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Sam Molezki

"I am still excited about learning more!"

An interview with the President of Karatedo Shitokai Canada

Sam Molezki has a long and rich martial history, starting in 1967. At that time he was already studying boxing and competing as a member of the Midland Avenue Collegiate gymnastics team. He began practising Karate-Do under Master Kei Tsumura and his impressive fighting career started a short time later in 1968, when he competed at the 7th Canadian International Karate Championships, where he took 2nd place in the kumite. His career has been full of trophies and awards since, including becoming the only non-Oriental to win 1st place in kumite at the Japan Karate District Karate championships and this interview is an in-depth introduction to a true warrior.

Molezki Sensei, you have been practising martial arts for many years now. Can you tell us when and where you began your martial arts journey?

SAM MOLEDZKI: I was introduced to this fabulous world of martial arts back in 1967, in Toronto. It was approximately 9 years after the initial introduction, in 1958, of organised karate in Canada by the man who is referred to as, the Father of Canadian Karate, Masami Tsuruoka sensei. A very close and good friend of mine named Bill Pinkerton, (Pinky) had asked me one day if I was interested in checking out a place where they were teaching some kind of mysterious Japanese fighting system. Something he had pronounced as "eye-key-due". Unfortunately, after arriving downtown, we couldn't actually find the location so Pinky suggested we go to another place he knew for sure. It was the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre located in the North East of Toronto. He suggested the JCCC because he had recently played at a wedding reception there as a member of a band. Bill was an accomplished drummer.

We arrived at this very impressive, early 1960's marvel of modern architectural design by a local Japanese Canadian architect named Raymond Mariyama and, proceeded to walk right in the front doors unannounced. At the reception area we boldly asked "Do you have eye-key-due here" and an older Japanese gentleman behind the counter replied something like "No, eye-key-due." Is called "Ai-ki-do"! And, we don't have. He did indicate that "Judo, Kendo and Karate-do" was being taught there and we were instructed to return on Monday for Kendo and Tuesday for Judo and Karate do classes. The following Tuesday evening I signed up for my first Karate class and, as you say, the journey began and I'm still enjoying it very much.

What style of karate did you initially learn and what was the training like back then?

SAM MOLEDZKI: The karate being taught all across Canada at that time was a system called Chito-Ryu. Please, picture this if you will. My very first karate class that Tuesday evening was, to say the least, very impressive. Upon opening the double doors and entering the training area, there, before me were approximately 100 students in their pyjama looking outfits, punching and kicking and yelling at the top of their lungs. I thought, WOW, this is something I can really get into. I believe I'm going to enjoy giving this a go and trying it out! The rest, as the saying goes, is history!

I recall the training sessions were a full two hours. They included a light 10 minute easy stretching warm up, followed by a two mile run outside in bare feet, Spring, Summer and Fall, and shoes in the Winter. Then, more basic calisthenics of jumping jacks, toe touching, splits, leg lifts etc, including the usual 50-100 push ups on the palms, knuckles, backs of the hands, finger tips etc. and sit ups with basic blocking techniques, and so on, for the first hour. FYI, water bottles were never permitted at all during the workouts. After a 2-3 minute break, we would line up usually 10 across and 10 deep and begin the second hour.

Was there particular focus on kihon, kata or kumite and were you encouraged to compete outside your dojo?

SAM MOLEDZKI: Yes, the norm back then was the three K's (kihon, kata, kumite), as it was in most dojos across the country. Kihon was first. This consisted of simply lining up 10 people deep. We would then take turns counting to 10 while, punching and kicking in usually a zenkutsu dachi stance. I distinctly recall that when someone messed up the count, we'd have to start right back at the beginning of the row you were in, and repeat the techniques. Everything was usually done with a very loud and strong Kiai. I remember on more than one occasion, during a normal class, we'd only complete the techniques on the right side of the body because someone would continually mess up the count and we'd never get to exercise the opposite side, for lack of time before we'd move on to the next part of the scheduled class.

Kata was practised by separating into belt colour groupings. I remember very little applications were shown, let alone actually taught for kata then. But, some of us were curious why we had to perform something a certain way and would ask sensei Kei Tsumura privately, and he would usually show us some form of application that would satisfy us enough to continue practising the kata. Generally though, we mostly repeated the kata patterns over and over again to commit to memory in preparation for a belt testing down the road.

Jiyu kumite was what we most wanted to practice and it was practised usually during the last 20-30 minutes of each class. We would change partners (usually 1 1/2-2 minutes per match) with any belt level, including black belt, as many times as possible to gain more experience against different calibre, size and types of fighters. All sparring was bare knuckles without mouth guards or even groin protectors and, NO weight distinction either.

When was your introduction to the Shito-ryu system, who was your Sensei and how did it differ from your previous system?

SAM MOLEDZKI: Actually, my first introduction to the Shito ryu system was in the summer of 1969, in Detroit, Michigan, USA. Let me explain here a little if you will. My work profession was, and still is as a draughtsman. (Only difference today is, everything is drawn using computer software) I was then employed by a consulting engineering firm that had a contract with Allied Steel and Conveyors in Detroit.





of 1969. He received his 5th dan in Karate & 5th dan in Kobudo directly from Sakagami sensei and, officially introduced the Shito Ryu Itosu Kai system to Canada, as an affiliate branch organisation of Sakagami sensei.

Over the next few months, we were told to forget everything we had learned to date about Chito ryu, and were directed to concentrate on learning this new Shito Ryu system. During this phase, the dojo actually lost a few members who refused to make the change over but those of us who stayed, eventually learned the new Shito ryu Itosu Kai system. The transition wasn't too difficult as I remember, just very intense. Besides making adjustments to how we executed certain basics, we had to learn 20 new basic kata + 20 new basic ippon kumite, 5 Pinan kata and 3 Nianfanchin, before we could test for our black belts.

I recall training Tuesdays and Thursdays at the JCCC and special classes on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays at Tsumura sensei's other dojo location, regularly, over the next 3 months, to prepare for my first black belt test in this new system. I successfully received my 1st dan on January 10, 1970.

You also have an extensive knowledge of both Japanese and Okinawan weaponry, can you tell us about your introduction to kobudo and the weapons you practice?

SAM MOLEDZKI: My first taste of Kobudo actually was when I was a blue belt in 1969 and had an opportunity to play around, informally, with a pair of Sai that Tsumura sensei had. He had shown me some fundamentals. The students who wished to learn the Kobudo system of Itosu kai were instructed in special classes only after they received their 1st dan level in Karate. My official instruction in the 5 basic weapons of Sakagami sensei's Kobudo (Bo, Sai, Tonfa, Nunchaku and Kama) began in early 1970 and, was taught directly by Tsumura sensei.

Later, whenever I did travelled to the Honbu dojo in Tsurumi, Japan, (1971, 1976, and 1980) I had the special privilege of also receiving direct instruction from Sakagami Ryusho sensei in Kendo, Judo and Iaido as well as Karatedo which, was arranged for me by Tsumura sensei. By 1980, I had received my 5th dan in Shito ryu karate, 3rd dan in Ryukyu Kobudo and 1st dan in Muso Jiki den Eishin ryu Iaido. It should be noted that in February 12, 1981, I personally chose to leave the Shito ryu Itosu kai Karate and Kobudo Association of Canada to further my own personal knowledge of the martial arts, independently.

You have studied under Kunio Murayama Sensei for over 15 years now. How did you meet and what made you decide that Murayama Sensei and the Shito-Kai was for you?

SAM MOLEDZKI: Please allow me to explain it this way if I may. I remained independent of any international federation over the next 10 years (1981-1991) by choice, and then, had the great fortune of meeting Kunio Murayama sensei 7th dan, Japan Karatedo Shito Kai from Mexico, during our 1991 Canadian National Black Belt Karate Championships in Vancouver, British Columbia. At the time, I was a senior Canadian referee and also had one of my junior students competing at the nationals. Murayama sensei was a special guest instructor conducting a Shito ryu seminar on shitei kata. I must clarify at this point that I had previously heard of Murayama sensei and thought this was a great opportunity to train with him as another senior member from the Japan Shito kai Federation.

During our nationals my student, Roland Chan, became the first ever junior to win both his Kata and Kumite divisions at the Canadian Nationals. Murayama sensei, a head table guest, had come directly over to congratulate us on the win. He then extended

a personal invitation to us to come to Mexico. I took this opportunity to put Murayama to a little test and asked him directly if I came to Mexico would he teach me the Kata Nipaipo. I explained to him that I had never learned the kata in Shito Ryu Itosu kai. Now, from my personal experiences, the most typical reply from a Japanese master would be something like: Mmmm, Nai! This kata very high, high level and not for Gaijin; or, Not possible! Must be member long, long, long time etc. Murayama sensei's instant reply was YES! Come to Mexico and I'll teach you personally.

Many karate-ka quit training once their competition days are over, what has kept you motivated all these years?

SAM MOLEDZKI: I'm certain it's the continuing thirst for the never ending knowledge found within the martial arts I guess, and simply trying to better understand this marvellous art. I began my journey back in 1967, and I'm still excited about learning more and more from various leaders in the martial arts. It truly is a never ending journey. My quest to understand our budo/sport system led me into three other fields after my competitive days came to an end in 1981. As a way to give back something to an art/sport that pretty much took me off the wrong path and virtually save my life, I decided I'd give back to it as much of myself as humanly possible.

I became interested in the officiating aspect of our sport after being the victim of poor officiating on many an occasions. I pursued that side to the extent that I spent the better part of 15 years as a Provincial, National, and Pan-American and WSKF world licensed referee. Approximately 12 of those years were directly paid for out of my own pocket. Only after becoming a member of the Canadian Referee Council did I actually have things partially funded. I also served as President of the Karate Ontario Association, the province's sports governing body for karate in the

province, as well as 1st Vice-President of the National Karate Association of Canada for 2 year terms each. Since 1991, I've also been a member of our provincial coaching staff.

Can you tell us a little about your organisation in Canada and its affiliation to Murayama Sensei and the WSKF?

SAM MOLEDZKI: Well, as mentioned earlier, I officially became a direct student of Murayama sensei in 1991. Since then, I have more or less travelled to Monterrey, Mexico or brought Murayama sensei to Canada to continue my training on an annual basis. As an official member of Murayama sensei's organisation, all my previous Canadian students and affiliate dojo were also accepted. My association in Canada became eligible to compete at the 1st World Shito Ryu Karate do Federation Championships in Tokyo, Japan in 1993. At the competition, the Canadian team members competed well and one of my own top female students, Christine Kay, won a world bronze medal in her kumite division.

The WSKF officially recognises only one organisation per country. My Shito kai Canada Association received recognition and official documentation at the 2nd World Shito Ryu Karate do Federation Championships in 1996 in Puebla, Mexico.

In October 2005, Shito Kai Canada will be competing at the 35th Copa Murayama Karatedo Championships. We are also preparing perspective members for the Canadian team selection that will be competing at the 5th World Shito Ryu Karate do Federation Championships in September 2006, in Japan.

For more general information see the following websites: www.shitoryu.org www.shitokaimurayama.com www.karatedo.co.jp/shitokai/wskf/index.html www.fujitaseiko.tripod.com/



They sent me on my first foreign assignment. It was a 3 month contract to work on the 1970, Ford model changes. During that time, I lived at the YMCA and used to work out in the gym there.

Sometime around the 3rd week there I believe, I met a young fellow (unfortunately, I don't recall his name) who asked me what system of karate I was practising. I explained Chito ryu and he then extended an invitation to work out at his club with him. He told me he had just received his yellow belt, and saw that I was a brown belt. The following evening I think, we went to his club and I was introduced to his sensei. He (sorry, but I've forgotten his name also) asked many questions about the system of Chito-ryu and then explained that his system was Shito Ryu Itosu Kai and he was supposedly, a 4th dan student of Fumio Demura sensei. Demura sensei had introduced Shito ryu Itosu kai into the USA in 1965.

I trained there for only one more session and never did return again. Back in Toronto, it was during the later part of 1968, that sensei Kei Tsumura, was increasingly becoming dissatisfied with the whole Chito ryu experience in Canada and had decided to investigate other karate systems. After briefly training privately with a visiting Japanese Shito ryu Itosu Kai stylist throughout the early part of 1968, Tsumura sensei had made arrangements to travel to Japan and begin intensive training in the Shito ryu system. Of course, we as students were not aware of any problems occurring at the time and, were only aware that Tsumura sensei was going to Japan for approximately a year.

He was met at the Haneda (Tokyo) airport by a Seiko Suzuki sensei, a senior instructor of Itosu kai and, immediately taken directly to the Shito ryu Itosu kai headquarters of its founder, Ryusho Sakagami sensei, 9th dan, in the small town of Tsurumi. The town was located along a commuter train line between Kawasaki and Yokohama stations. Tsumura sensei returned to Canada at the end