

## THE CHAMPION

It is said that once not too long ago there was a man who boasted that he was the greatest of the martial arts masters who ever lived. Although his friends counseled him that it was unseemly for him to brag so, he would not be put off.

"I am the greatest," he said. "I have a black belt in jujitsu, and a purple sash in kung fu, and I am rated inestimable in karate and judo, and I can break ten bricks with one blow." And with that announcement he would usually break a board or a brick or a piece of cement with a snap kick or a reverse knuckle blow or one of the nine secret killing blows of the Shaolin priests. Of course no one contradicted him. Because he could do all of the things he said he could do, for one, and because he might take it in his head to do such things to his detractor, for a second reason.

Now though he bragged a lot, this champion also studied a lot. He could learn a technique by merely watching it. He could learn to perform a system in a day. He was powerfully built with wrists like horse's knees and hands that were harder than oxen's head. His shoulders were so broad he burst the seams out of the largest kimonos to be found in Japan.

If that was not enough, he leaped about with the grace and speed of a cat, and he might whip a nunchaku from his voluminous robes or even a staff or a sword which he could use equally well with either hand, which was very well indeed. In short, though he bragged, none treated his bragging lightly.

It was at this time that the great championships were being held in Japan to choose the champion of all champions of the martial arts. And, of course, this champion invited himself to compete.

"I can," he boasted before the tournament started, "do techniques for five days and nights without slowing down and without repeating myself once. Who else can say the same?" Of course, none could.

When it was time for the tournament, he had already crowned himself grand champion with his words. He moved into the arena with supreme confidence and cast pitying glances at his first opponent who had assumed a judo stance. Unleashing a spectacular flurry of kicks from Tae Kwon Do, he felled his opponent in an instant, then rendered him unconscious with a simple karate blow.

Then, looking around, the champion noticed an old man sitting close to the front of the audience who smiled at him and nodded politely. Instantly the champion took umbrage. It was as if the old man had approved of his performance in a condescending way. Angry that this might be so, he turned his back to the crowd and stalked away.

On the next day, the champion faced a sai master. This time he used a quick judo throw and a complicated series of kung fu moves to end the match.

As before, the white-haired old gentleman sat in the audience. Only this time he shook his head in disapproval. As though the head shake was a gentle reprimand.

Such behavior irked the champion. He has done each move very well and had thoroughly dazzled his opponent, not to mention beating him with masterful techniques. He scowled at the old man before leaving the arena.

The day following was similar. The champion demonstrated hapkido and San Soo and three other thrilling forms in downing his opponent without taking a single blow. And still the old man disapproved.

It was on the fifth day, though, the final day in which the champion would meet the other finalist to decide the championship, that he made a vow to himself. If the old man was again present and indicated disapproval, the champion would thrash him severely.

When he walked into the arena, the champion's eyes immediately sought out the old man's accustomed place. But he wasn't there. Nor was he seated anywhere in the crowd surrounding the arena. "So be it," the champion thought to himself. But he was secretly disappointed that he couldn't show the old man this final moment of glory proving he was best.

But divining the future, the champion discovered, was best left to the gods. For when he stepped onto the mat he was facing the old one, somehow different in his worn gi. "What is this?" the champion exclaimed. "I cannot fight an old man for the title of champion of Japan. Everyone will laugh at me for winning this way."

But the referee interceded. "No," he said. "This man has defeated all the others and he has the right to challenge you. See it his way," the referee implored, and then added, "please!"

"All right," the champion growled. And then he looked at the old man. "Listen, old man," he snarled, "do you know kung fu?"

"Kung Fu?" The old man looked puzzled, but he shook his head.

"Hapkido. Tang Soo Do, Tai Chi, Aikido? Perhaps Arnis? Judo? Kyudo? How about Pentjak-Silat?"

"No!" the old man shook his head each time and didn't understand, or seem to understand, what the champion was driving at.

"How many bricks can you break then?"

The old man's eyes widened. "None, I think."

"What do you mean you think?"

"Why would I want to break bricks?" the old man asked.

"You do know karate?" The champion's disgust showed through his words.

"Ah, yes. I do know some. Not all, but some!"

"Well, that is something anyway," the champion muttered and signified he was finally ready to fight.

Relieved, the referee placed them and signaled the start of the match.

To make it look better, the champion started out with a simple karate stance so as not to confuse the old man. And then he advanced using the seven simple techniques of Shotokan. Unfortunately, he was not able to hit the old man who slipped away like an eel in dirty water. The champion was starting to sweat, because pursuing the old man on a hot day like this was hard work. He tried judo then. And even ch'in yuhsi. But again the old man slipped away. He tried the five basic forms of hsing-i and then the twelve styles. But none caught the old man.

While debating what to do next, the old man settled in front of the champion in a familiar karate stance, one the champion has learned many years before but had left behind because it was too simple.

Seeing this error on the old man's part, the champion knew the match was over for he could now use a technique much superior to the old man's move.

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It was many hours later when the champion awakened. The crowd was gone and the arena dark. But the referee was there and appeared very relieved that the champion had at last recovered.

"What happened?" the champion asked.

"The old man won the match and has left to celebrate."

"But...but, how can this be? I asked him what he knew, and he told me he knew very little. Did he lie?"

"No," the referee said, very sad at the champion's ignorance. You just asked the wrong questions."

"How can that be?" the champion cried.

The referee shook his head in pity. "You didn't ask him how well he knew what he knew!"