

A Closing Letter from Sensei Miller-Feinstein, 2024 Koei-Kan Tournament Director

I would like to say thank you to all who made this year's 50th Anniversary Taikai Tournament special for me as Director, and for helping us to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of Koei-Kan existing as a family of karate worldwide.

The weekend began with Sensei Ciser arranging a wonderful banquet where we celebrated many prestigious awards. This banquet was a special opportunity for us all because it reunited many of us in the Koei-Kan family worldwide and brought us friends from outside of our family as well. I was so thankful Sensei Ciser took this opportunity to arrange this and allowed me to focus solely on the tournament.

This year was so special not only because it was an international tournament, but because we also saw many new competitors and instructors from around the world. In addition, we were joined by neighboring schools across New Jersey who came, enjoyed the experience, and promise to be back next year in 2025.

It has given me much personal joy through the years to bring this event to the level Sensei Kaloudis and Sensei Frost always dreamed it could be. This year even Kancho Sensei, our founder in Japan, gave us a special tribute for hitting the milestone goal of fifty years. Make sure you check out his video message on the KoeiKanTaikai.com site.

There are so many who are deserving of special, personal thanks for their contributions, not just this year, but for the many years they have supported me as Director of this event.

Sensei Sabat treated us with another of his spectacular "final" demonstrations. Or at least he said it was his final - those who know him, know he never stops! Such an impressive demonstration of mind over body, as he demonstrated focus and discipline by having 2x4s and cinder blocks broken over his body while supporting the weight of his student on a bed of nails while laying on swords. I encourage you to go to the KoeiKanTaikai.com page and see these, and many other tournament photos available for purchase, taken by photographer Christina Vaval. Maybe you will find yourself amongst the many images. I am looking forward to sharing the videography of Sensei Rhodes when it is completed and posted as well.

Special thank you to Sensei Scordilis, who was instrumental in obtaining most of our 30+ sponsors. The funding from these generous supporters offset some of the costs associated with housing and transporting our foreign visitors and special guests. You can find all the sponsors at the bottom of the KoeiKanTaikai.com page. Please use their services when possible! Thank you to Advanced Group, spearheaded by Wayne/Costa Rica Black belt Lynn Snyder, for creating the KoeiKanTaikai.com website. Lynn helped to bring the Taikai into this century by providing easy-access information, online registration and banquet details. Don't forget, the website is now your place to order your professional photos, which can be viewed and purchased with ease!

Not all airport pick-ups and drop-offs were funded. There were more than a few contributions made by generous people who donated hours of their personal time to make our guests feel welcome. These include Sensei Ciser, Martinez, Stringer, Abajian, Lopez, and Scordilis.

I personally want to thank all the dojo who sent participants. Of course there are all the Koei-Kan Dojo: Cortland, NY; Branchville, Clifton, Lafayette, and Wayne, NJ; West End, PA; Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo and Montecito, CA; Shelby Twp and Leonard, MI; and Panama City, FL. We also welcomed Koei-Kan competitors from Greece, Venezuela, and Spain.

Outside of the Koei-Kan family, I thank East West Karate and Fitness, Bayonne Martial Arts, ISR Honbu Dojo and Martial Arts Center for Excellence. Thank you all for bringing this 50th Anniversary event to a higher, more competitive level!

There were many, many people who arrived on the day of the tournament to assist in running various areas, making the event run as smooth as possible. Forgive me if I have unintentionally overlooked someone.

Thank you to the Yudansha who were present competing, officiating, and assisting throughout the day. *(Based on the Yudansha sign-in sheets. Apologies for forgetting anyone).*

Shodan

Anthony Leal, Santa Barbara, CA

Alan Camez, Montecito, CA

Jose Valencia, W. End, PA

Colleen Stringer, Clifton, NJ

Yliyah Lok, Clifton, NJ

Erica Mason-Capalla, Lafayette, NJ

Jack Lesch, Branchville, NJ

Robb Bolton, CA

William Whitteaker, Lafayette, NJ

Kevin Hyland, W. Milford, NJ

Jeremiah Rundell, Cortland, NY

Andrea Lok, Clifton, NJ

Donny Casse, Wayne, NJ

Peter Lachenauer, Branchville, NJ

Christos Fakitsas, Greece

Charalampos Vamvakidis, Greece

Nidan

Michael Adams, W. End, PA

Barry Jones, CA

Vladimir Vaval, Clifton, NJ

William Meyers, Monticito, CA

Yale Levine, Wayne, NJ

Paul Landmesser, Clifton, NJ

Eric Snyder, Wayne, NJ / Costa Rica

Christopher Doolittle, CA

Michael Starr, NJ

Elizabeth Kadkoy, NJ

Blake Kingston, Santa Barbara, CA

Emily Slattery, East West Karate, Sparta, NJ

Pam Bellot, GA

Sandan

Joshua Coletti, Shelby Twp., MI
Bill Abajian, Wayne, NJ
Anthony Alfino, CA
Samuel Adam Webster, Santa Barbara, CA
Eileen Larney, Clifton / Wayne, NJ

Thomas Flowers, Santa Barbara, CA
Carl Grisanti, San Luis Obispo, CA
Stephen D'Addario, CA
Brian Lann, Cortland, NY
Ryan Beebe, East West Karate, Sparta, NJ

Yondan

Cindy Brown, MI
Phil DeStefano, Branchville, NJ
Mark Skawinski, NJ
Barry Jones, Santa Barbara, CA
Fred Speece, W. End, PA
Paul Kadzielawa, Clifton, NJ

Kim Landoline, W. Milford, NJ
Ayla Quaglio, Branchville, NJ
David Butz, CA
Lynn Snyder, Wayne, NJ / Costa Rica
Kyle Smith, Clifton, NJ

Godan

Marco Lopez, Clifton, NJ
Dan Fife, Shelby Twp., MI
Keith Chambers, AZ
Leo Stringer, Clifton, NJ
Jalal Sidani, FL
Ron Siegel, Wayne, NJ
Joe Malaro, East West Karate, Sparta, NJ
Ghandi Kadkoy, Lafayette, NJ

John David, W. End, PA
Ken Jackson, MI
Larry Rhodes, CA
Roy Ogden, CA
Quinn D'Amico, MI
Nina Wrubel, Shelby, MI
Jim Malaro, East West Karate, Sparta, NJ

Rokudan

Luis Martinez, Wayne, NJ
Tom Davies, CA
Tony Becera, Santa Barbara, CA

Al Mendillo, W. Milford, NJ
Steve Golis, Santa Barbara, CA

ShichiDan

Sue Scarborough, W. End, PA
Theo Apatzis, Athens, Greece
George Botetsianos, Greece
Jesus Moran, Italy
David Sonta, FL
Stefanie Chee Haiser, ISR Honbu, NJ

Brad Hildabrant, W. End, PA
Stephania Doulia, Greece
Olga De Armas, Venezuela
Mike Brown, MI
Carlos Hernandez, FL

Hachidan

Jack Sabat, CA

George Scordilis, Wayne, NJ

Tom Hudacko, Bayonne, NJ

Dave Spearing, MI

Alvero Rodriguez, Spain

Lee Feinstein, Wayne, NJ

Pat Ciser, Clifton, NJ

Jeff Mason, Shelby Twp., MI

Many people do not realize the time it takes just to set up the tournament. Gone are the days of coming in the morning of the tournament to do the set up. It now takes hours of co-ordination of pick-ups at two different locations before we even get to the University. I want to say thank you, Peter Hall, Lonnie Helfand and Tim Formanuk (soon to be a shodan), who have been with me for many years, for spearheading this co-ordination effort and giving direction to the many volunteers who show up at the venue. Also of great assistance were Sensei Larney and Lopez, Mr. Casse, the Vaval family (Valdimer, Christina and Kia), Mary Nibbling, Carl Gristanti, the California demo team, Maria Federico and her husband Chip, Kevin Hyland, Kevin Breen. All of you made the set up go fast so we were able to return home and relax just a short time before the banquet that night. (My apologies if I have forgotten anyone. It was a busy day!)

As people walked into the gymnasium on the day of the tournament, they were greeted with my husband Steven's voice, directing, announcing and letting all know they have entered the atmosphere of competition. He provided us with stimulating music to boost our energy. And he certainly did a great job keeping all events on track and running smoothly. I thank him from the bottom my heart for all the years he made sure he would be available the weekend of the event. But more so, for all the hours of frustration, along with the highs and lows, he had to endure with me through the years. He never left my side; he always gave me advice, support and his unconditional love.

What can be said for a woman who is a fierce kumite competitor and is also very capable of signing our national anthem acapella style. Thank you to Erica Mason-Capalla, Lafayette, NJ.

Thank you to those who ran our registration desk: Sensei Lynn & Eric Snyder, Sensei Ayla Quaglio, Cristina Hatzimahailis, Krista Kiebensberger, Andrew Lubchansky and Bradley Gizzi. It was a new learning curve, but it seemed to go smoothly.

Thank you, Sensei Sonta who assisted in the ring assignments and Yudansha sign in. I really enjoyed having you back again. And to your wife, Leah, who made me feel all the hard work was well worth it, with the praise she gave the event as a new comer.

My sincere gratitude to a few who missed watching most of the tournament because they were at the sales table; Sensei Gonzal, Mary & Christy Nibbling. If you missed some of the sales and

saw something you liked, please contact them at lkendewit.com as some items are still available.

To Art & Miriam Storbeck who have been with me for over 25 years of checking in the spectators, thank you for always being two people I could count on. They have officially retired from their position. I will miss them at future events, as they contributed years of dedication to the W. Milford, NJ dojo, Sensei Mendillo, Sensei Kaloudis and myself.

To those who ran the rings:

Peter Hall has been instrumental in assisting with so many areas of the Taikai - from helping us with picking up and delivering tournament equipment, to setting up the rings, and always showing up at our ring tables. He has been a competitor, a friend, and a long-time student of Koei-Kan. Assisting him at the table again this year was Mr. Adams of the West End, PA dojo. We hope Mr. Adams recovers quickly and is ready for action next year, competing once again.

Lonnie Helfand is another key person in assisting, organizing and providing quick-thinking fixes for many problems. He was so wonderful at making the children feel important, and understanding that the meaning of competition is not just about winning. He has been working at the ring tables for many years and this year had a new - yet not new to the tournaments - assistant, Sensei Pam Bellot. She stepped in and quickly regained her footing.

My students, Fatima and Adam Quabarti, are no strangers to working a ring, dojo breakdown and re-set. Since the time they were green belts, along with their family member Akram, they have competed and assisted with these tournaments for many years. I look forward to them completing their shodan exam soon.

Sensei Larney is both amazing and inspirational. Nothing has stopped her from always being at the Taikia, despite her personal challenges. Even though she was not ready to compete, she was there for us, running a ring table. I would also like to thank Mr. Whitteaker, who also wasn't able to be a competitor this year due to injuries. He stepped in at the ring table with Sensei Larney.

And of course, there is our main center ring, run by no other than Dojo Mom. If you know her, you know her true name and the affection she has for the Koei-Kan family. For many years now her son-in-law, Pat Quaglio, has assisted her. The two of them run it so tightly and efficiently that the judges and referees just follow their lead, knowing these two have got it down. Dojo Mom is another who is retiring from Taikai responsibilities. But I wouldn't be surprised if we see them both together at the center ring once again when the tournament resumes in 2025. Dojo Mom has been instrumental in so much of the Koei-Kan Taikai. You see her spirit captured in her tournament medals and pin designs (which I often drove her insane with.) She has had a very special place in my heart for all the years she gave unconditionally to make the tournament the success it has become today. I know Sensei Frost is smiling for all she continues to give.

Charting each division and staging each ring is not as easy as one might think. Even with pre-registration, there are always last-minute changes to be had. Sensei Scarborough (Sue and Duane), Sensei Cindy Brown, and Mrs. Opperee have done it for a good number of years, making it look easy. Assisting in charting over the years has been Sensei Larney and Lynn Snyder. But the person who mastered the staging of the rings and kept us all smiling will always be Sensei Bambrick, may he R.I.P.

Often an overlooked area of the tournament is security. Not an easy task, as everyone, no matter what their status, wants to be right at the ring side. Which honestly, I do not always understand. With stadium seating and being close enough to the floor to speak with competitors, I would think all would rather be in the stands with the best of views and seating. Mr. Valencia of PA and Mr. Starr of NJ did the best they could to keep people safely away from the rings so the competitors could compete, and the referees, judges and table support could do what they needed to keep it moving. Sensei Davies was also assisting in security, judging and he was a huge assist in researching hotels in NJ while he was in California. Thank you, gentlemen, for doing all that you did.

In concluding this 50th anniversary year of our Koei-Kan tournaments, I want to say it has been my pleasure and honor to bring this event to the level Sensei Kaloudis and Sensei Frost always wanted it to be. I have honored my "*gimu*" - my obligation - to them, and I will continue to mentor through guidance and experience. It is time to step aside and allow others this privilege. Time for me, and those who have been with me for so many years, to take a rest per say, and let others shine.

Life is always in constant change, and so has the Taikai been. Every year I strove to bring something new and different to the event. I hope it has been an exciting and enjoyable experience for you. This coming year, 2025, will be a new adventure for us all. As you have read, this is a group effort (an effort that has already started with securing a hotel and venue for next year!) For myself and those who have been assisting and working closely with me for many years now, we say it is time for you, the younger generation, to step in and experience the fulfilling satisfaction of this challenge. My journey began 45 years ago...yours is just beginning. Thank you all for your many years of support.

Sensei Miller-Feinstein

Tournament Director Emeritus