation (IAKF) with Nishiyama as the Executive Director.

The 1970s and 1980s saw the expansion of Karate around the world through the efforts of Nishiyama. He oversaw the formation of the following organisations and championships:

- 1973: Co-founded the Pan-American Karate Union (PAKU). The 1st PAKU Championship was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
- 1975: The 1st IAKF World Championships were held in Los Angeles.
- 1976: The formation of the Mediterranean Karate Championships.
- 1976: The formation of the Bolivian Karate Federation.
- 1977: The formation of the Central American/Caribbean Karate Confederation
- 1977: The formation of the Asia/Oceania Amateur Karate Federation.
- 1981: The formation of the South American Karate Federation
- 1981: The formation of the North American Karate Federation.

As can be seen, Nishiyama was an ambassador for the expansion of Karate across the world. However, this has not been without its fair share of political issues within the various organisations that he was a part of. In 1974 the AAKF severed its ties with the AAU. Issues within the AAKF led to senior instructor, [Teruyuki Okazaki](#), leaving to form the International Shotokan Karate Federation (ISKF).

of a ten-man Budo team, invited by SAC Commander General Curtis LeMay, on a three-month tour of American bases in the United States.

1953 saw Nishiyama appointed the JKA's Chief of the Department of Instruction. The department oversaw such things as the Instructors Training Program, from which many JKA legends would emerge.

On 26 April 1957, Shotokan founder, Gichin Funakoshi, died in hospital aged 88 years. Following his death there was a split within Shotokan that saw the Shotokai and the JKA under Masatoshi Nakayama, go their separate ways. Nishiyama was instrumental in trying to make the JKA a successful organisation.

In 1960 Nishiyama was graded to 5th. That same year saw the publication of "*Karate: The Art of Empty-Hand Fighting*". Believed to be the best selling Karate book of all time, it has been one of the most influential training manuals. Many of today's top instructors from around the world cite this book as the reason they began Karate. Nishiyama had formed good relationships with the students he had trained in the early 1950s as part of the SAC training program. At the invitation of these students and some JKA members who were living in the US, Nishiyama arrived in Los Angeles in November 1961. In the same month he established All-American Karate Federation (AAKF) and his first dojo in the city. Under the AAKF he organised the 1st National Karate Championship, held at the Olympic auditorium in Los Angeles.

From its inception AAKF was not conceived as a branch of the JKA. It was a separate entity and retained its own unique character. However, it still retained some

Despite the political issues Nishiyama has faced, it does not take away the immense respect his students have for him. While in charge of the JKA Instructors Program, he trained the likes of [Hirokazu Kanazawa](#), [Keinosuke Enoeda](#), [Takayuki Mikami](#) and Hiroshi Shirai. He is also trained some of the legends of the American Shotokan Karate, including Ray Dalke, Robert Fusaro, Randall Hassell, Frank Smith and James Yabe. A traditionalist, Nishiyama has always stated the importance of good basic techniques and a strong work ethic. This is a trait found in all of his top students. In recognition for his contributions to Karate Nishiyama has received a number of awards. In 2000 Emperor Akihito of Japan awarded him the Order of the Sacred Treasure. In 2001 Poland awarded him the Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit.



Following a long-term illness resulting from lung cancer, Hidetaka Nishiyama died on 7 November 2008. He was survived by his wife Yoko and their three daughters. In his death the world lost one of its most technical masters.

For a long time Hidetaka Nishiyama was a beacon for the practice of traditional Shotokan Karate. He has helped establish Karate in many countries around the world. As a JKA instructor he has trained some of the best Shotokan masters, including Kanazawa, Mikami, Enoeda and Shirai. He has been at the forefront of Shotokan Karate in the United States. Known for his technical and his ability to explain complex techniques, he has trained some of the pioneers of American Shotokan Karate, including Ray Dalke, Robert Fusaro and Randall Hassell. He is still revered and honoured by his many students around the world. His book on the Karate training is still one of the best selling Karate texts in the world and has stood the test of time.