

ACADEMY NEWS

Australian Jiu-jitsu, Judo & Chinese Boxing Federation of Instructors

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Your First Seminar

There's a moment in every martial artist's journey that everyone recognises, the day they are awarded their black belt. It's visible, celebrated, and rightly honoured. Families attend, teammates gather, and the room rises in applause for what has been years of commitment, discipline, and perseverance.

But there is another moment that passes far more quietly.

The first seminar a new black belt plans and delivers.

It doesn't always carry the same audience or ceremony, yet in many ways it demands something deeper. It is no longer about demonstrating what you have been taught, it is about revealing how you think. For the first time, a new black belt stands in front of their peers and opens up the ideas, questions, and explorations that have been forming beneath the surface, often for years.

That is what makes it both exciting and nerve-racking.

I still remember my first seminar nearly 30 years ago as clearly as if it were yesterday. The pressure was different. Not physical, but intellectual and personal. You are no longer just performing technique, you are sharing perspective.

And that's what makes these moments so special for the rest of us.

We get a glimpse into the direction each new black belt is heading, the concepts that have captured their attention, and the way they are beginning to shape their own understanding of the art. No two are the same, and that is exactly the point.

In recent years we've seen some outstanding examples. Harry's "F Words", Deen's "The Void", Gab's "Not So Nice Groundwork", Nakira's "The Harmony of Yin and Yang", and Hillary's upcoming "Breaking Patterns". These are not simple topics. In many ways, they are ideas that would challenge even our most senior black belts.

In these first seminars, we are not just seeing new black belts, we are seeing the emergence of future teachers, thinkers, and contributors to the art.

These moments may not always come with a standing ovation, but they should never go unnoticed.

Well done to all of them.

I'm already looking forward to their second seminars.

— Shihan Len



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A Martial Arts Cultural Exchange to Okinawa

It was mid-2025 when Colin Wee, a friend and fellow martial artist, reached out to me with an unexpected invitation. We had originally met through the AMAHOF, where Colin currently serves as secretary, and had kept in touch over the years. He asked whether I would be interested in joining a cultural exchange trip to Okinawa.

I'll admit, I wasn't entirely sure what to expect.

Those who have read my previous articles may recall that I often visit Colin whenever I find myself in Perth. Beyond being a highly respected practitioner, he is also the author of *Breaking Through: The Secrets of Bassai Dai Kata*. At the time of his message, Colin was deep into his second book, and I had the privilege of reading an advanced manuscript. Without giving too much away, the story is set in Okinawa during the period of Japan's annexation and explores the origins of Karate through the lives and experiences of its early pioneers.

It was a compelling read, one that sparked a deeper curiosity in me about tōde and the cultural forces that shaped the conditions for Karate's emergence. So when Colin explained that he wanted to visit Okinawa to better understand its history, culture, and environment for his writing, it felt like a rare opportunity. One of those moments where the answer is obvious, even before you've fully thought it through.

By October, the trip had quickly become a reality. I met Colin and the rest of the group in Naha. The group itself was a diverse collection of experienced martial artists, each bringing their own background and perspective. Among them were Master Colin Wee (Taekwon-Do, Karate, Former National Coach in Archery and Author, Perth), Shihan Peter James (Kenjutsu, Iaido, Weapons Systems, Kenpo Karate and various empty hand systems, Perth), Vivica Lamarche (Renbudo Karate Do, Kobudo and Tai Chi, Texas), Shihan Elaine Ogden (ITF and WTD Taekwon-Do, Krav Maga, MMA, Sunmudo, Taekyun, Hoppaesul, Haidong Gumdo, Arnis, Wing Chun, Hsing I and Kempo Jutsu, Sydney), and Kyoshi Doug Spear (Karate, Muay Thai, Jiu-Jitsu, Kenjutsu, Setei Iaito and Kobudo, Perth).

Although the trip was only eight days, it was packed with training, cultural exploration, and, of course, exceptional food. Colin, being both a passionate foodie and an excellent chef, made it his mission to ensure we experienced Okinawa properly. We sampled everything from yakitori and fresh sushi to more local specialties such as Sata Andagi (Okinawan doughnuts), Goya bitter melon juice (an acquired taste, to say the least), and the now-iconic inclusion of spam, introduced during the period of U.S. military presence and since absorbed into local cuisine.

Our first full day in Okinawa coincided with World Karate Day, something I'm slightly embarrassed to admit I hadn't even realised existed. Each year, practitioners from around the world gather in Okinawa, the birthplace of Karate, to mark the occasion.

The main street of Naha, Kokusai Dori, was closed off and transformed into a sea of white gis. Thousands of karateka, men and women, young students and senior masters alike, lined the length of the street. There was a quiet sense of unity before the demonstrations began, and then suddenly the entire space came alive with synchronised kata.

It was surreal. I had never seen anything like it, not just the scale. To witness it firsthand was something special. Moments like that remind you that what we practice is part of something much larger than our own individual journey.

One of the more reflective moments of the trip came when we visited the graves of the teachers of Gichin Funakoshi. Standing in front of the graves of Matsumura Sokon and Itosu Anko, you are reminded that what we practice today is built upon the lives, efforts, and sacrifices of those who came before us.

There was a particular inscription that stayed with me... *a warrior of both wisdom and bravery*. Simple words, but they capture something essential. Not just technical ability, but character. It's a theme that seemed to echo throughout the entire trip.

We also spent time at the Okinawa Karate Kaikan, a place that serves as both a museum and a living record of Karate's history. Walking through its halls, you are surrounded by the lineage of the art, detailed timelines, historical documents, old weapons, uniforms, and articles spanning generations.



One section in particular stood out, a documented exchange of opinions on the naming of Karate.

Historically, what we now call “karate” was not always referred to as such. Earlier terms like tōde or simply te were commonly used, reflecting its roots and influences. As the art evolved, so too did the discussion around its identity. There were differing views, some emphasising tradition, others recognising the importance of aligning with broader Japanese budo systems.

What became clear through these writings was that the shift toward “karate-dō” was not just a change in terminology, but a deliberate move to frame the art as a path of personal and spiritual development, not simply a method of fighting.

It’s a reminder that even the name carries intention, and that the art itself has always been shaped by thoughtful dialogue and reflection.

While much of our time was spent in and around Naha, we did venture further afield. On one day, we hired a car and travelled north with the intention of visiting the famous Blue Caves. After a three-hour drive, we arrived only to find they had been closed due to rough seas. Disappointing, yes, but not without its own rewards.

At one point, we stopped along a cliffside where the wind was so strong it was difficult to stand upright. Naturally, this became an opportunity for Colin to demonstrate a high kick for a photo, balancing against the elements with impressive control. It was one of those moments that perfectly captures the spirit of the trip, part discipline, part humour, and part simply making the most of where you are.



With plans changed, we set off again and eventually found Tataka Falls after another decent drive and a long walk in. The water was freezing, but after the journey, it didn’t matter. Sometimes the detours are the experience.

We explored many of Okinawa’s cultural landmarks. We visited the site of the former Shuri Castle, once the palace of the Ryukyu Kingdom and now a UNESCO listed site, along with temples, local markets, and the seafood markets, where the quality and affordability of the food is something to behold.

One of the more memorable moments came when our guide learned that we were all martial artists. Without hesitation, he led us off the main path, down a quiet back street, and into a small, unassuming park, called Amagoidake Observatory.

It wasn’t the kind of place you would notice on your own.

Yet this modest location celebrates the pioneers that contributed to the development of karate and kobujutsu. Standing there, in a place so simple on the surface, it reinforced something that is easy to overlook, that the origins of what we practise were not grand or formal, but developed quietly, shaped by necessity, environment, and the people who dedicated themselves to it.



While the entire trip was exceptional, the two most memorable experiences came in the closing days, moments that felt less planned and more like they found us.

The first came through a chance invitation to a Kobudo dojo. One of Colin’s friends in the United States had seen his posts and suggested he reach out to Shihan Frank Williams, who was training in Okinawa. Without hesitation, Shihan Frank extended an invitation for our group to attend training the following evening.

So we went.

We jumped into a cab, sat in traffic for close to an hour, and arrived just as the class was beginning. The dojo, called Okinawakan, was located north of Naha, away from the busier parts of the city. Upon arrival, we were introduced to Shihan Frank, who had only recently been awarded his 10th Dan by the head of the school we were visiting.

Stepping inside the dojo felt like entering another world. The walls were lined with history, photographs, calligraphy, and artefacts that spoke quietly but powerfully of lineage and tradition. Training was already underway, with students practising kobujutsu using kama, a traditional Okinawan weapon resembling a handheld sickle. These were not training replicas, but live blades, handled with a level of control and respect that made it clear we were observing something very real.

As we stood watching, a small sliding door in the corner of the dojo opened. An elderly gentleman stepped slowly into the room. Instantly, everything stopped. Every student turned. Then came the call, “Sensei ni rei.” The room bowed as one.

We soon learned that this gentleman was the head of the dojo, a 97-year-old master, Kiichi Nakamoto Sensei and the only living student of Chojun Miyagi, founder of Goju Ryu Karate. Despite his age, there was a presence about him that was unmistakable. He looked toward us, understandably curious about these unfamiliar faces in his dojo.

At that moment, Shihan Frank introduced us as visiting martial artists. The old master smiled.

As I bowed, he returned the gesture, then extended his fist toward me. For a brief moment, I wasn't sure what was being offered, until it became clear, a fist bump. I responded in kind, and he smiled again. We later learned that since the COVID period, this had become his preferred form of greeting.

A seating area was quickly arranged so he could observe the class. Shortly after, his grandson Tanaka Sensei, the current principal instructor of the dojo, invited us to join in training. He began guiding us through a basic bo kata.

We worked through the movements, while the senior master watched quietly from his seat. It was one of those rare moments, where you are acutely aware of where you are, who you are with, and the significance of it all.

At the conclusion of training, we were deeply honoured when the instructors offered to take a photo with us.

After changing and spending some time talking before leaving, we discovered another unexpected connection. Kiichi Nakamoto Sensei and Tanaka Sensei frequently travel to Australia and teach at Pollet Martial Arts Centre, a school that is part of the Australian Shihan Kai, and one we ourselves visited annually with Kancho to conduct seminars.

Halfway across the world, and once again, we found ourselves connected through the same martial arts family.

The second highlight was something Colin had thoughtfully organised, a simple idea, yet one that proved to be a highlight of an already awesome trip.

We gathered in a quiet, open park in Naha called Midorigaoka Park for a two-hour session of shared learning. Each of us would take a turn to lead a short, twenty-minute segment, offering something from our own discipline and perspective.

On the surface, it was informal. No structure beyond respect, no expectation beyond contribution. But in practice, it was more.

After spending eight days together, training, travelling, and sharing experiences, there was already a strong sense of connection within the group. This session gave that connection a

different expression. It allowed each of us to step forward, not just as participants, but as contributors to one another's learning.

What stood out most was the openness of the exchange. There was no ego, no need to prove anything, just a genuine willingness to share knowledge, and an equally genuine appreciation in receiving it. Each session offered a glimpse into a different way of thinking, a different approach shaped by years of individual study and experience.

It was a reminder that while our styles may differ, the underlying principles, timing, control, intent, awareness, remain universal.

If there was any fault to be found, it was only that time moved too quickly. Two hours wasn't enough.

Looking back, what stands out most from the trip the connection, respect, and a shared commitment to the martial path.

In many ways, this "cultural exchange" reinforced something we often speak about within the Federation. That what we practice is bigger than any one style, any one school, or any one individual. It is carried forward through people, through relationships, and through a willingness to both learn and contribute.

There is a responsibility that comes with that.

To represent what we do properly. To approach others with respect. To remain open to learning, regardless of experience or rank. And to continue developing not just technical ability, but character.

From the history preserved in Okinawa, to the practitioners who continue to live it today, there is a clear thread, one that connects past to present, and reminds us that we are part of that continuation.

Not at the centre of it, but within it.

And perhaps that is the greatest takeaway.

That wherever you go, and whoever you meet along the way, the path is shared.

—Shihan Leonard Montagnana, Rokudan



President's Report

From the Annual General Meeting,
28 March 2026

2025 has been a strong and productive year for our Federation — one filled with growth, connection, and continued dedication to the principles that unite us as martial artists. It has been inspiring to witness the energy across our academies, the progress of our students, and the unwavering commitment of our instructors.

Membership and Community Growth

The year saw another substantial increase in membership across our Federation. For the 2025 financial year, membership grew by 24.4% to a total of 255 registered members — a significant rise from the previous year. Combined with the 30% increase recorded in 2024, it's fair to say that membership growth has been remarkable.

This growth in 2025 was largely driven by our Mighty Mite (+28.12%) and Junior (+48.61%) members, with Senior membership remaining steady (+2.63%). Further details can be found in the 2025 Registrar's Report.

Our ongoing marketing efforts, along with the support of our academies, have contributed to this success. These initiatives strengthen our ability to support academies when needed, subsidise members attending events such as AMAHOF, host guest masters at the Honbu, and plan for continued growth and development.

You can play your part by supporting our marketing initiatives and completing the relevant documentation.

This growth also reflects the welcoming culture our instructors foster and the strong reputation our clubs have built within their local communities. Naturally, growth brings new challenges — some of which will be discussed later in this report.

Strong Financial Position

Financially, our Federation remains in excellent shape. I'd like to acknowledge that our sound management and careful planning have allowed us to maintain stability while supporting new initiatives and events throughout the year.

Key Highlights of 2025

A major milestone was the successful running of our first Federation seminar, featuring guest Masters from Canberra: Shihan John Bear, Shihan Ed Scharrer, and Shihan David Rowley. Each brought fresh insights and techniques that enriched our practice. The positive feedback from participants confirmed the value of broadening our learning circle.

During the event, Kyoshi Chris Bailey was presented with his Hachidan (8th Dan) grade by Shihan Bear, Shihan Scharrer,

and Shihan Rowley — an achievement richly earned and well deserved.

We also strengthened our external relationships, continuing to build bridges with other martial arts organisations and community groups. These connections help us remain engaged beyond our own walls, promoting mutual respect and collaboration across disciplines.

Another highlight was the establishment of a new club by Renshi Owen, with assistance from Sempai Gab. This reflects both the ongoing expansion of our Federation's reach and the spirit of mentorship that continues to define us.

The Road Ahead — 2026 and Beyond

This new year marks a very special milestone: the 45th anniversary of our Federation. Planning is already underway for mid-year celebrations to mark this important occasion. It's a moment to honour our heritage, celebrate our achievements, and look forward to the future we're shaping together.

With ongoing membership growth, we also recognise the need to streamline our administrative processes. The Executive Committee and the Board of Master Instructors are committed to improving efficiency and easing workloads across the organisation — especially for those who already dedicate so much time to teaching and training. This will be a collective effort, and we'll be calling on members to lend their skills and ideas as we refine our operations.

In 2026, our focus will be on continuing to expand the Federation's profile — reinforcing our reputation within the martial arts community and strengthening our presence in the local communities where our clubs thrive. We will achieve this through the integrity of our training, the inclusiveness of our culture, and the high standards we uphold.

Closing

Thank you to everyone — instructors, committee members, students, and families — who contributed to another successful year. Your enthusiasm, collaboration, and dedication are what keep our Federation strong and growing.

I look forward to celebrating our 45th year with all of you and continuing our shared journey in the art that connects us.

- Shihan Jay Icasiano, 6th dan
Federation President,
Member of the Board of Master Instructors



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