



GMA News June 22

Congrats to our New Black Belts:

GMA is excited for our new Dan ranks: Miss Holly Brown (2nd) and Miss Kylie Yoshida (3rd)

Break-a-thon Results

Thank you to everyone who worked extremely hard to make our break a thon and annual picnic a success. Our final tally was approximately \$2600. Thanks to all the parents who also helped serve or set up, etc. to make the picnic awesome.

SUMMER ATTENDANCE REWARD and Referral Program

As usual we have our summer attendance reward program starting in June. Look for details on how you can be a part of a celebration at the end of the summer for strong attendance during the hot summer months.

Upcoming Events

June 4 th	Demo Team 9:00-10:30
June 4 th	Stripe testing 10:30-12:00
June 4 th	Black belt prep 1:00-2:00
June 4 th	Stick fighting 2:00-4:30
June 9-10	BJJ camp 9:00-3:30
June 10 th	TKD testing
June 11 th	Bedford TKD tournament
June 13-17	TKD Day camp
June 25 th	Demo team 9:30-10:30
June 25 th	BB prep 10:30-12:00
July 4 th	No class, Happy Independence Day
July 7-8	Hapkido day camp 9:00-3:30
July 9 th	Lil Dragons testing
July 11-13 th	Lil Dragons camp 9:00-1:00

Fathers' day invitation

After inviting the mothers to join the kids in class for Mother's Day, we would be in trouble if we didn't offer the same to our fathers. Dads, Grand-dads, etc. are welcome to join their kids in class the week following Father's Day—June 20-23.

Training Anniversary

Congrats to those students who are celebrating a year or multiple years of training with us:

Noah Wilson (BJJ 13 yrs.)	Megan Brook (TCC 5 yrs.)
Soliel Sparks (BJJ 7 yrs.)	Caitlin Gibson (TKD 4 yrs.)
Nathan Crowe (BJJ 2 yrs.)	Adrian Britt (LD, BJJ 2 yrs.)
Mikayla Kirk (TKD 1 yr.)	

Happy Birthday to these students

Carson Smith	6/5	Cole Patton	6/5	Cooper Glunk	6/10
Daniel Hanscom	6/11	Larissa Poorman	6/12	Freddy Bower	6/16
John Hirt	6/21	Sara Voorhees	6/21	Henry Godfrey	6/21
Spencer Larson	6/23	Silas McCalden	6/25	Jason Eversole	6/25
Declan Williams	6/26	Kayla Bush	6/27		



Please keep us posted.

A reminder as summer approaches: if you have vacation plans, we would appreciate being kept informed, so we don't worry if we miss you in classes. Fridays are great days to make up any classes that you missed while on vacation. Thanks.

This Month in Martial Arts History (selected from "Dates with Destiny" in *Martial Arts Success* by John Corcoran.

June 15, 1917,	Birthday of American jiu-jitsu pioneer Wally Jay
June 1961	Black belt magazine is founded.
June 1978	"Good Guys Wear Black" first features Chuck Norris as the star
June 22, 1984,	Karate Kid debuts—forever changing the perception and demographics of martial arts in America.
	Karate II and III are released in June 1986 and 1989, respectively. As well as the remake in 2010.

Other June movie releases include *Mulan* (1998) and *Kung Fu Panda* (2008).



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Black Belt Politics

Any veteran martial artist could easily assume by the title of this rant that I was going to rail against how someone got robbed at a tournament by judges from another school, or how organizational control was wrestled from one person or another, or how even cliques and loyalties among black belt leaders in a single school ultimately divided it. I have seen or heard all of the above, although I still like to believe it happens less often than is commonly cited...at least in my circles it fortunately isn't common. But I was actually referring to true international politics.

The conflict in Ukraine has deservedly kept peoples' attention for a while now. One of the headlines that caught fewer peoples' radar was that Putin, who by all accounts is quite the legit black belt level judoka with the rank of 8th dan, was stripped of his other honorary titles by the International Judo Federation, and also lost a completely honorary 9th dan in TKD from World Taekwondo. Honestly, I don't think Putin cares at all. He might care more if his actual rank that he earned was stripped, but at the same time, it isn't like that means he instantly forgets what he had learned or can no longer practice. When it is all said and done, it is just a piece of paper. Admittedly one that we martial artists put a lot of intrinsic value on, but still. While I think it is more of a statement and hollow gesture by the governing bodies, perhaps those organizations sincerely regret the decision of awarding them, in which case there should be more prudence in giving them out in the first place.

But therein lies the trouble...the martial arts do not exist in a vacuum. They are subject to the same influences, pressures, politics, and "social expectations" that are placed on other entities. To be sure, Putin is not the only person to receive such awards. President Trump received an honorary 9th dan in TKD, as did President Obama before him. Why? I have no concrete answer, other than it was a chance to get some PR by having your organization linked in a headline to a major name. Of course, not everyone is a fan of those



“promotions” either. While at the recent Kukkiwon Master Course, during a membership Q&A with leadership (which I appreciated being part of the schedule), one individual, who didn’t hide his orientation, wanted to know why such a divisive person was given the honorary 9th dan.

His question got a loud applause from about half the room. I didn’t find it nearly so courageous. I wondered why he stopped there. If he was passionate about the cause..., why didn’t he demand accountability as to why the Kukkiwon gives rank—legitimate rank—in countries where his orientation is outlawed or would get you killed? Or allows athletes from those countries to compete? Or what about countries who oppress women? TKD, like other combat sports, has seen Muslim athletes refuse to compete against an Israeli opponent—a demonstration of hate—on the biggest of stages like the Olympics and World Championships. Sometimes the athlete is sanctioned, but of course, it is a cosmetic solution that doesn’t address the actual problem with that country’s delegation. Sometimes, a courageous athlete ignores the delegation’s demands to withdraw and competes anyway, and then fears death or serious repercussions if they return home. Why didn’t my black belt colleague go all the way with his objection to real problems? Well, my guess is politics. He wanted to make a stand but not one that would cost him too much.

To reiterate, martial arts do not exist in a vacuum, but are subject to societal forces and issues. Multinational organizations face a balancing act in trying to work across different cultures, and such is the world we live in. Perhaps in said world, honorary promotions to every important leader is just the normal way of doing business with a person of clout. It is similar to every high-profile commencement speaker receiving an honorary degree from that institution.* Or a distinguished guest receiving a key to the city.

To clarify my position, I don’t mind honorary degrees, but I am against the random person getting them. There is actually a process for someone to receive an honorary black belt. For those who are involved in the art in some way but can’t get a normal black belt. I will make up a few examples where I would have no problem with them: Someone is in an accident and can’t continue training, but still remains attached to the art, even volunteering, or supporting in ways they still can. Someone is on track for a black belt but joins the military...and his future service precludes him finishing the journey, but he gets a black belt when he returns on leave. To my knowledge, longtime World TKD Federation President Un Yong Kim never practiced the art, but as an administrator he worked tirelessly to promote, globalize, and unify the art of TKD, saw the Kukkiwon be built, got TKD into the Olympics, etc. Certainly, he did much to merit his “rank”

In stark contrast to those examples of meaningful honorary promotions, I have been at tournaments where the mayor receives an honorary black belt for showing up (largely for his own purpose of kissing babies so to speak), even though he may not be able to pronounce TKD or the name of his host properly. Similarly, in Martinsville, we just had a sport celebrity receive a key to the city, when—as far as I know—the only thing he has ever done for this town is show up that one time to promote his book. Recently, we just hosted our BJJ summit, where we had 3 world class BJJ athletes and instructors. All three have ties to us here at GMA and it wasn’t their first visit. They contributed their knowledge to us, but also brought guests from across the state, KY, OH, TX and NC, who contributed to the local economy. I would argue these people have done far more for the community than our most recent keyholder, yet I couldn’t even get local media to cover the event.

I think that is an injustice, but such is the world we live in. Apparently, I deem it worth writing about, but you may ask, why don’t I do more to effect change? Am I not guilty of stopping short as I criticized my colleague at the Kukkiwon course? Well maybe. Maybe I just don’t care that much. Or maybe it is politics.

* Do you think speakers who make the rounds have a folder in their desk for all their PhD’s?