

# 1st Technical Advisor of FEW

## K. Sakagami sensei

By now, Sakagami sensei is the 1st Technical Advisor of Federation European Wadokai. Of course, this did not happen overnight. Sakagami sensei has been resident in Europe since the sixties and has trained, promoted and lived Wado Karate until today and counting.

I will not bore you too much with the simple biography, but will try to explain who Sakagami sensei is and what significant influence he has had for the development of Wado Karate in Europe. At the same time, I will share several stories, show you some photos and videos to give you an idea of one of the most important figures in European Wado Karate history.



## Last of the Titans

The generations before us left their mark in the Wado Community, some with more impact than others. Of course, Suzuki sensei had a great influence in Europe, but he also managed to do so with the help from various other Japanese instructors, Sakagami sensei being one of them. Suzuki sensei was actually Sakagami sensei's original instructor at Aichi University back in Japan. In the past, the Japanese instructors used to train together and spread the Wado Karate together.

Unfortunately as the years have passed the European Wado Community has lost many of those Early Days Pioneers. Sakagami sensei is part of the Last of the Titans. He is one of the last people alive today with influence from Ohtsuka sensei. This makes Sakagami sensei one of the treasures of Wado Karate in Europe today. Nevertheless, he had to start somewhere..



## A little boys dream

When Sakagami sensei was a kid he used to play hide and seek like any other kid. But, being Japanese he also used to play Samurai games and Sumo wrestling. It basically came down to pretending to be a Samurai or Sumo after seeing Chanbara Samurai Films. Those were his favourites. Around ten years of age Sensei became a little bit more serious and had the dream of being a professional Baseball player as he was hooked on Baseball. In secondary school sensei did several sports as his mind was always about sports. His older brother used to tell him to do his homework seriously but actually he would just pretend, his mind was always on sports, not academic studies. Sensei told me that his coach said that he was not good enough to ever become Pro so he dropped the idea.

In 1957, before television, he listened to a boxing match on the radio which was won by Sandy Saddler, an American Champion who came to Japan to fight Kaneko. The commentator to the Boxing match remarked on how much money Saddler would earn from the fight. Sensei decided, he wanted to become a Boxer! This dream also ended as the most nearby boxing gym was 25 and 50 miles away, which was too far away at the time.

Finally he joined the Toyahashi Shibu City Dojo (Wadokai Branch) run by Suzuki sensei in 1960, just before he finished High School.

## University days

Suzuki sensei taught at several places at the time, but it happened to be the case that he loved Aichi University. This actually meant that the trainings were much harder. Suzuki sensei's attitude towards the Aichi Students was different to most of the other clubs he taught at, for instance the Toyohashi City Dojo was open to public so his teaching was not so severe or hard, but when it came to University training, it was a totally different attitude. It was so physically hard and the mental training was the constant pressure from the Sempai. Apparently Mr Eigima was a very good free fighter and was asked by Suzuki sensei to come to Europe. Mr. Eigima respectfully declined so Sakagami sensei got recommended by Mr. Sugiura to take the teaching post in Germany.

## Ohtsuka sensei

During Sakagami sensei's University days the actual technical transmission from Ohtsuka to Sakagami sensei was quite limited. The usual focus and way of training was specific to the University and according to Sakagami sensei a lot of the technical stuff that Ohtsuka sensei explained went over their heads. As University training ended and a more serious approach as a teacher and a different way of technical training was evolving, stuff like Ten I, Ten Tai and Ten Gi, Ko bo Ittai and other principles came to be more clear under guidance of Ohtsuka sensei.

## Becoming independent

Sakagami sensei had the luck that he could simply follow Mr. Suzuki who was the one being under pressure being the highest authority in Wado at the time in the UK and of course Europe. Sensei did not have to think too much about technique, he could simply follow Mr.



Suzuki's way. In the UK there was an organisation called U.K.K.W. which fragmented in the 80s. For this reason Sakagami sensei started the AIWAKAI organisation in 1990. He could not rely on Mr Suzuki anymore, he had to find out and develop by himself. From this point on Sakagami sensei was very critical thinking about training and technical development. As his age progressed he came to realise that some ways of training are simply not effective as you get older, because your joints stiffen and your muscles start to weaken. Actually what you do just weakens and weakens, but sensei believed this is not the real budo way. As you age you should still be able to keep your effectiveness. This means that just relying on physical action is not real budo, that is more like a gymnastic way of execution. Sakagami sensei's independence and aging pushed him to search deeper and deeper into the skill of Wado Karate to remain effective without being affected by age.

## Last of the Titans

I had the blessing myself to train under the late Ishikawa sensei, who in spite of his age let us train like young strong boys. He knew how to show you how to train in karate depending on your age or ability and at the same time he transferred the curriculum to me. I was fortunate enough to experience Ishikawa sensei's seminars and Dojo training, which contained some fundamental differences in approach. I see the same thing in Sakagami sensei's teaching. On one hand he encourages you to train and focus on what is important for you right now, but also lets you think about technical skill and how to deal with this and training in particular in the future. Sakagami sensei has seen it all and is unfortunately among the Last of the Titans having had the tough University Karate trainings in Japan as well as the technical development under Ohtsuka sensei and currently with Yanagawa sensei, who has taken Ohtsuka sensei's concepts to a different level according to Sakagami sensei.

Sakagami sensei keeps teaching, training and researching, looking for development and depth.

