

About Tournaments and winning

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Just back from the latest tournament, I wanted to write a small piece about them in general to give my personal perspective, which I hope will help students, parents, and the general public to understand them better, or in a different light.

My Sensei , Luis Chiock, back in Peru, was not too enthusiastic about tournaments, and all the weight and fuss that people put and made about them. He always reminded us that the main objective of Karate is not to go get a medal, or a trophy. That is not to say that he discouraged us from competing, on the contrary, he was very supportive and guided us appropriately. He even coached the Peruvian National Team for several years in the 1980's; but he wanted us to keep our priorities in order.

Through the years my brothers and I, (and some other of his pupils) have competed at the highest levels of Karate very successfully; we've won, and of course we've lost, but we've always kept a good perspective on the "DO" part of Karate-do. The Way, the path of Karate should ultimately lead us not to a medal (nothing wrong with medals), but to the continual improvement of each one of us as a person. If we miss that, we missed the best part of our Karate formation.

I believe that competitions are a great way to measure one's own progress, to go meet with friends from other schools, make new friends, and especially, have fun. It also may be a roadmap to excel as an athlete, and vie for a place in the US National Karate Team, and represent our country in international competitions. However, too often folks get too wrapped up on the tournaments and just winning as the ultimate goal. Children may feel pressured by their parents or instructors to win, which sours the whole experience. Other times, tournament organizers, or Instructors who wish to have their school be above the rest, arrange divisions so that their students have a better chance of winning. And even worse, referees consciously or uncounsciously give preference to a competitor of their school, state, or country to help them win. All of this is a sad degeneration of the true spirit of Karate, which should regard winning as a lesser good, after honesty, respect, and honor (to name a few).

Having said all of that, I should emphasize that if I compete, I compete to win, I train to win, and I instruct and cheer all my students on to get first place. I encourage every one to excel and to do their best. To ask anything less, I think, would be detrimental. Whether we win or lose, though, is many times out of our hands, but the amount of effort we place in our training and how we conduct ourselves means much more than any award ever can.

While I am very proud to have our students take back several medals and trophies at each tournament, there is no comparison to the pride I feel when other sensei's come to me and say: "You have outstanding students". That, to me, is the best prize any Sensei may ever get.