
HANDING OVER TO SHIHAN OF THE KSK ACADEMY

After Sensei Dirk Heene, Pascal Petrella, Michaylo Fedyk, it's turn of Velibor Dimitrijevic to open up to us memories of his own experience with Sensei Kase. Sensei Velibor Dimitrijevic was born in Serbia. He lives and teaches in Athens.

FSK-Ha : When did you begin practicing karate and who where your instructors?



Velibor Dimitrijevic: I began practicing karate in 1969. My first sensei was Takashi Tokuhisa. He was one of the assistants of Taiji Kase and probably the most technically advanced young Japanese instructor at that time. He was and still lives in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

When and how did you meet sensei Kase?

Actually Kase sensei was responsible for the development of Karate-Do in former Yugoslavia, and thus in my native Serbia too. He was a Technical Advisor for the Karate Association of Yugoslavia until 1980. At that time I was 17-18 years old, so it was impossible to be close to him; he was already a living legend even then. Later, when I become a member of the National team I had chance to get to know him a bit better. By 1979 I passed my Shodan, Nidan and Sandan examination to sensei Kase.

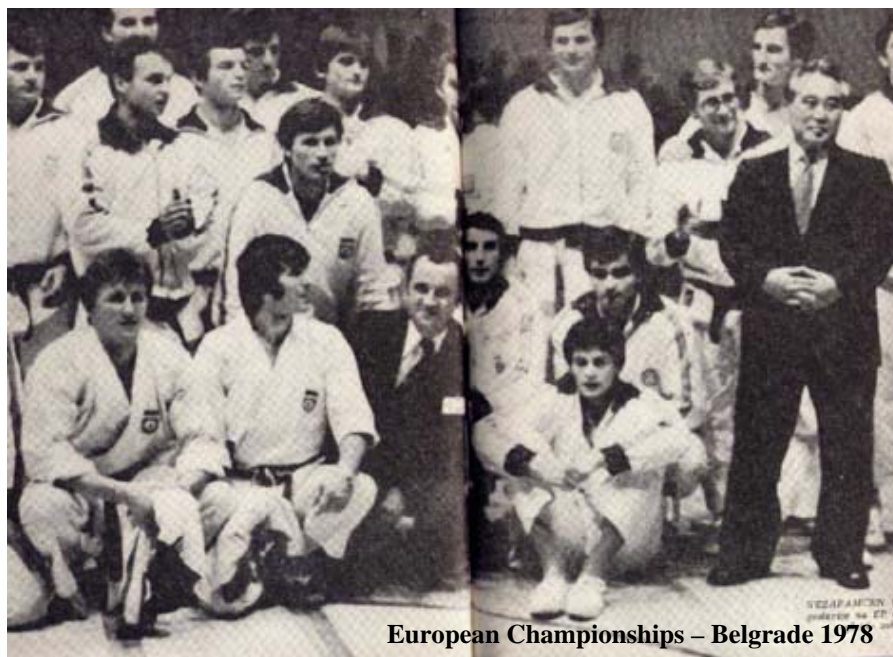
Why did you select sensei Kase as your teacher?

I was lucky to have Takashi Tokuhisa as my first sensei. He influenced my karate attitude and technical development. Through him I also had chance to find out more about other Japanese instructors like Shirai, Enoeda, Miyazaki, etc. From 1974 until 1987, I participated in 13 European Championships, two World Championships and two World Cups and I had a chance to see many of the top Shotokan Japanese instructors.

Simply speaking Kase sensei was an enigma for all of them. His style was not fancy but essential, and his search for the level beyond was something that even the Japanese could not accept easily though it is a part of their tradition and culture.

I had long and successful competitive carrier wining 15 World and European medals but what I was looking for was the real meaning of the Way of the Empty hand.

Kase's approach and life philosophy is exactly what I was looking for, so it was not difficult to choose a teacher, he was the only choice.



Did you follow him regularly or have there cuts been in the relationship with him, and why?

As young karateka I attended the courses he held in the country along with thousands of people at that time.

Unfortunately from 1980 cooperation with him in former Yugoslavia was interrupted. Later, due to the political development, war and disintegration of former Yugoslavia it was impossible for me to travel.

From 1988 I went to Athens, and from 1991 I met him again when he established WKSA (World Karate-Do Shotokan Academy). Since then I followed him as one of his closest assistants until his death.



Since when are you teaching?

Due to the circumstances at the time when I began practicing karate I was teaching in the club. While I studied Mechanical Engineering I was running a club and I was doing seminars during weekends. Later, almost for a decade I was working in a company and in the evening I was teaching. The last twenty years teaching Karate-Do is what I do.

Do you think that it is possible to save the teaching of sensei Kase or will history and individual personality influence it in the future?

As I said earlier Kase Sensei was an enigma even for the Japanese. His deep affection with Japanese samurai's tradition and his instinct to reach the level beyond technique and physical power made him an exception in the world of Martial Arts.

He proved during his life that it is possible to reach such metaphysical abilities following the way of Karate-Do. We, members of his Academy and particularly members of the Shihankai have great responsibility not to lose that direction. It won't be easy because nowadays approach to karate practice could be defined as quite superficial, mostly technical.

Only those who'll dare to search other aspects of training, breathing and mental development along with techniques may expect to stay on the Way of Kase and of course they may influence further development of the style.

Now you are a representative of the sensei kase's teaching; according to you, which qualities do we need to be a good "practiser" ?

First, it is important to make a clear distinction from the athletic karate practice. Unfortunately even in our Academy it is not quite clear what is the method of Budo practice.

Second, In Budo there is not a coach or trainer but a teacher or sensei. It is very important to theoretically explain the teaching method, however in Budo the teacher is first in line and he shows in practice what he wants others to do. He is a life example of what it means "to follow the system of the style".



It is not only the knowledge of the curriculum that matters. It is not only the technical or physical ability to demonstrate as well. The knowledge of the philosophy, anatomy, physiology and psychology combine with all of it is what makes a teacher or sensei a distinguished personality which influences the students.

We still have very vivid memories of Kase sensei. He never stopped practically demonstrating what harmony and unity of the mind and the body means.

The Kase Ha School is a way of research in the Shotokan style. Do you think the morphology indicates the style one is choosing? For example, the open hand allows the cosmic energy to enter through the body, and to root it to the ground and stabilize around the centre of gravity. It is quite a workout to introduce this sensation, isn't it? What is your opinion?

Though it is based on the roots of Shotokan, style Kase Ha Shotokan Ryu is actually a completely different style all together.

Technically speaking morphology might play some role in selecting some of the techniques as favorite, or more suitable than the other.

When speaking of human body as a receiver of the cosmic energy then technique itself is of a second importance, or even of no importance at all.

At the highest level of energy development only the way of thinking is important, the way how the train of thoughts is directed. Ki is an inherent energy beyond human comprehension. In order to feel and access the Ki and to develop ability to control it we need to develop body intelligence.

Besides our Karate-Do approach where insisting on extreme Kime is important, proper abdominal breathing is crucial in order to cultivate body intelligence. Of course, what you mention about centre of gravity and ground contact are technical aspects which belong to the same approach.

You belong to the circle of people chosen by sensei Kase to create the International Academy in 2002. You must be proud of that because it is a big responsibility; what's your feeling about ?

It is an honour to be chosen by Kase sensei to represent his style and I'm proud of it. Of course, with my experience now I'm aware of the responsibility we all have since we bare Kase's seal.

I believe no one expects us to replace Kase sensei because that is not the meaning of Budo and the meaning of life generally. What we have to, or what I feel I have to do, is to follow his idea and his direction while trying to go beyond my limits.

You created your own organisation kase Ha. Can you please tell us your organisation and its influence in your country ?



I live in Athens and I run a Honbu Dojo here; but I never stopped going to my country, Serbia, and teaching there as well. Since 1991 when I became a member of the WWSA I tried to bring Kase sensei back to Serbia. At that time the country was under embargo due to the war. Nevertheless, in 1993 after 13 years Kase sensei came with me to Serbia.

In my town Nis, we had a two days course with more than 200 people and almost 3000 people watching. Shotokan Karate-Do Academy of Serbia was established two years later in 1995.



Nis – Serbia - 1993

I regularly teach, at least six times a year in different parts of Serbia. The main goal of the Academy is to preserve Budo approach to practice and to promote Kase's style. Nowadays, when karate has become just an athletic discipline with only the outer form that matters, Academy in Serbia is offering a completely different picture about a Martial Art based on the ancient Budo code which can be accepted as life philosophy. I can say that new generations of young people find such approach attractive.

According to you, what are the factors to develop Shotokan Ryu Kase Ha ?

When it was established, WKSA had a concept of a school for higher instructor's education; so it was meant not for beginners but for those that "came to the end" of their improvement in practice or those that had conquered everything in the field of competition. Technically speaking for a beginner it is almost impossible to understand the differences our approach has comparing to others that share the same Shotokan name.

I'm deeply convinced that we have to keep developing other aspects of practice besides the technical one. In the phase we are now we need to emphasize practice of breathing above all and the way to implement it in all aspects of practice. It is simple, humans live because they breathe. The secret is to extend it beyond the frontiers.

Kase sensei showed us that it's possible to do it. I see this as my direction too.

I have no doubt about that but we need time, patience, determination and above all very hard and persistent work to reach the level of demonstrating such abilities and not to remain on the theoretical level.

It took life time for Kase sensei to reach the level of the consciously awakened energy. We can not expect anything less.

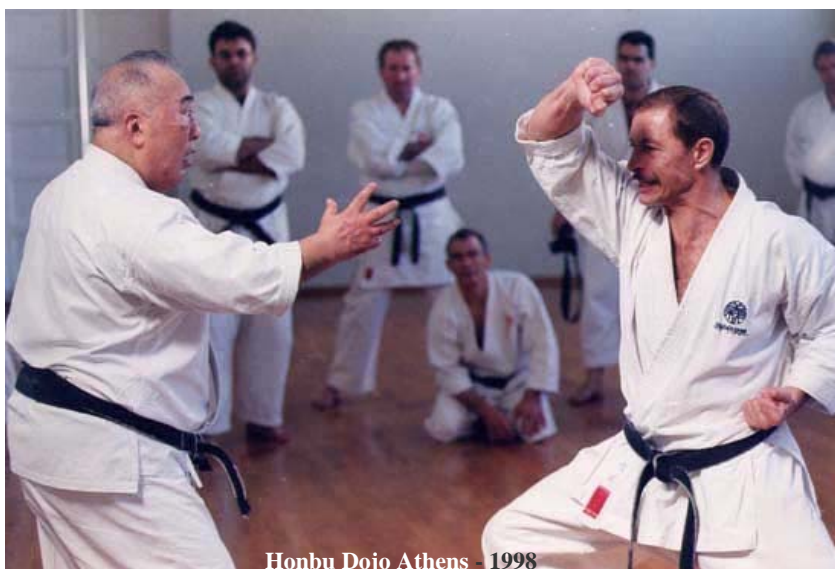
Which are the perspectives of evolution of the Ksk Academy ?

I would say there are three levels in the KSK Academy structure.

First is the highest structures consisting of people that inherited Kase Ha heritage and have the obligation to further develop and improve the style (Currently, members of the Academy with Sandan and above but more precisely members of the Shihankaï and some of the senior members)

Second are their closest assistants or advanced students.

Third level is actually new generation of karateka educated according to the standards and the method of our style.



Honbu Dojo Athens - 1998

Sensei Kase was rigorous and astonished his western students because of his spontaneity. Would you please tell us an anecdote from which you still remind, among all those punctuating your own experience with him ?

Not everybody understood or liked Kase sensei's style but I don't know anyone not respecting his personality. He radiated with an enormous positive energy. Unlike other Japanese instructors of that rank he was an open minded person ready to hear and to accept other's opinion or suggestion.

During one of the first courses we had in Athens I was assisting him in demonstrations. Though I really did my best to offer a decent resistance, with each contact he would toss me with unbelievable easiness left or right and often I found myself on the floor.



I should mention that most of the participants were adults and experienced karateka. Of course in dojo I had no problem of "playing" with them, and now they could not believe what they were watching. Their sensei was like a kid in front of an old man.

They thought everything was fake; their sensei was kind with the older sensei. Unfortunately I could not explain to them that I was the one who was shocked.

At that time I was physically very fit, almost 25 years younger than Kase sensei and the fact that I could not withstand any of his blocks was a kind of disaster for me.

I did not say anything of course, but at the end of the course Kase sensei touch my shoulder and told me:

"Vebo, you were champion, you have very god technique and excellent kime, and it is now time for you to start practising karate".

I was almost 40 years old at that time.
What could I do?
I just had one choice:
To start from the beginning again.
The rest you know...



With senior members of Honbu Dojo - Athens

Thank you very much Velibor, for your answer that permit us to know you better...

Thank you for offering me a chance to share my experience with the members of the French KSK Academy.
My best regards to all !

Oss !