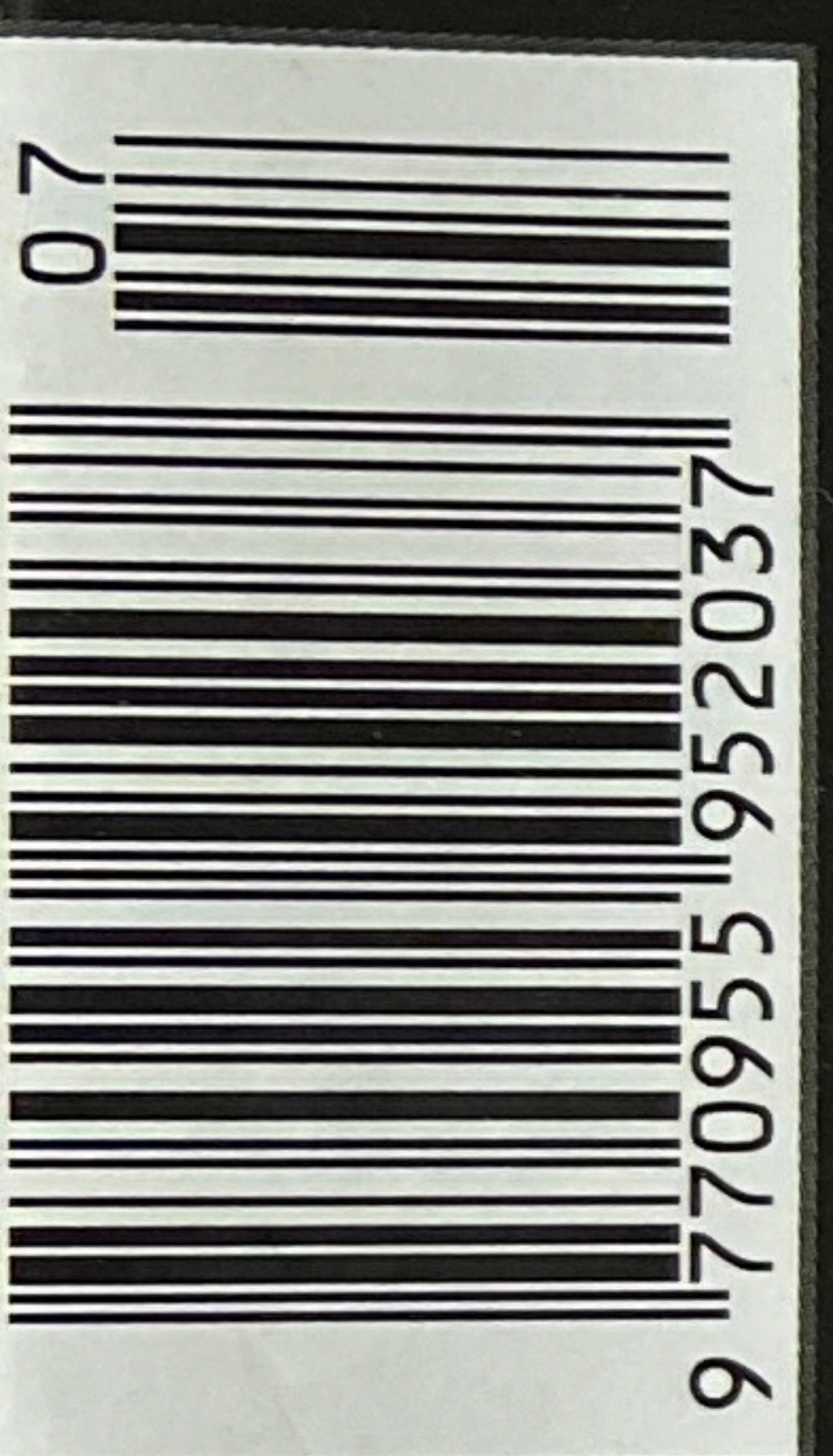


TRADITION KARATE

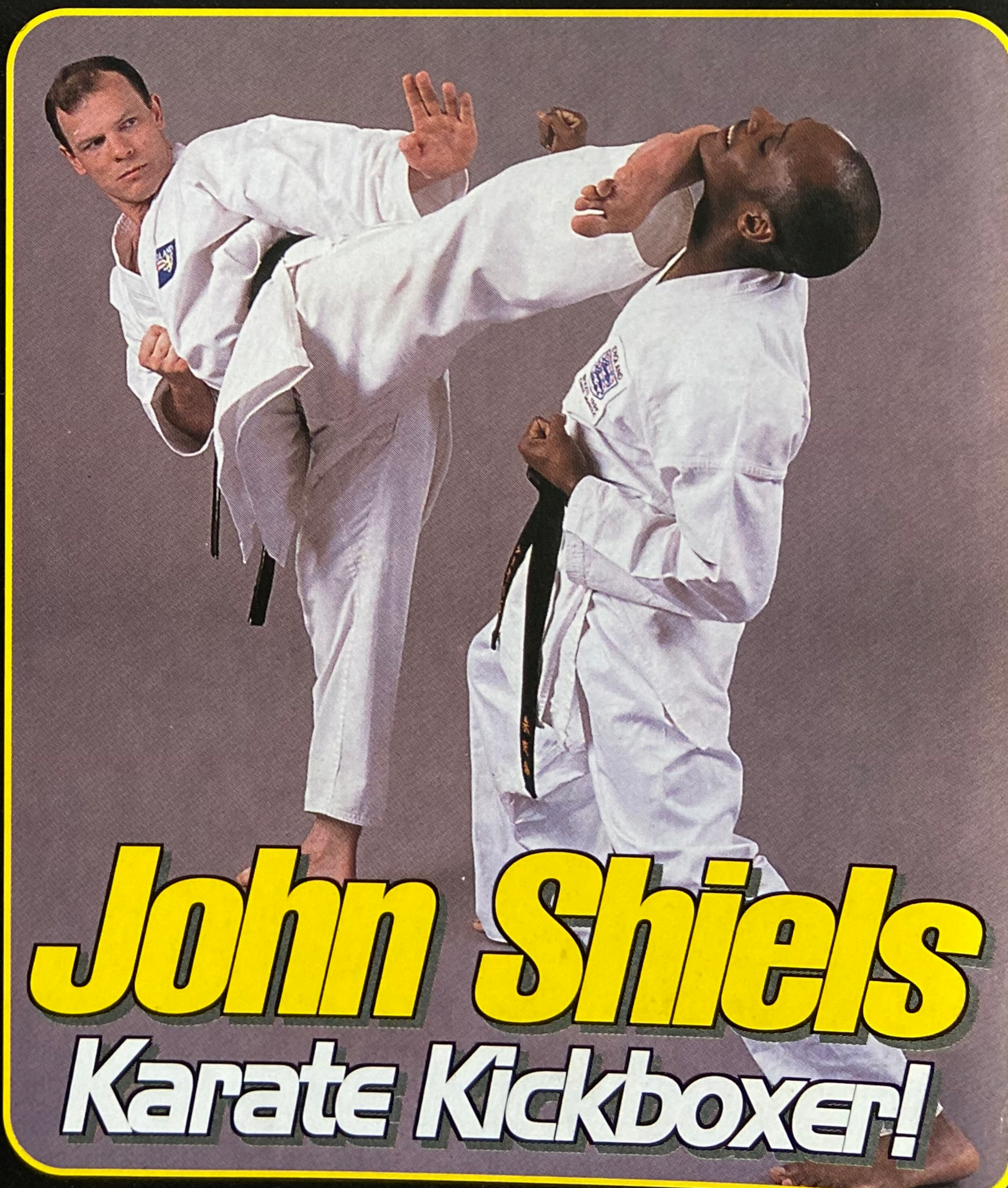
Vol. 12 No. 11 £2.00
JULY 1999



Peter May

Karate is Still a Challenge!

Okinawa
Chasing the Disappearing Dream!
Vic Charles
Forward Planning!

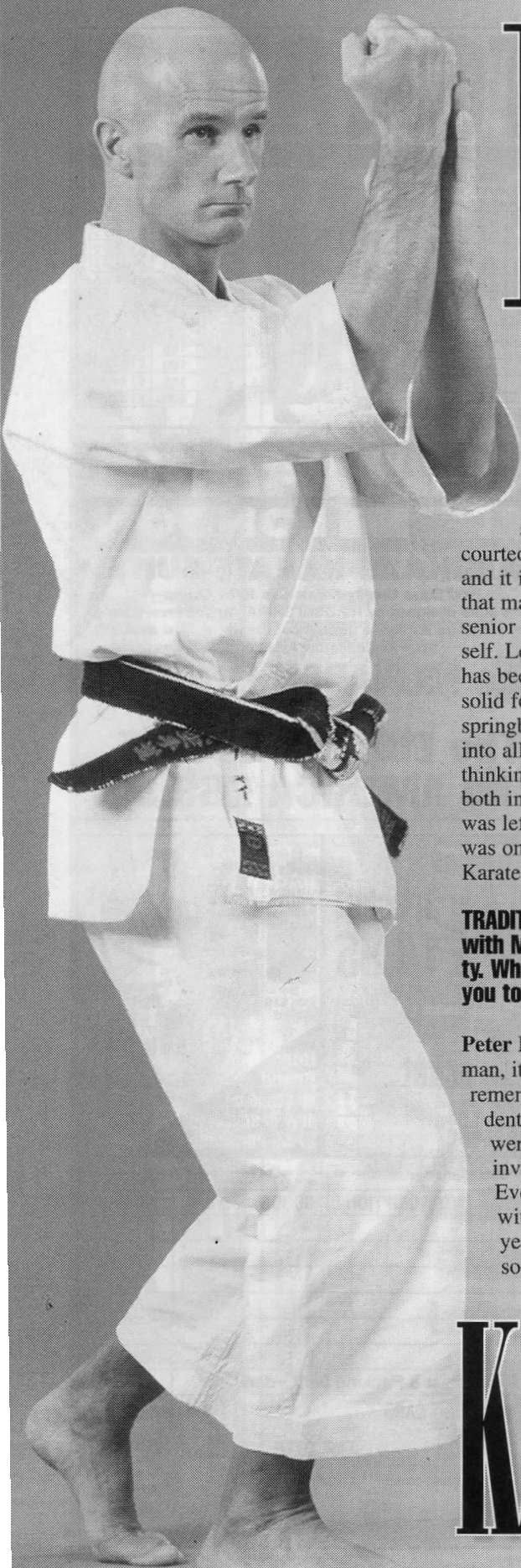


John Shiels

Karate Kickboxer!

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Peter

Peter May is the thinking man's karateka, a rock-solid example of personal discipline and dedication that infuses his fifth dan ranking with authority. Quietly spoken and courteous, he's also warm and friendly and it is this combination of qualities that makes him a blue-print for how a senior instructor should conduct himself. Lean and fit at fifty, Peter's career has been a journey of discovery, his solid foundation in Wado Ryu a springboard for his inquisitive nature into all the arts. Articulate and deep-thinking, the interview with Peter was both informative and entertaining and I was left with the abiding belief that he was one of the true gentlemen of Karate.

TRADITIONAL KARATE: Thirty years with Master Sakagami, that's loyalty. What is about him that inspires you to stay?

Peter May: Thirty years with the same man, it is a long time I suppose. I remember speaking to Japanese students when I was in Japan, and they were amazed how long I've been involved with Sakagami sensei. Even in Japan, for students to be with their teachers over twenty years, it's a remarkable feat. It's something I never have to think

about. He's got a lot of black belt students of third or fourth dan who have been with him for more than twenty years and that must obviously say something about the man.

TRAD: Sakagami sensei is very much into his boxing, and to bring elements into his art in the early 70's must have been a very brave step.

Peter May: The Wolverhampton club was originally in a boxing stable, Wolverhampton ABA, and we were surrounded by a boxing ring, bags, and Sensei has always had this interest in boxing and he incorporated it into the training. All the conditioning work that boxers were used to just seemed a natural progression to his teaching. Consequently when I used to train on my own, with a bag, people would say to me, oh you're a boxer? A kickboxer? They couldn't understand that I did karate, their perception of Wado and what I was learning was totally different. Yet if you look at the fundamentals of Wado and re-arrange the alignment, you are close to boxing. Sakagami Sensei's interest in Mohammed Ali, the way he moved, influenced our Wado quite a lot.

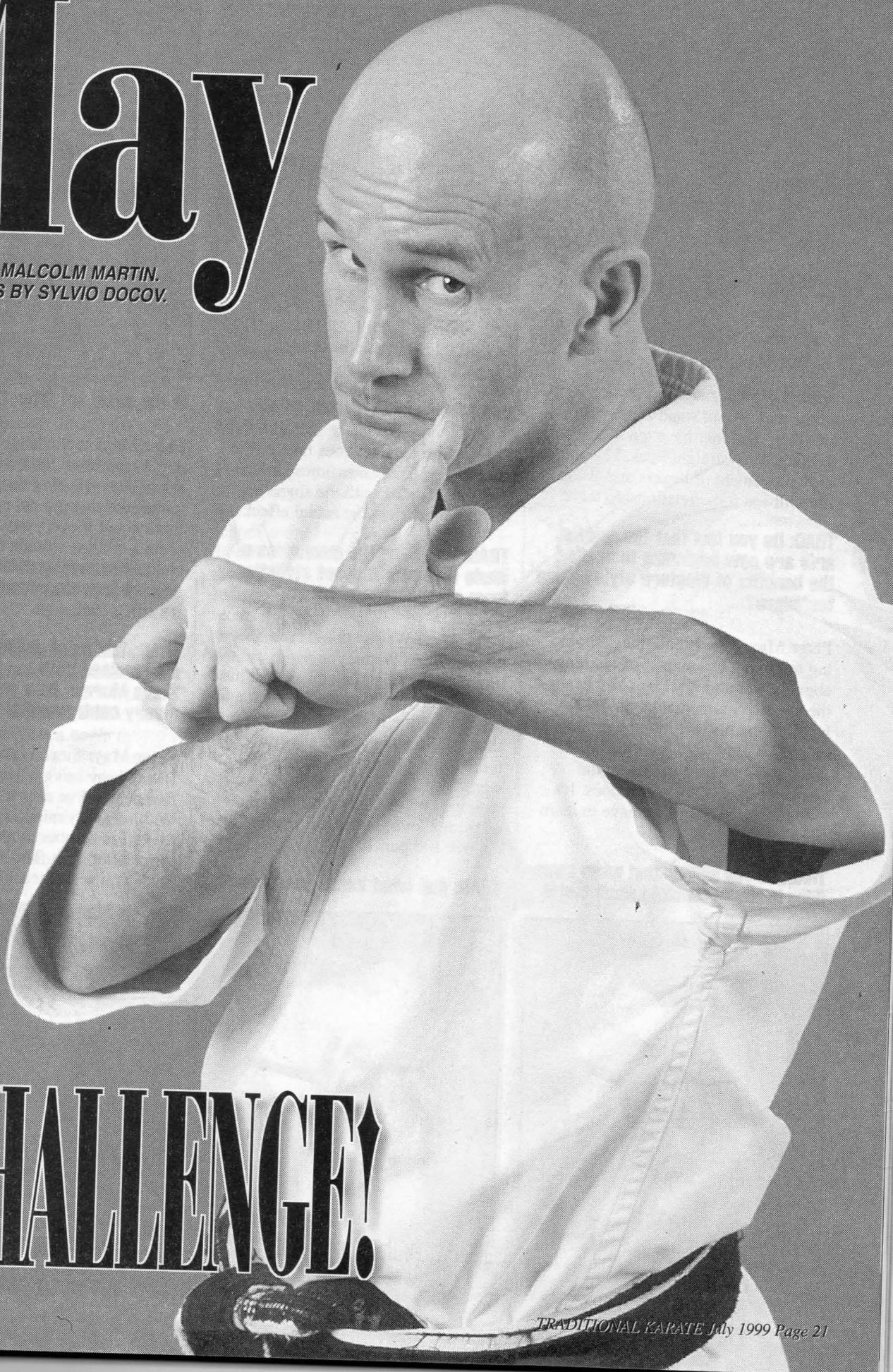
TRAD: The fluidity of Ali's movements?

Peter May: In the seventies, especially in competition, it was very static,

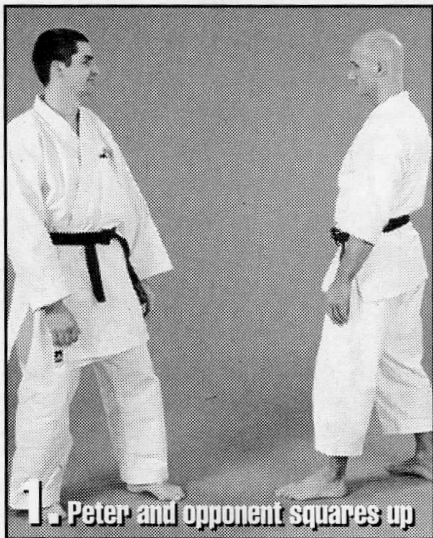
KARATE IS STILL

May

INTERVIEW BY MALCOLM MARTIN.
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SYLVIO DOCOV.



A CHALLENGE!



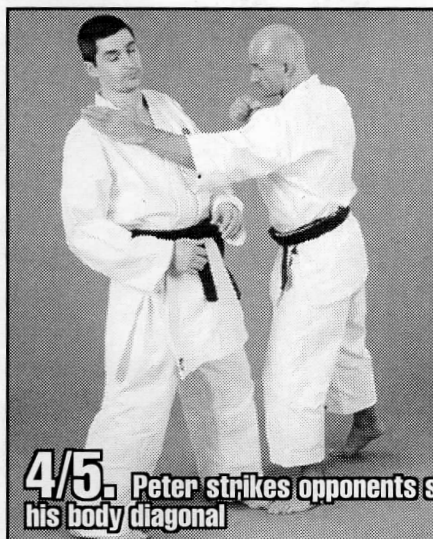
1. Peter and opponent squares up

where they would stand for two minutes then suddenly have ten seconds of fighting. Very straight lines. The actual body movement of boxers and Wado, you will see some relationship there.

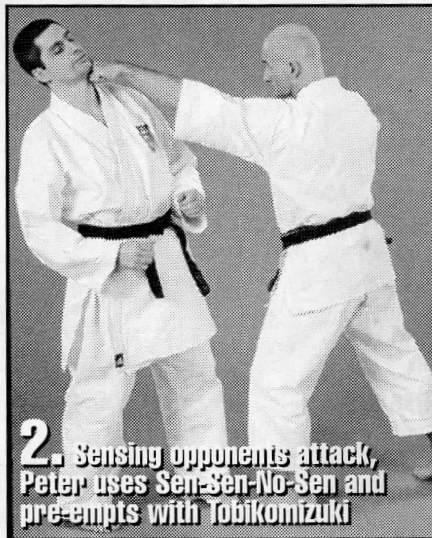
TRAD: Do you feel that the martial arts are now beginning to realise the benefits of Western style boxing technique?

Peter May: Yes, I think they're looking to boxing as a means of learning about power and leverage. You hear the boxing commentators on TV say he's digging his feet into the ground, that's a shallow view of what he's doing but you have to look at the mechanics of what a boxer does. It's based on contact and we have to learn from that.

TRAD: Do you believe that when something is totally contact based, that it



4/5. Peter strikes opponents shoulder with Shutou-zuki, to turn his body diagonal



2. Sensing opponents attack, Peter uses Sen-Sen-No-Sen and pre-empt's with Tobikomizuki

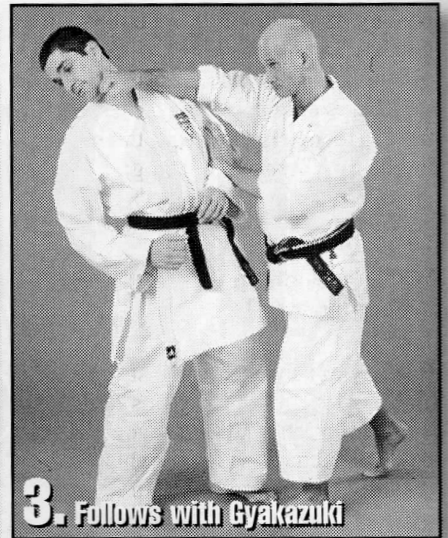
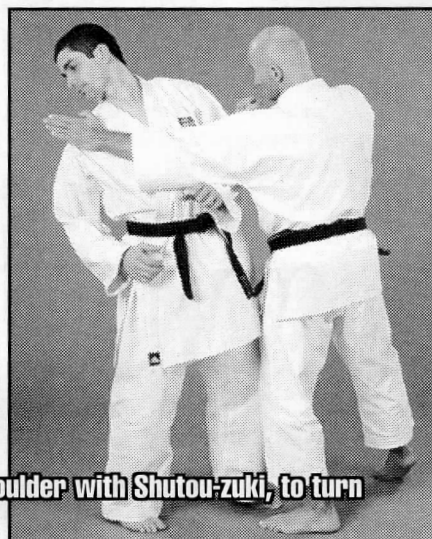
takes things to a different level?

Peter May: Contact does take it to another level and sometimes karate gets preoccupied with the shape it's making more than the actual effect.

TRAD: What are the mechanics of Wado that sets it apart stylistically from other forms of karate?

Peter May: We say that there's no blocks within Wado, you try to use the timing of the other person against him, moving forward to your opponent and actually hitting him before he gets his shot off. So you are actually using his force against himself. Where Aikido would use a lock and a throw, we would a strike. That's what separates us from a lot of styles, they would use a block and punch.

TRAD: And what keeps you training



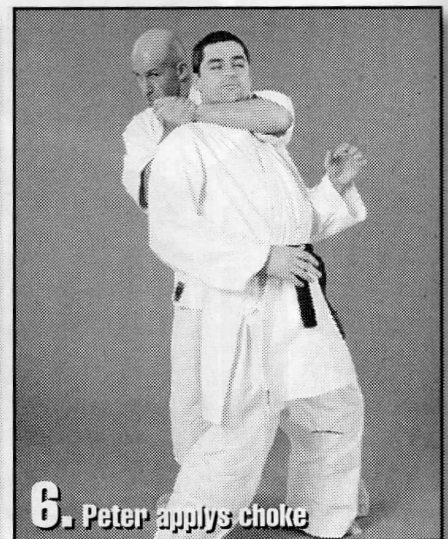
3. Follows with Gyakazuki

in the same art after thirty years?

Peter May: It challenges me every day. I read interviews where you've asked if people ever think of giving up karate and they go no, never. Well I think about it every day. Now that may seem a strange attitude but it's the challenge of doing it. Karate has never been easy for me and after thirty years it's still a challenge.

TRAD: Talking of challenges, you've also trained with the legendary Steve Morris, how was that? He's a very controversial figure.

Peter May: Steve is an icon in karate. I would say he's up there with the top five people I've ever trained with. Within twenty minutes of training with Steve I remember thinking this is filling a lot of gaps. This was not due to Sakagami sensei teaching, this is when



6. Peter applies choke

you get to your own level and you're looking for the answers, it's like you're putting a 20,000 piece karate jig-saw together without a picture to work from. Steve helped me put the pieces together. Whether you recognise the picture at the end of it, that's up to yourself.

TRAD: Is he still a very physically orientated man?

Peter May: I've heard the stories about Steve and there seems to be a misconception about him, you know, that he's actually waiting behind the dojo door with a telegraph pole to hit you over your head. It's completely the opposite, he welcomes you. Outside the dojo you couldn't wish for a more gentle person, inside the dojo he exemplifies karate. He teaches not just the physical shape but the mechanics and each time you think you've got it, he takes it to another level.

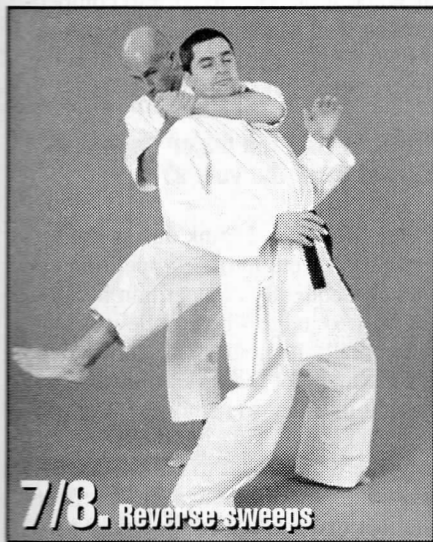
TRAD: Is his internal "mechanics" based on the same principal as chi or ki?

Peter May: If you call it chi, or ki, then yes I would say he possesses it but he will actually put it down into physics and biomechanics and explain it that way. I won't even begin to explain what he could explain better himself. As far as I'm concerned the man is a genius. I always thought that being a Wado practitioner I wasn't blinkered at all to other styles and I could not see the relationship between

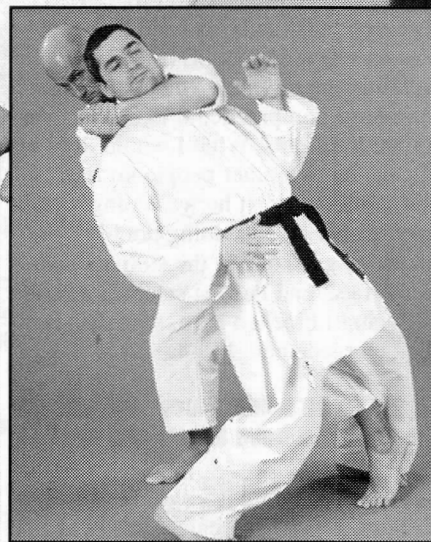
karate, kung-fu, philippino systems, muay thai, but once you find common reference points within the fundamentals, common denominators, then the barriers actually drop between the styles. If we've got anything to actually thank Steve about it's opening my eyes to these arts which he's well versed in. I've been studying now for 5 years about styles, any references, to find these common denominators, and it's fascinating. Karate has now become multi-dimensional to me.

TRAD: When you started karate, in the 60's, it must have been very different.

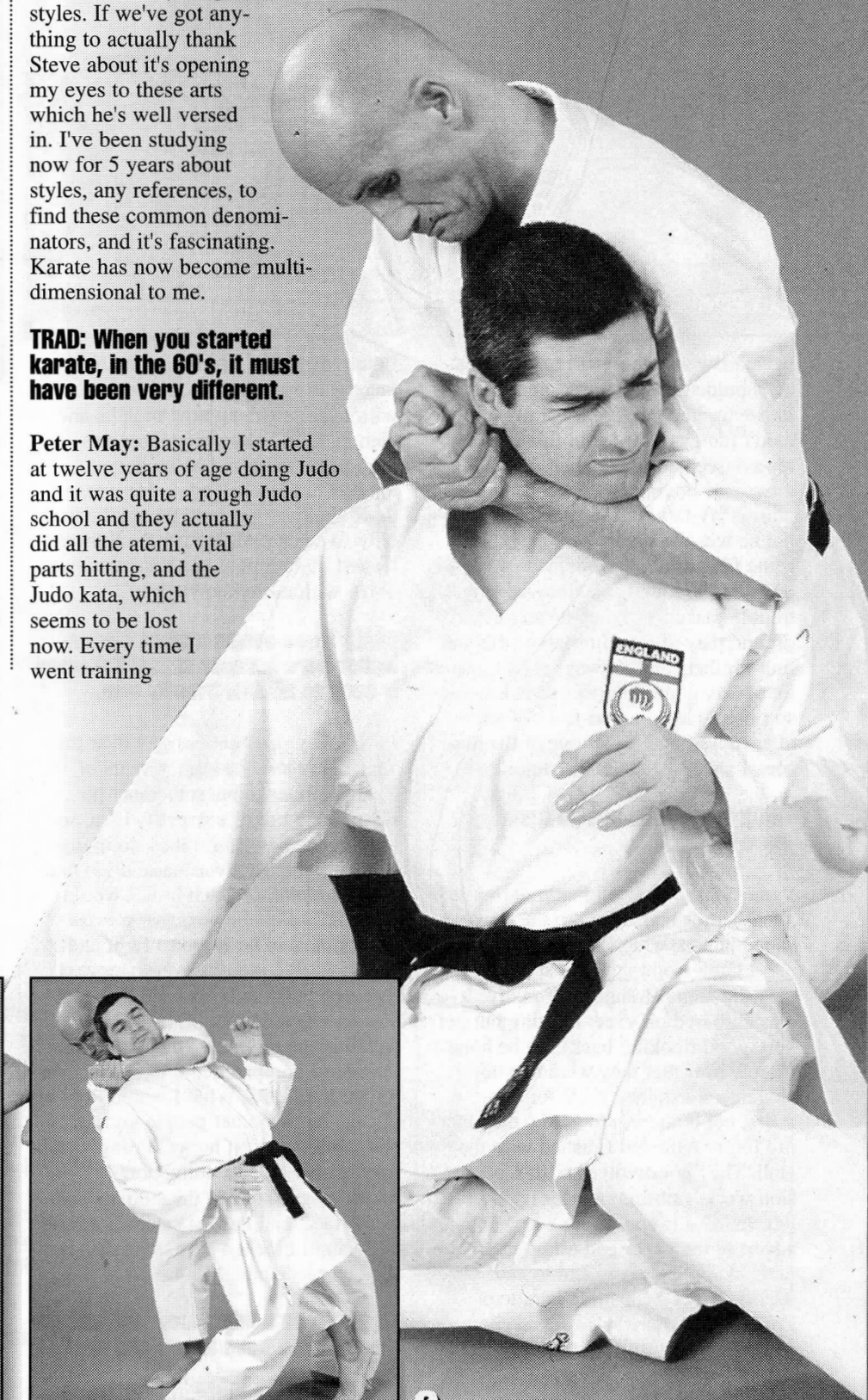
Peter May: Basically I started at twelve years of age doing Judo and it was quite a rough Judo school and they actually did all the atemi, vital parts hitting, and the Judo kata, which seems to be lost now. Every time I went training

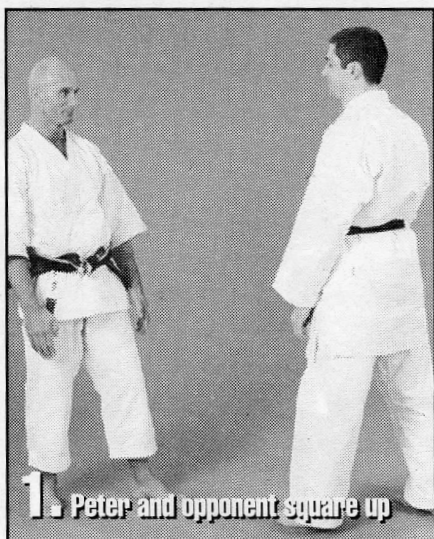


7/8. Reverse sweeps



9. Applies final pressure to the choke





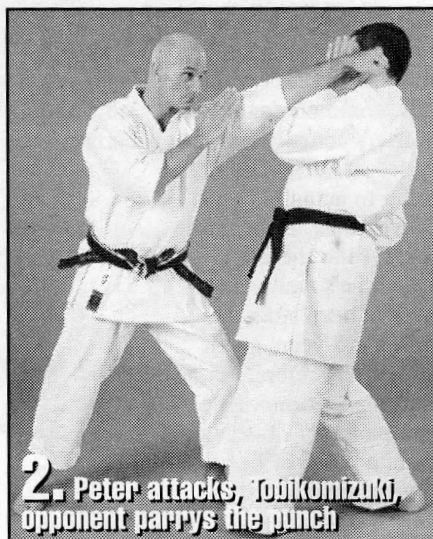
1. Peter and opponent square up

someone was either getting a dislocated shoulder, broken wrist, and my father wanted me to go, but my mother didn't (laughs), same old thing. There always seemed to be a pair of boxing gloves, or boxing ball around the house. My father never taught me this but he was always into weapons. He came from a large family, who were quite on the rough side, they weren't trouble-makers but they never backed off and they always finished it. He had four brothers and I always used to get a lot of flak going to my Grandmothers, so I had to learn to run fast or look after myself and it was one of the reasons I went to Judo at the time.

TRAD: Where did you go from there?

Peter May: From '65 I started to hear about karate and I went to the only school about, which was local to me and I knew nothing about styles and they did some strange stuff really! It was all based on street fighting but not very good (looking back). To be honest I know now that they were cowboy characters. I trained there for two years, not bothering to grade, then met my future wife and finished with the club. They got involved with repossesion work, smashing places up, so I left. In '69 a friend of mine saw an advert in the paper and asked me if I fancied coming along and lo and behold it was a Japanese instructor Fuji sensei, who was all Japan champion and his co-instructor was Hayakawa sensei.

TRAD: Not a bad introduction!



2. Peter attacks, Tobikomizuki, opponent parrys the punch

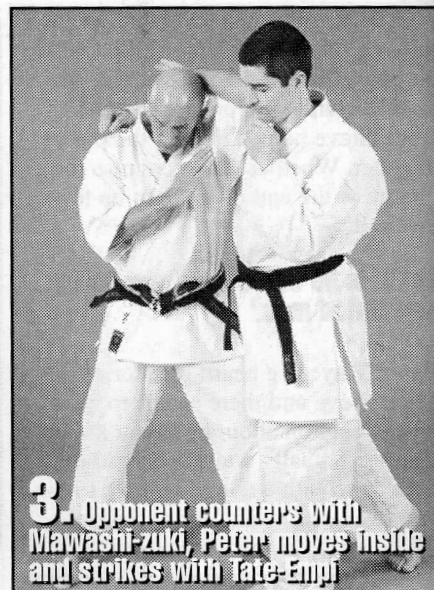
Peter May: No, and I was just hooked, there was no comparison. I trained with them for about nine months and then in 1970 Sakagami sensei was introduced to us and he looked so tough when he walked in. He was a disciplinarian and even though he was only five years older than me I always looked up to him as someone who was older, with more knowledge.

TRAD: There seems a slight contradiction here because sensei Sakagami is such an affable, friendly man.

Peter May: He has changed over the years. He's now had thirty years of British influence but remember he wasn't long out of university then, so looking back what did they do in university-fight. That was basically it and I used to love to watch him. I would stop and watch the next two classes after mine and he loved to fight and within twelve months everyone was fighting. I suddenly realised he had a system when he fought. If they were fighting one night he would stick to one move and practice it over and over within the fights. What I would do was always let two other people go first and work out what he was doing. Once I remember he was doing double mawashi-geri, one to the stomach, one to the face, and he was catching everybody and I blocked both, so he did it the other side bang! Bang!

TRAD: So he's influenced you, but his students have influenced him?

Peter May: I think so, yes. He has mellowed over the years. I've always



3. Opponent counters with Mawashi-zuki, Peter moves inside and strikes with Tate-Empi

found him to be a character and I like to meet characters, observe them. They're manufactured now. Obviously through his training he was a hardened character, he was always amicable, but on a different level, obviously he's learnt more about English people and adjusted perfectly to our culture. I know some of the old sensei were hard people, and when they fought you, you got hurt but Sakagami sensei was never like that, he never took a cheap shot and I think that in itself made him closer to people, even though there was this division between English and Japanese at the time and I found that his karate was practical.

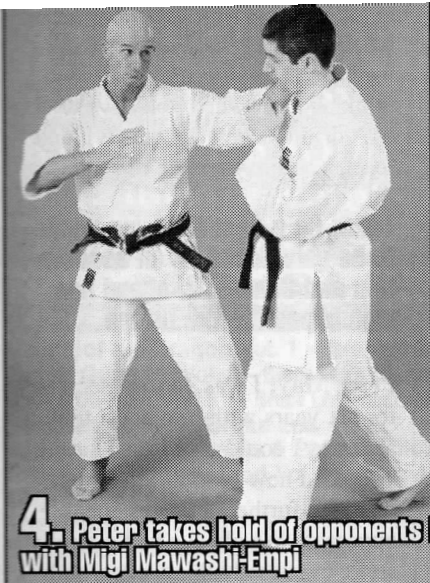
TRAD: Was this due to the man or the style?

Peter May: I don't know, if you look at Wado it blended itself into competition so well in the 60's and 70's, you could see the actual divisions in style. Today you can't tell.

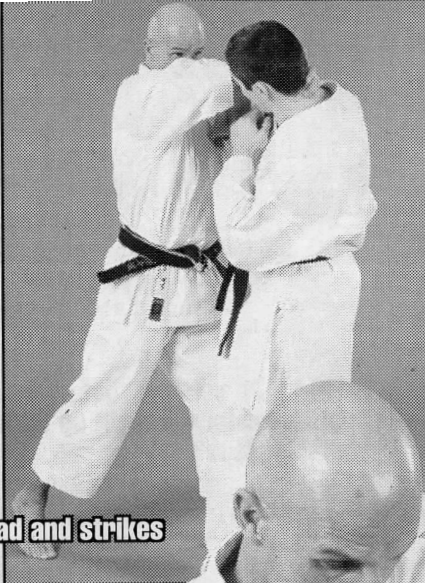
TRAD: Is that the major change in karate over the years?

Peter May: No, I think during the 70's and 80's it went into a competition era and consequently competition became the way to judge whose style was best, when really it shouldn't be about that, it's the man not the style. I never bought into that to be honest. The biggest change is we're coming into an era where they want to know if it works, an era of practicality. It reflects the fact that society has got more vio-

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4. Peter takes hold of opponents head and strikes with Migi Mawashi-Empi



5. Keeping hold of opponents head, Peter strikes with Hidari Otoshi-Empi.

lent, predominantly so. We have to gear our karate towards that now, it has to change. People now cross-train at various ranges, grappling etc.

TRAD: What's your personal opinion on cross-training?

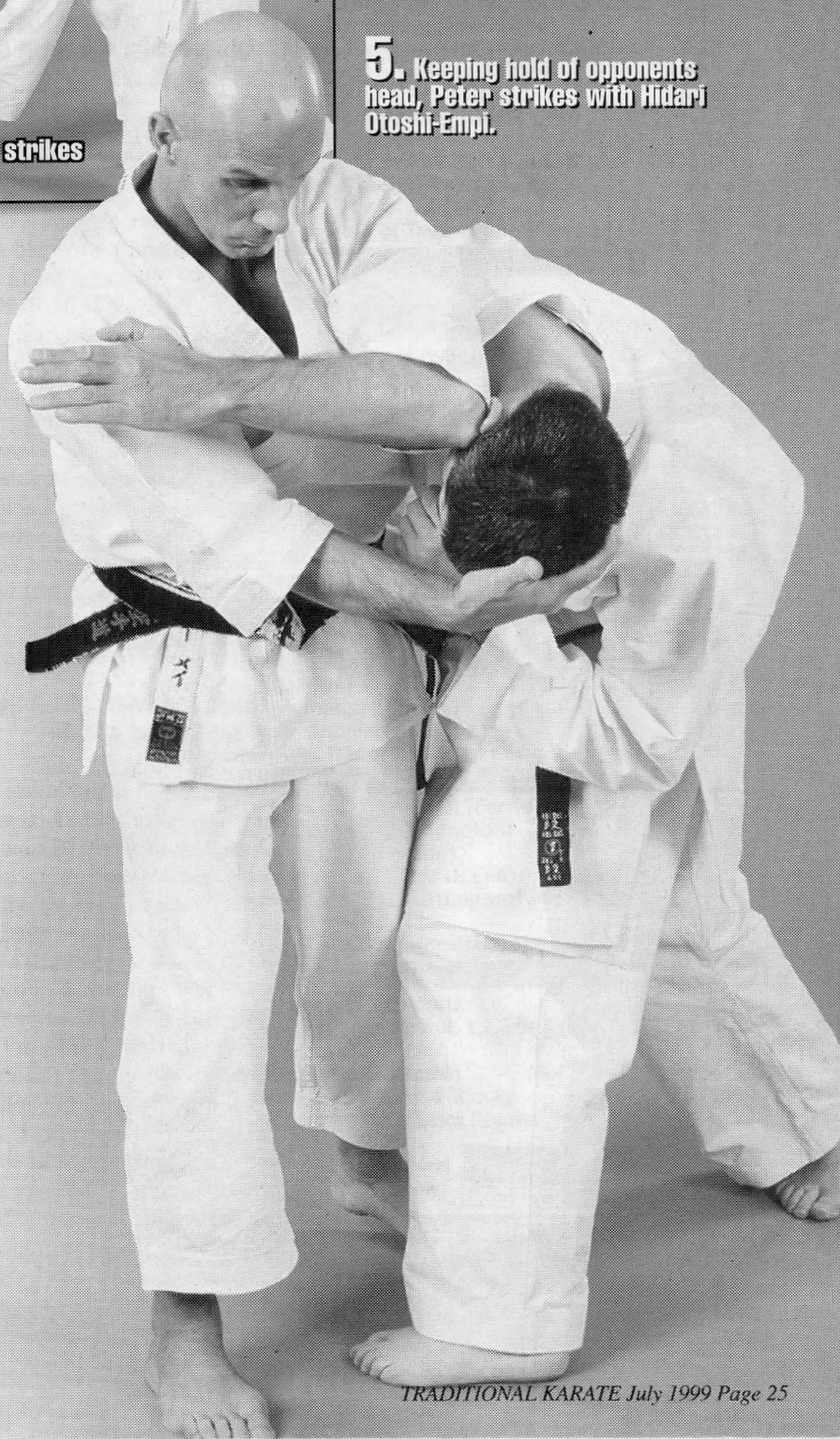
Peter May: I think at a certain level it's essential but you have to have a sound base to work from. I think some people may try it a little bit too early and it becomes watered down. It is essential, you need to know how to deal with these distances because after the first two, three seconds, if it hasn't worked, you're going to end up on the floor. You don't want to be there, but you have to know how to deal with it. It's no good turning a blind eye and hoping your art will work on the day, you have to practice.

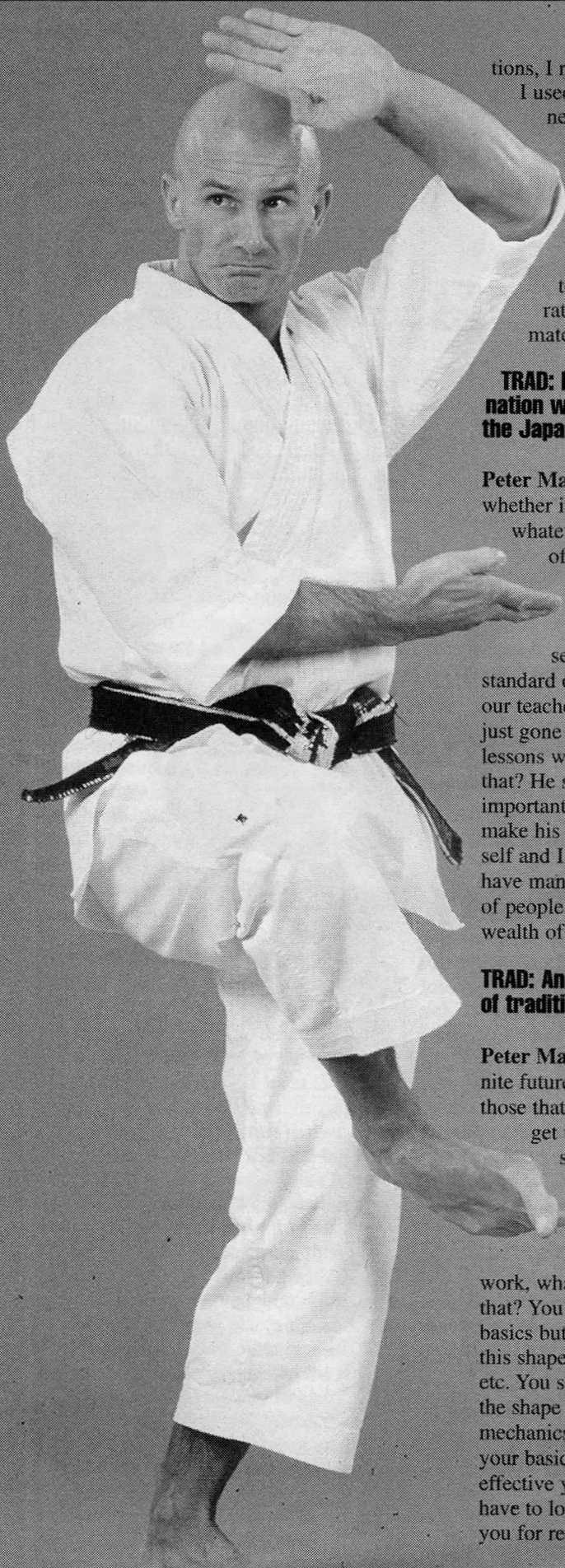
TRAD: Do you think we recreate enough practical scenarios within the dojo?

Peter May: On one of recent courses sensei told me to give a talk on attitude. The way we practice in the dojo is very quiet, almost churchlike, and we know the street situation is completely opposite, it's a very volatile situation. So normal dojo scenario training doesn't prepare you for that onslaught of venom, you have to train specifically for that. This is something we've actually looked at this year within Aiwaki this year, we're going to bring them grapplers, boxers, different denominations, see what we can learn.

TRAD: On a personal level, what do you feel about competition karate?

Peter May: Even when I placed in competi-





tions, I never got that buzz and yet I used to train one of my partners Clive Wright, who eventually became World Champion, watching him go up for his trophy I used to get a buzz, so competition was never that big a deal to me. To be honest I'd rather watch a good boxing match.

TRAD: Do you feel that as a nation we have caught up with the Japanese?

Peter May: I think, to be honest, whether it be Shotokan or Wado, whatever style, we had the best of the instructors come over and we learned from them, so Japan actually came to us. They only sent the best over, so the standard of our karate is a credit to our teachers. After 30 years I've just gone back to having private lessons with sensei, can you believe that? He said to me that the most important thing for a teacher is to make his student better than himself and I feel that some Sensei have managed to do that with a lot of people in this country. We have a wealth of talent.

TRAD: And what about the future of traditional karate?

Peter May: I think there's a definite future for traditional karate and those that evolve will continue to get the students, those that stay blinkered will hold on to what they've got or maybe not. It's how people perceive traditional. If they perceive it as line-work, what can you learn from that? You have to practice your basics but we have to get beyond this shape, how you hold your hand etc. You sometimes have to change the shape to the effect, the internal mechanics are the same. Through your basics you have to look at how effective your art is and you then have to look internally. Drills train you for reaction rather than thought-

out action and this is sometimes where karate goes wrong, basing itself on thought-out action, you think about it when you have to do it. A drill teaches you to see it and react, you miss out the thinking.

TRAD: On a final note you seem to be galvanised as an association and Sensei Sakagami has high hopes for the future.

Peter May: I was general secretary for six years with him and I took it as far as I could take it and I said you need new blood in to take it that step further, a professional approach. We always had a family style, everybody knew everybody but as with most family styles it becomes very insular and we needed to open ourselves up if we were to become an umbrella group to these Wado styles. Through Sakagami sensei's involvement with Bilston college they have now given us a professional attitude. They run the politics and business side and leave the karate side to us. They have got a lot of good ideas for the future and one is obviously giving us a higher profile, which they have achieved this year so I'm very hopeful for the millennium, that Wado groups will come together. They will still have their autonomy but have the benefits of a bigger group, an umbrella that gives the access to European and World championships and Wado Kai dan gradings.

TRAD: Is this a personal motivator?

Peter May: No! I don't need it. To be honest with the politics I've seen it all, done it all, bought the t-shirt over 30 years. I never started karate to be a politician. I'm privileged in that I don't run clubs, so I'm one of the few fifth dans who actually just trains. I just love to train.

TRAD: Thank-you for a fascinating interview Peter.

Peter May: It's my pleasure, thank-you.