

Brandt Cogill - An interview with Australia's Shotokan team captain - Blitz Martial Arts Magazine

Brandt Cogill: A conversation with Captain Cogill

Written by Boon Mark Souphanh

Now a veteran of six Shotokan Karate International Federation (SKIF) World Championships, the 30-year-old captained the Aussie team to a successful showing at the recent 2012 SKIF World Championships in Sydney. Leading by example, Cogill fought his way to a bronze medal in the kumite.



Cogill fought his way to a bronze medal in the kumite at the 2012 SKIF world champs. Brandt, why did you end up choosing Shotokan karate over other martial arts?

I was inspired by movies when I was a kid. I started karate when I was seven because of watching Bruce Lee and The Karate Kid. My family knew a guy who taught karate close by, and he happened to teach [Shotokan](#). He was Andrew Corneel, my first sensei. He is now my stepfather, too!

You've achieved a lot in karate, including your bronze medal at the 2012 SKIF World Championships. What would you say are your top achievements?

My bronze medal at the World Championships would probably be my top achievement to date. I've been [competing](#) and training for a really long time. I've been to six World Championships, but this one was different because I felt I wasn't really trying to chase medals and results. I was actually

looking for that 'feeling' you get. I just wanted to be in the zone, with that heightened sense of awareness.

Instead of those results-based goals, I went in looking for feeling-based goals and because of this, I think the results took care of themselves.

What did your training consist of leading up to the event? Can you give us an outline of a typical week of preparation?

[My preparation](#) leading up to this event was pretty different to previous World Championships because I trained with a different attitude. From a physical point of view, I've been smarter and more specific. So there have been a lot more specific drills, perfecting my strengths, identifying my weaknesses and improving on them. Analysing video footage from competition is vital for this.

From a mental point of view, [it's been about] keeping positive, relaxed, focused and having performance-based goals rather than results-based goals. Earlier in the year, I worked on strength and power, and as the year went on, the strength work tapered off and I worked on speed and power. Toward the end of the year, it was mainly speed work. This was combined with specific kumite drills; favourite techniques I mostly score with, as well as defence against techniques that mostly scored on me. As always, there is a lot of fitness work and I tried to get as many sparring sessions and competitions in as possible.

You compete actively in both kata and kumite — does that present any difficulties in preparing for such an elite event, in terms of diluting your focus on one or the other, and halving the time that can be spent on either aspect?

This was the first year I focused solely on kumite and did not compete or train much kata. I've missed it because in the past I have always competed in both. I believe competing in both disciplines successfully is easier in more traditional competitions rather than in sport-karate competitions. It also depends on the karate practitioner's physical and mental ability combined with the amount of time they can devote to training. Being a father of two, running a dojo and managing a small business, my training has had to change to fit in with the rest of my life, therefore focusing solely on kumite has made it easier for me to improve my skills more efficiently. As a consequence, I have had better results.

That said, my students have to work on both kata and kumite with a holistic approach to karate. I like to teach traditional values, but I believe that there is a lot to learn about yourself through competition and I encourage my students to take part.

Do you think it's important to train and compete in both? Or is it acceptable for students to concentrate on one of these aspects?

I've always competed in both, but this year I chose to only focus on kumite. At the end of the day, I think it's up to the individual. If you were capable of doing both kata and kumite, I'd definitely encourage it. I like to tell my students they can succeed at anything they want to, and they have potential to succeed in both aspects. However, sometimes people want to focus their energy on either kata or kumite. This may be due to personal commitments or whatever; it's less time

consuming to focus on one and I'm okay with that. I encourage my beginner students to perhaps enter lower level competitions and compete in both.

How do you rate your own performance at the event, as well as that of the Australian team?

I think the Aussie team did extremely well. I think the preparations were done well with everyone having some great coaches. The competition was at the forefront of everyone's mind because it was in Australia. Being in Australia is always good because it gives you that mental advantage, being on home ground. We did have a big team this year, because it was in Australia and people could attend. The standard of training really picked up, knowing that the competition was here and we had everyone working towards that goal.

Are you happy with the current state of Australian karate in general? Where can we improve?

With Shotokan karate in Australia, there are a lot of top competitors on the sport-karate side of things; we have Shotokan guys doing really well in AKF [Australian Karate Federation] events. Traditionally, we have a lot of really experienced guys here and recently, a few Black-belts got graded to 8th Dan. Where could we improve? I think we could work to encourage the younger generation to make more of an effort to take the reigns and drive the organisations forward. These young guys bring a lot of new ideas so it would be nice if they could go forward while still keeping the traditional values in place.

What do you hope to achieve in both your competitive career and running your school?

I will always be involved in karate; I want to train for as long as I can. As far as the competitive side, I did have doubts about continuing after the World Championships in Sydney, I initially thought it might be my last one. However, I had so much fun and had such a great experience that I feel I might have a couple of them left in me now. With the school, I just want to let it grow naturally. As the school grows and evolves, I want to do the same with my own karate.

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Kudo with Kononenko

Written by Paul Cale

Few Aussies are familiar with the Japanese combat sport of *kudo* (Daido Juku) — but those who are, are pretty excited about it after a visit from 10-time All Japan Kudo champion and twice runner-up at the World Kudo Championships, Alexei Kononenko. A Russian fighter who now lives in Sendai, Japan, Kononenko is a former Soviet Union judo and sambo champion of Siberia and the Far East. He recently toured Down Under and trained with members of Kudo Australia, a newly formed international branch of the Kudo International Federation, and gave *Blitz* an insight into his background and kudo battles.