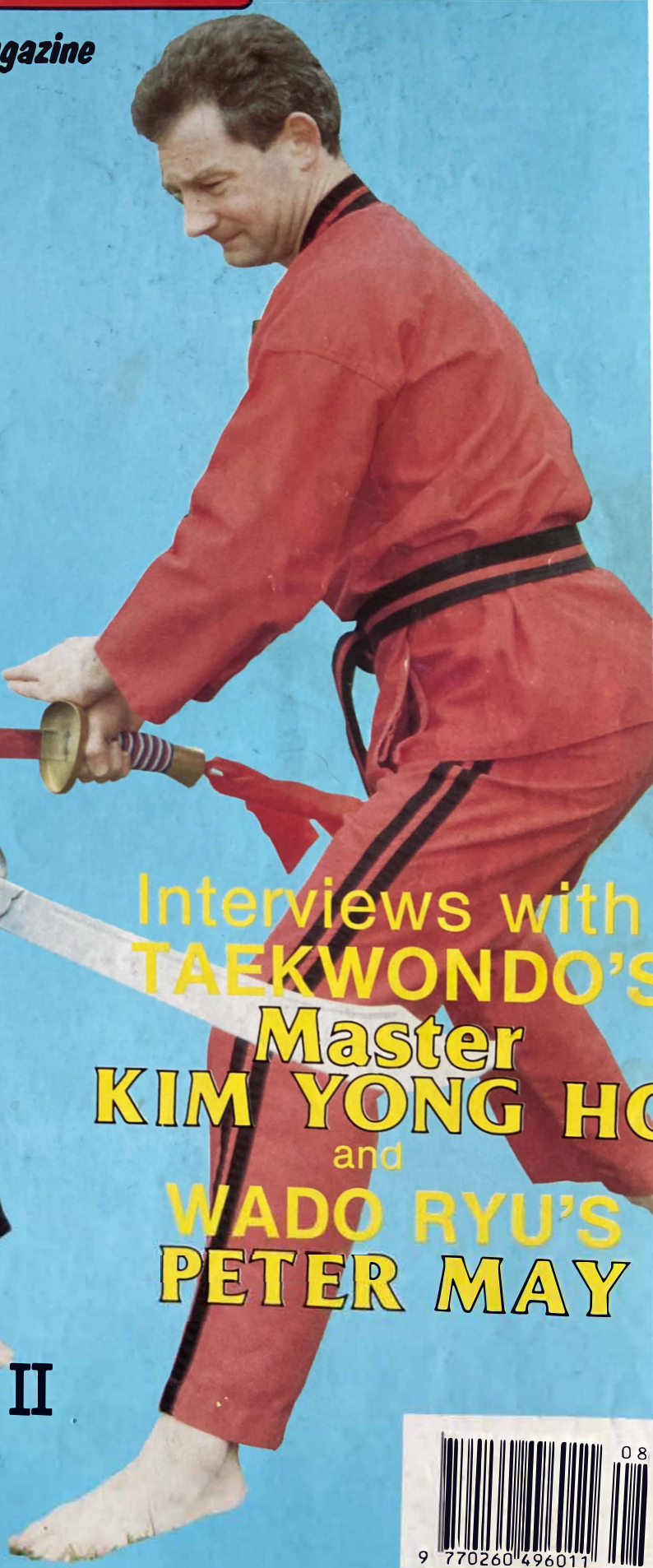
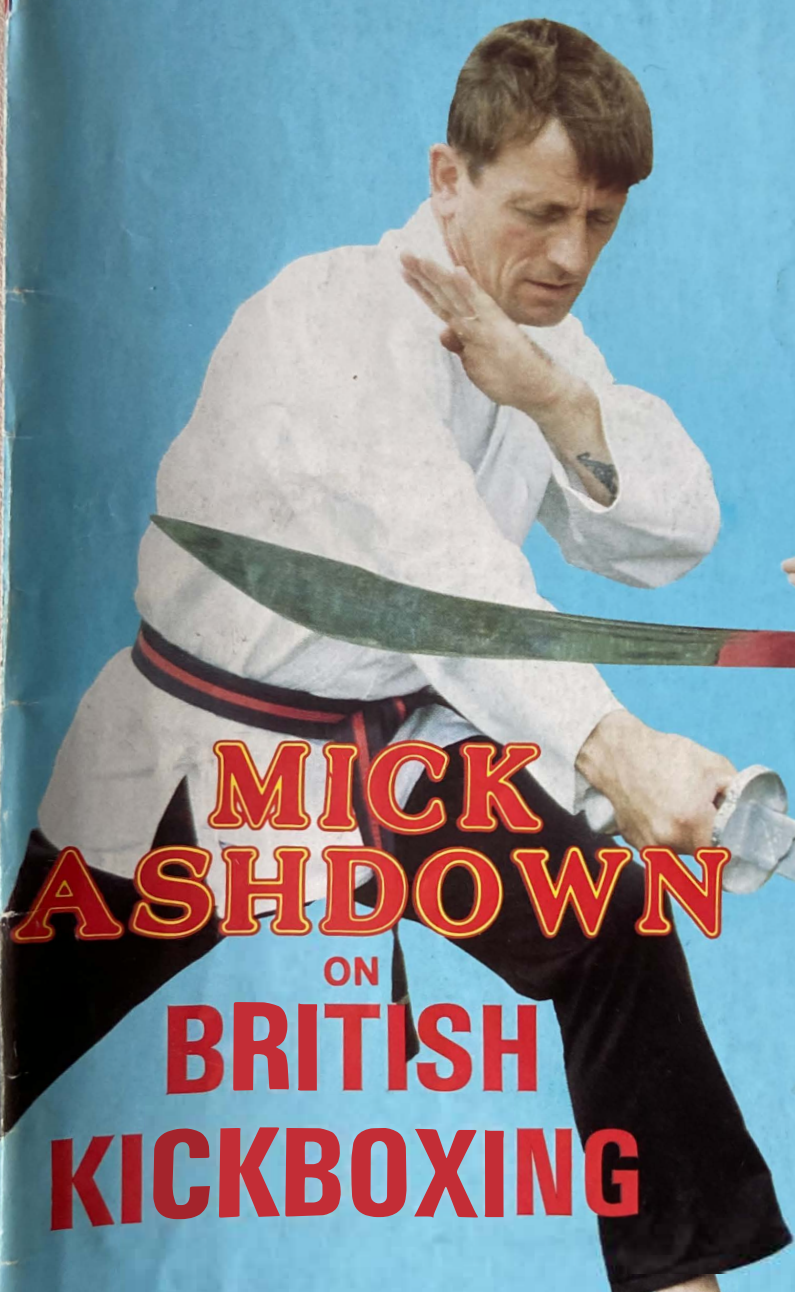


# **MARTIAL ARTS** The Martial Arts Magazine

AUGUST 1991

£1.40

*Britain's No. 1 Quality Martial Arts Magazine*



**MICK  
ASHDOWN**  
ON  
**BRITISH  
KICKBOXING**

Interviews with  
**TAEKWONDO'S**  
**Master**  
**KIM YONG HO**  
and  
**WADO RYU'S**  
**PETER MAY**

**THAI BOXING  
EXTRAVAGANZA II**  
**HISTORY OF HAPKIDO**





# Peter May

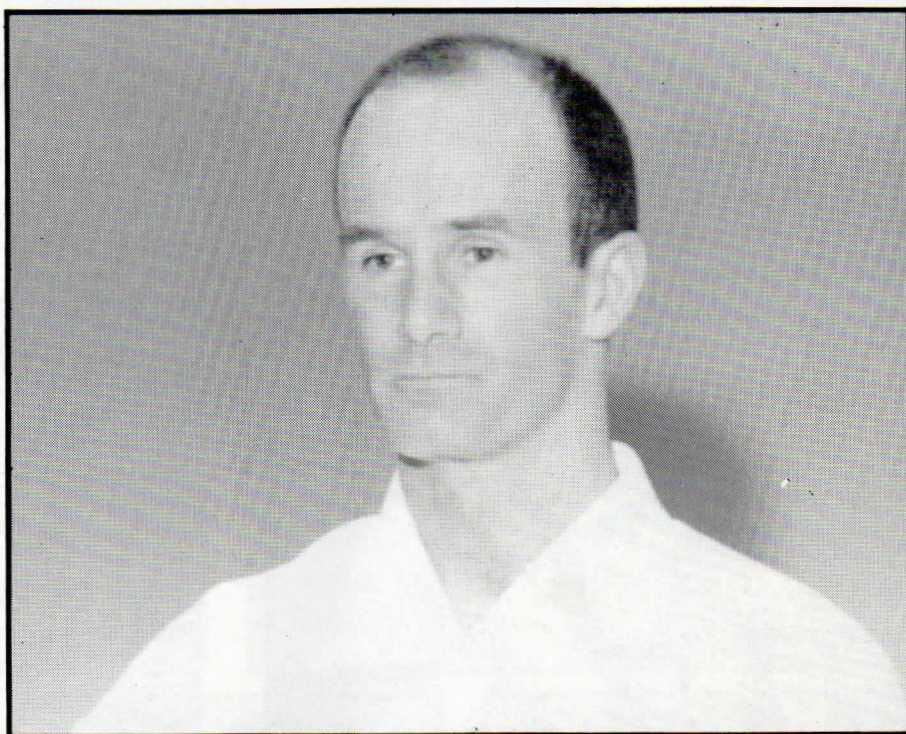
By JENNIFER ALEXANDER

Photos DAVID ALEXANDER

“THERE’S SO MUCH to learn with Wado,” says 4th Dan Peter May. “People look at Wado Ryu and think: ‘Ah, sport orientated,’ but those who say that have only scratched the surface. Some clubs may be sports orientated, but just practising the sporting side, you miss out on the depth there is in a martial art. You tend to concentrate on what works for you in competition, and you leave a lot of other things out. Besides, sport is for the young and healthy, but karate is for everybody, for all your life.”

Peter May’s interest in the martial arts began when he was nine years old, after he had seen a film of jujitsu and judo techniques at a relative’s house. He and his friends used to practise these on each other, with varying degrees of success.

His formal training began at 11, with judo at a local club in Darlaston, but only for about two months. Then at 14 he saw “The Seven Samurai,” which made him want to learn a martial art. At around this time people were beginning to hear about karate, but no-one had ever actually seen any, let alone had the opportunity to train. Two years later Peter saw an advert for a karate club:

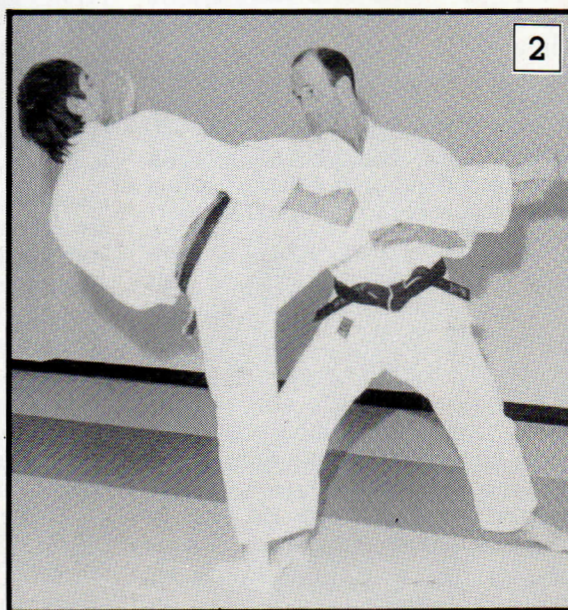
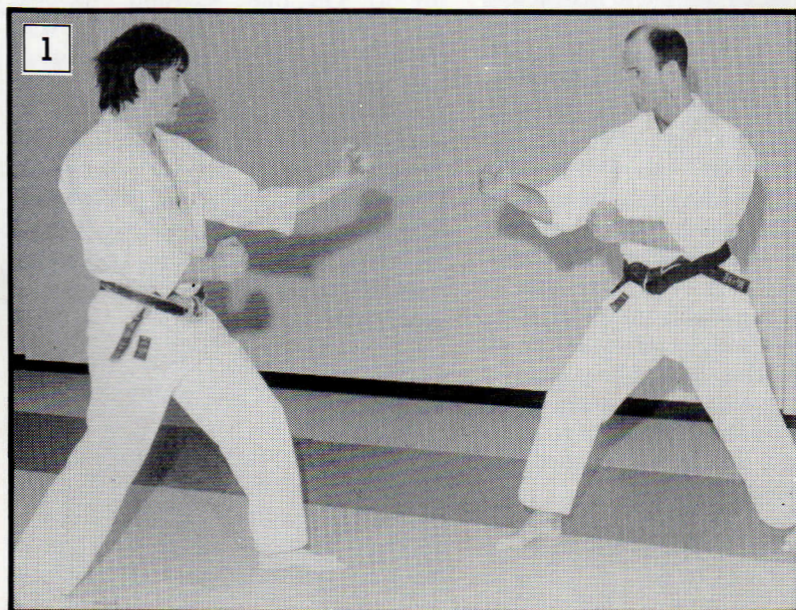


“In those days, nobody knew anything about it, so anyone with a rudimentary knowledge of karate could set himself up, and no-one would know the difference.”

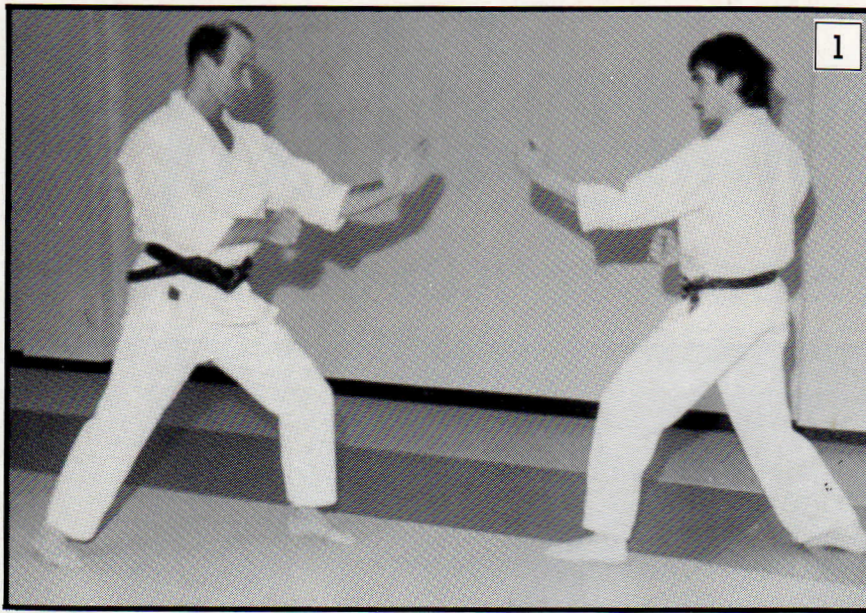
Although karate is more publicised now, Peter feels that it is only the

sporting side that is shown. There are plenty of beginners wanting to take up a martial art, but they should take their time before joining a club.

“I think people should look round at the clubs,” advises Peter, “and it is a good thing that people ask more



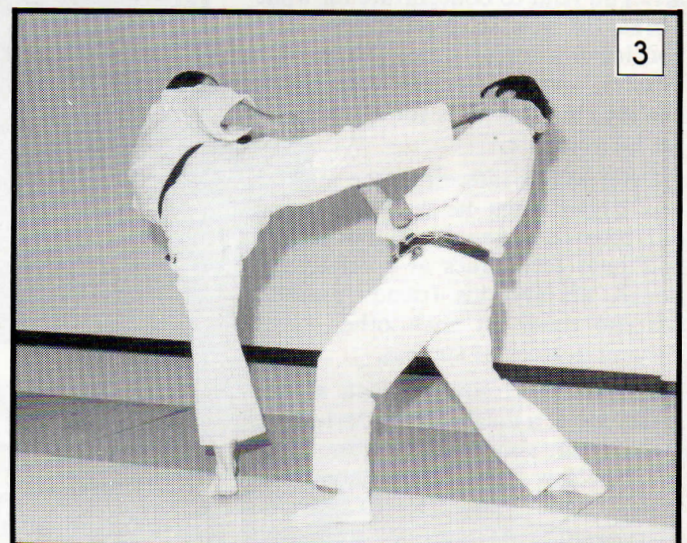
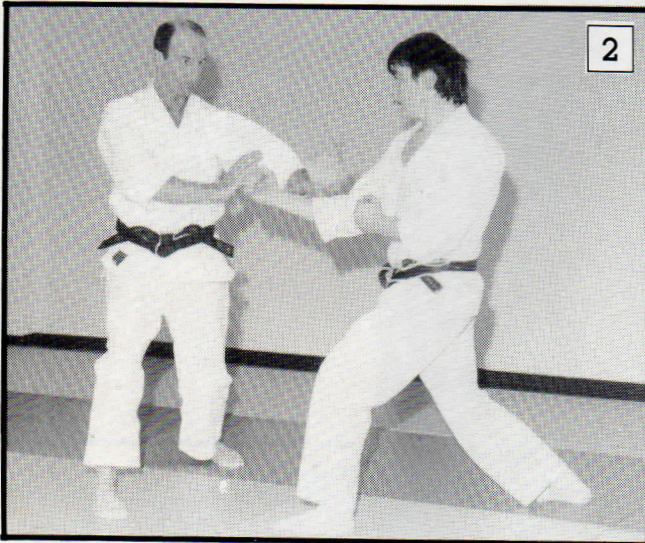




you have to relate to somebody to learn from them, and I knew that this was the person who could teach me the right way."

Now, Peter realises that being half as good as someone else is not enough: "A good teacher will always try and make you better than himself, but even now, having studied with Sakagami Sensei 21 years, I'm still not half as good".

He continues: "When we trained, I was always mesmerised by Sakagami Sensei's fighting, and he loved to fight. The bigger and the harder they were, the bigger the smile on his face. He would fight everyone in the class, one after the other. I noticed that he used to practice one technique, whatever it was. Whether or not it



questions about the martial arts. There's more choice now, so people can 'vet' the clubs. Sadly, there are still a lot of cowboys around. There always have been and there always will be. Perhaps eventually legislation will come in, so that each instructor has to be vetted."

Sixteen-year-old Peter attended classes at that club twice a week, in what turned out to be a street-fighting style, rather than traditional karate:

"At the time, that's what I thought karate was all about," he says, "But they did stupid things, like practise with real broken bottles, and bricks, and it wasn't very good karate at all."

He stopped attending this particular club, feeling disillusioned, and had no further contact with the martial arts until he was 19, when he saw an advert advertising karate classes at a public house in Wolverhampton.

"It resembled nothing that I had ever practised before," he remembers. "Straightaway you could tell that this was the real thing." This club was run by Japanese instructors and it was here that Peter's long association with Sakagami Sensei began.

"He looked a very hard man when he walked into the dojo. I can remember it as though it was yesterday. The first thing he did was to take us through basics. He started on the left hand side of the room, testing everybody's stances, and he would kick the legs from under them if they weren't right. He went down the lines like this, and as he got closer and closer to me, I was getting lower and lower. By the time he got to me, I was so tense, that he just pushed me, and I fell over!"

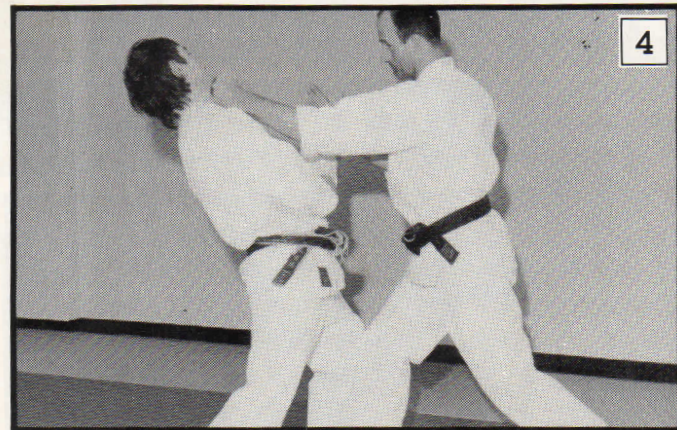
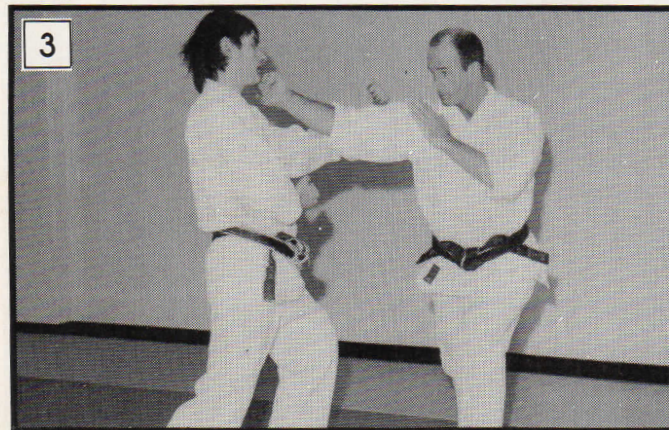
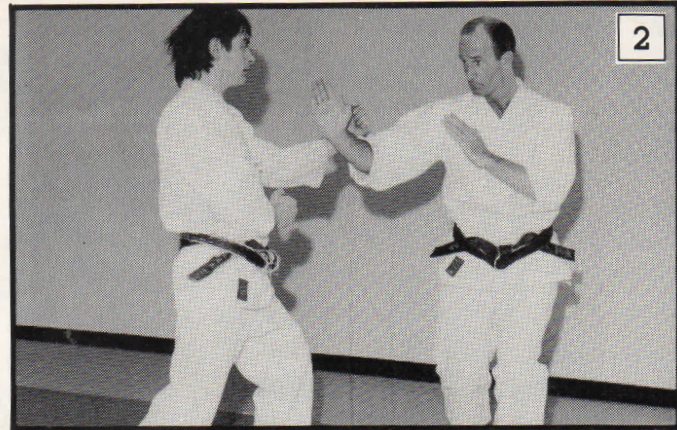
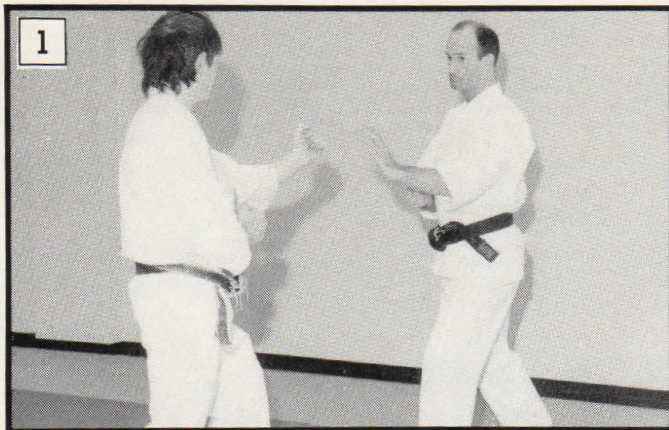
However, this didn't discourage Peter. "By the second lesson I said to myself: 'If I can be half as good as this man, I'd be happy.' I believe that

worked in his fighting, he would keep practising it. I used to try and get up about third, so I could work out what he was using, and keep out of the way of it! On one occasion, he was practising double mawashigeri with his left leg, one to the groin, one to the head. I managed to block both, which brought a gasp from the people watching, and Sakagami Sensei said 'Good'. Then he kicked me with his right foot in my groin and my head, just to show he could do it either leg! Sometimes he performs a technique, and it makes the hairs stand up on your arm."

Sakagami Sensei has the true teacher's gift of getting the best from each student.

"If you weren't getting something right, there would just be the shake of the head, or something, and that was enough to make me go home after training and train again. He found a way to put enthusiasm into me and





plan your sessions so there's a lot of enjoyment in them. Every club has a troublemaker. Some instructors shout at them, or make them sit in the corner. I would always say to them: 'Okay, who's going to train hard today?' and all the hands would go up. Then I'd ask: 'Who's going to play about?' and no-one puts their hands up. That usually stopped it. If you get a commitment from them to train hard, kids will do it."

At one time Peter was running three Clubs in Manchester, while living in Wolverhampton, but found that the travelling was just too much. Now, he does not have a club of his own, although still teaching locally and on courses.

Peter trains every day, and also has a full time job, working shifts at the Goodyear Tyre Company in Wolverhampton.

[REDACTED]

When the UKKW split up into three groups about two years ago, Sakagami Sensei formed the Wado

Ryu Aiwakai Karate-Do Federation, Peter became the General Secretary, and now simply does not have the time to run a club as well. "Aiwakai" literally means "People who love to practice in harmony."

As General Secretary, he organises contests and courses, keeps in touch with governing bodies, and generally runs the administrative side of the federation. This is no mean task, since there are about 1,300 students. Aiwakai is also affiliated to the Wado-Kai group in Japan, and Sakagami Sensei is their Chief Instructor for the UK.

### Sponsorship deal

Aiwakai has recently clinched a major sponsorship deal, which Peter claims is unlike any other previously obtained by a martial arts federation. Firstly, the next five years' championships are guaranteed, and secondly, a main honbu is likely to be built in either Wolverhampton or Birmingham.

As a young man, Peter entered a few contests with the Wolverhampton team. At that time many of the competitions were open ones, where he fought against the best from other styles. He returned in 1984 to do some kata, but his heart was never really in competition.

"I didn't learn karate to be a champion, and I used to get bored with all the hanging about at competitions."

Peter's favourite technique was formerly mawashigeri jodan, but now it is nagashizuki. However, he has a word of warning: "You need to be able to do the full range of techniques. Even if something doesn't work for you, you must keep practising it. I try not to rely on one technique too much. Years ago, in free sparring, you tended to use what you knew would work for you, and you didn't develop your weaker techniques. Now we have lighter sparring, with heavy sparring perhaps once a month, so you can work on your weaker techniques safely. The Wolverhampton dojo is made up of the 'old boys' now, so we don't think 'Oh he's hit me,' but thank him for showing you your weakness. You never bear a grudge for what happens."

Peter only attends competitions as an organiser or referee. He has seen some changes in competition over the years: "Technically, it's got better," he says. "In the early years there was less control. What you would be disqualified for now, you would have been given a full ippon for then. It's better now, because most people have



to be able to work the next day. In theory, I think you should be able to leave the competition area as you walked in."

Peter was awarded his 1st Dan in 1973, becoming one of the very few shodans in the West Midlands.

"At 22, you tend to be a bit cocky, and I was no exception," he remembers. "I used to look at the Japanese instructors, and there wasn't one English student who even compared to their standard. I used to wonder how they trained, and what their secrets were — I knew they had to have secrets to be so good! At that time, I was between jobs, and Sakagami Sensei invited me to train with him. I thought: 'This is it! I'm going to learn the secrets now.' He didn't take me to the dojo, he took me running first. Although I was fit, I hadn't done any extra training besides normal press-ups and sit-ups and karate. We did a four mile run, then sit-ups, and I lost count of how many, then push-ups. And then we went up the hill doing bunny hops. By the time I reached the top, he was coming back up the other side! Next, we did sparring, then sprinting, before going to the dojo and training. I couldn't believe it! It was the same the next day. By the Wednesday my muscles had cramped up. On the Thursday my wife had to help me out of bed. On Friday I couldn't get out of bed, and she said: 'You're crazy doing this. You mustn't go today.' I said: 'I'm trying to learn the secrets. And I mustn't lose face.' So, she helped me out, and I managed to get to the dojo, and Sakagami Sensei had a prior engagement. So I went home and went to bed. I was in so much agony that I didn't get up until the Saturday night. When I look back at it now, the secret was hard work, but at the time, being young, I never realised it. I vowed from that day that I'd never be unfit again. The Japanese call that 'knocking the nail down.' If the nail sticks up out of the floor, you knock it down, so that if you've got a cocky attitude, they'll knock you down."

Karate is often advertised as little more than self-defence, but Peter does not agree with this approach. Firstly, there is much more to it than that. And secondly, it takes a long time, as he explains:

"You have to learn to fight. It's not an instant process. It takes a long time to develop reflexes, so that you

can react instantaneously. Self defence only comes with long study. When you've practised martial arts for a number of years, you can tell when it's going to go off, and the best thing to do is not be there at the time! Having said that, there are times when it is necessary."

On the rare occasions when Peter has had to use his martial art skills to defend himself, they have never let him down.

Sparring in the dojo is nothing like the real thing: "Even if you do hard free-fighting, there's a lot of difference between that and self defence. Without going into detail, 11 o'clock at night, in pitch darkness, on a hill, in two inches of mud — where do your normal dojo skills come into that?"

## Aspects of training

However, some aspects of dojo training have a part to play in such situations, as Pete explains:

"Sakagami Sensei has always run a strict and hard dojo, and I can remember years ago, walking up the stairs, with butterflies in my stomach, never knowing what was going to happen in the dojo. Going through that stage helped me in later life, and I wouldn't change it for anything. There's a saying in self defence situations that you have to be able to 'turn on' like a tap, so that you get anything over with as quickly as possible. When it's happened to me, I'm like a cat on a hot tin roof for about two or three hours later, with the adrenalin still rushing round me. Once, I met Sakagami Sensei just after three fellows had had a go at him. He 'turned on' quickly, and got it over with, but what impressed me about it was the way he 'turned off' so quickly as well."

Peter does not think it is possible to set any guidelines about how to respond in self-defence situations.

"No two situations are the same," he says. "There is what we call 'Sensen no sen,' in Wado, that is, the instant your attacker has made up his mind to attack you, the instant he starts to move — you hit him. This comes with martial arts experience, you read the situation. Some people might see it as pre-emptive, if they hadn't got the martial arts experience to see that he had already made up his mind to hit you. You're not reading his mind, you're reading body language. Some situations are easier

to read than others, for example, an aggressive dog's hair will stand up on end when he comes at you, but a cunning dog will start by licking you, and then bite you. And there are people like that."

Although Sakagami Sensei has been the major influence on Peter, there are others who have impressed him, including Ohtsuka Sensei, in the 70s.

"I trained with him a few times when he came over to Britain. He was a marvellous man, and the more you go into Wado Ryu, the more you realise he was a genius. In all the years I've trained I've been lucky to have the best instruction, with all the senseis in the UKKW. Their characters are so strong that you cannot help being influenced in some way. But training with and being instructed by are two different things. I've been instructed for 21 years by Sakagami Sensei, and I shall still carry on being instructed by him."

Even after 20 years in karate, Peter is still finding new inspiration.

"In future I plan to dig deeper into Wado Ryu. The martial arts side is really beginning to come out now. A few years ago, Sakagami Sensei said that he didn't quite understand kata and how some of the movements relate to fighting techniques. He's now bridged that gap, and there's a whole new world opened up to us. I find that kata training challenges you more than kumite training."

He also has some wishes for Wado Ryu karate as a whole.

"Hopefully, within the next couple of years, we'll see Wado karate getting together, as it originally started out years ago. Even though the UKKW split two years ago, we had a contest earlier this year where the three groups came together. It was marvellous — all old friends together. In Wado, we talk about 'harmony throughout your life.' Wado hasn't been that way over the last two years, but I see no reason why it cannot be so in the future."

Awakai Clubs in Wolverhampton are held on Mondays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Sundays; and in Manchester on Wednesdays and Sundays. For further information about clubs, the Wado Ryu Aiwakai Karate-Do Federation, or the national championships being held in Derby in October, contact Pete May on 0922 475635.