

WINNING AT KATA IS WINNING AT LIFE



Time and time again, I look around the dojo and watch students going about practicing kata, and I start to shake my head in frustration. Most students seem to think or feel that kata is just a way to warm up, some kind of brief work-out, an exercise, and that is all. Then, there are a few who practice hard at it. They wish to compete at the tournament level. They will eventually come up to me and ask, "What does it take to win at kata?"

The first thing I say is, "One must practice kata for one's self. You are not practicing for your Sensei or for society, but for yourself ... self improvement and self awareness". After confusing them with this statement, I go on with what I feel are important factors at winning tournaments, and that tournaments are just a game of psychological acknowledgments.

First of all, you can't even begin to think of winning if you aren't doing the physical, or mechanical, part of your form correctly. **KNOW YOUR FORM!** You must understand each movement, maintain proper tempo, and execute each technique correctly. Practice before your group is called. This will help your mental preparation, and can help to get rid of the butterflies. You'll usually be facing 3 - 5 judges who will determine the outcome. In some tournaments, there may be only a few black belts present,



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and while these individuals may or may not be the most competent, they are still judges, and should be respected.

Subconsciously, you are being judged the moment your name is called. Answer sharply when you are called, and in a loud, clear voice. Make the judges aware of your presence. You must remember that they are human, and can be distracted by other activities. Step smartly to the line and announce **YOURSELF, WHO YOU REPRESENT, and the NAME OF YOUR FORM** clearly. You need to kind of jar them out of their relaxed state, get them excited, and sitting on the edge of their seats. A passive appearance will hurt your kata, because you are in a fight, even if with imaginary opponents, you must perform as if you are fighting for your life. Eye contact is vital - look directly at your foe. The Judges must feel that you are "living" your kata. Do not rush the form, but go fast or slow when it is proper. When you are finished, remain standing until dismissed.

If you have been judged by officials of another discipline (style) who didn't understand some of the movements in your form, they will have judged you by your attitude, spirit (Kiai), and technique of your form. When performing kata, you need to teach or condition yourself to feel that this



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particular kata "belongs to me, and no one else can do it like me." We are each individuals, so the perceptions and interpretations of kata should deviate somewhat.

James Muro

