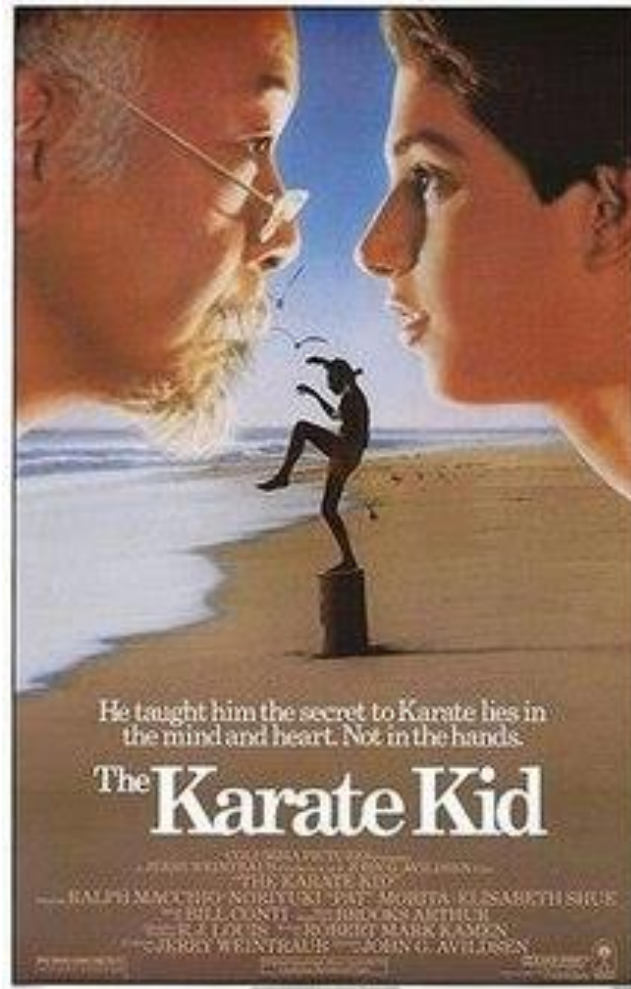


Testing for Shodan

By: Connor Lion

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The Karate in The *Karate Kid*

The *Karate Kid* (1984) was a block buster movie that used karate in the film industries like never before. The American martial arts film written by Robert Mark Kamen and directed by John Avildsen was based on the teachings of the karate style Goju-Ryu and Shito-Ryu. The movie itself stars Ralph Macchio as Daniel LaRusso, Pat Morita as Mr. Miyagi and William Zabka as Johnny Lawrence. In the film, we see Daniel LaRusso grow from a young 17-year-old boy from New jersey to a karate student and champion in California. A substantial portion of the plot shows many scenes of LaRusso's

training with Mr. Miyagi, an old janitor at his apartment. This gives a basis of the styles and training methods that were used to make the final product seen today. Now, most of this is already known about the movie, but what about the lesser-known information? What about the behind the scenes, the training of the actors, and the true accuracy of the film. All of these questions will be addressed in the coming pages, especially what was the karate in *The Karate Kid*?



(Mr. Miyagi and Daniel in his house)

Before understanding the karate that went into the *Karate Kid* movie, one must know what the movie is really about. The Story begins in 1984 when Daniel LaRusso and his mother move to Reseda, Los Angeles, California. And at their apartment was a kind and humble Okinawan handyman Mr. Miyagi. In California, Daniel befriends Ali Mills, which draws attention from one of her old other friends Johnny Lawrence. Johnny

Lawrence, who was one of the top students and blackbelts of the Cobra Kai dojo, began to bully LaRusso along with his Cobra Kai gang. Things went too far one day after a Halloween party when Johnny and his gang attacked and beat Daniel in an alley. But luckily for Daniel, a mysterious man (Mr. Miyagi) saved him by using multiple karate moves to single handedly defeat the gang with ease. After the fight, LaRusso asked the man if he would teach him how to fight like that. Mr. Miyagi unexpectedly declined his offer and instead agreed to resolve the problems with Daniel and his aggressors.



(Mr. Miyagi teaching Daniel to “Wax on, wax off” as he does chores)

Later in the story, Mr. Miyagi and Daniel go to the Cobra Kai dojo where they try to make peace with the dojo’s gang, but the Sensei refused. Miyagi then formed an agreement with the Sensei (Kreese) that if Daniel competes in the All-valley karate championship and wins then the bullying will cease. Kreese agreed and also agreed to

stop the bullying while the training began. Daniel then started his desired training with Mr. Miyagi, yet it was not in the way he had thought. For the first several days Daniel had to do Mr. Miyagi's chores, but he later learned that the moves in the chores were actually constant repetition to build muscle memory for his blocks. The most famous being "wax on wax off." He also got to learn the Crane kick move as he watched Miyagi perform it on the beach. During his training he learns much about Miyagi's past, karate itself, and the lessons it taught, such as gaining personal balance. He also came to understand that karate is not about the tournament and the cool fighting moves, it is about the training of mind and spirit as one. This would prove essential for Daniel as he entered the tournament.

Finally, Daniel entered the tournament and surprised many people as he showed great skill as he advanced to the semifinals. The winner would face Johnny in the finals, and right before the round, the Cobra Kai sensei told his other student, who was competing against LaRusso to illegally injure him. The student reluctantly agreed and executed a blow to Daniel's knee injuring him and in turn the student was disqualified. Daniel was told he couldn't continue, but Mr. Miyagi used a special pain suppression move, which allowed him to fight. And just before Johnny was declared champion, Daniel walked up to fight. The fight went on for a while with neither one showing great success or weakness, Daniel's blocks he had practiced so hard were finally paying off. Daniel finally trips Johnny with a scissor move followed by a blow to the head. The finals

were 2-1 with Daniel winning. At the timeout, Sensei Kreese told Johnny to sweep Daniel's already injured leg. Even this was almost too much for Johnny, but he followed through and got Daniel in a leg lock where he struck his leg. It was 2-2 and all tied up. With the championship and his reputation on the line, Daniel LaRusso went into crane stance. Then Johnny charged and Daniel jumped, kicked him in the face and won the tournament once and for all! Daniel received the trophy and went off to celebrate with the crowd, his family, and an immensely proud Mr. Miyagi.

(The final round of the championship of Johnny Vs. Daniel)



Before going any further into the understanding of the *Karate Kid*, you must know that the *Karate Kid* is in a way an autobiography of Robert Kamen, the creator of the story. Interestingly, in 1964 Kamen went to a fair in New York where he got beaten up by bullies. This experience led him to start martial arts. He tried studying violent and

vengeful martial arts forms, but they didn't suit him, so he began studying the soft-hard Goju-Ryu. The author said that he based Mr. Miyagi as a descendent of the master of Goju-Ryu, Chojun Miyagi. Kamen, in a way used the *Karate Kid* film to express how karate has helped him in his past as he tries to compare his life experiences with what Daniel LaRusso goes through in the story. He started out being bullied, he learned the art of karate, and he became successful due to it.



(Shito-Ryu and Congee)



(Goju-Ryu and Congee)

After explaining the reasoning behind the extraordinary film, another key aspect of the karate in the movie genre is the style of martial arts used in it. This is where things can get a bit tricky. Most sources believe that about half of the style of martial arts used in the *Karate Kid* movie is made up and should be called “movie-fu”. This was quite normal and was likely for cinematic purposes as the actors had to be “Flashy” for the movies. However, the movie does show signs of the prominent style of Goju-Ryu through it as well. The only reason Mr. Miyagi was named Mr. Miyagi was because the

character in the movie is a descendent of Chojun Miyagi the founder of Goju-Ryu itself. This is explained in small scene where Mr. Miyagi shows a picture of him next to Chojun Miyagi, as he explained Goju-Ryu karate to Daniel in his home. To explain Goju-Ryu briefly, it is a mix between Chinese and Japanese traditional martial arts that uses hard movements and soft movements as well. Another style that is seen in the movie is the style of Shito-Ryu. It can be seen through the movements of the students of the Cobra Kai dojo. Shito-Ryu uses long powerful stances and physical strength like Shorin-Ryu and Shotokan but also circular movements and soft movements like Goju-Ryu once again. So, to sum this up, the style of the *Karate Kid* movie is half cinematic flash, and half actual karate.



(Pat Johnson as the referee in the match between Daniel and Johnny)

So now you know about the film itself, now time to talk about who trained the actors in karate for the intense movie. Prior to the making of the film the main actors who played LaRusso, Miyagi, and Johnny had little to no karate or martial arts

experience, which would change in the coming months. The only two actors that had studied martial arts prior to the film were Ron Thomas (a Cobra Kai gang member) who studied Jujitsu and Martin Kove (the Cobra Kai sensei), who studied under Grandmaster Takayuki Kubota. To help with the lack of karate experience, the movie crew brought in Pat Johnson, a famous martial arts trainer and choreographer, to help train the actors and participate in the film as the referee of the Championship match as well. Pat picked up his martial arts skills when he was sent to Korea with the U.S. army, where he learned Tang Soo Do, which was a Korean form of karate, which focused on circular, spinning and straight movements and techniques. Johnson would later train with the famous martial artist Chuck Norris as well. Johnson had lots of karate to teach, and he didn't disappoint. Johnson and the actors worked hard for about 4 hours, 5 days a week, constantly training for the movie. Johnson most likely trained the actors according to his style of Korean karate in the process. The training was exceedingly difficult. For example, when Johnson was training Zabka and caught him being a little too sloppy, Johnson would respond by sweeping him off the ground and telling him to keep form. This was to show that he wasn't messing around and if the actors wanted to perform well, they would have to put in constant practice and repetition to get it right. Johnson would train Morita and Ralph separately, enlightening them on the secrets of karate as he trained them. Johnson's main job was to make the actors portray

themselves as masters of their karate styles to make the movie more credible, which he did.



(Pat Morita with his stunt double Fumio Demura)

Now, even though the actors went through a ton of intense karate training, there was only so much they could do, that is why they had stunt doubles. The actors need for doubles was made clear when Zabka and Ralph were training for their match scene and Zabka accidentally caught Ralph on the jaw with what should have been a fake kick. Now, even though Zabka and Ralph showed that stunt doubles were necessary, no stunt double would be more important than Mr. Miyagi's double, Demura. Pat Morita (Mr. Miyagi) didn't know much karate other than his training, so the director brought in Sensei Fumio Demura to perform several fight scenes such as the Halloween alley scene. Sensei Demura specialized in Japanese Shito-Ryu karate, which was overshadowed due to the fact that Miyagi had to fight according to the hard soft teachings of Gojo-Ryu, which will be further explained later. So, many of the well-known fighting scenes of Miyagi that you may remember, were actually performed by a real karate master and

not Miyagi. The producers use of stunt doubles like Sensei Demura, would greatly help to make the fight scenes more believable.



(Inside of the dojo during and after film)



(Outside of dojo during and after film)

On a different note, let's talk about the accuracy of the karate sets used in the movie. Interestingly enough, the Cobra Kai dojo set was filmed at 2 real karate dojos. During the movie, the Cobra Kai karate dojo makes two appearances. One being when Daniel first sees the outside view of the dojo and one when he enters the dojo with Mr. Miyagi to confront the Cobra Kai students. The dojo that was used for the outside view was at 5376 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles CA. The dojo that was used for the inside scene was called Lankershim Dojo and was found on 5223 Lankershim Boulevard in North Hollywood. Actually, that building miraculously looks almost exactly the same

today as it did back when the movie was filmed over 30 years ago. This use of real karate dojos for the film sets was a great move by the director because it made the movie more authentic and saved money for them in the process.



(Crane kick)

After going through many different aspects of the movie, now it is time to talk about the famous karate moves and methods of this iconic movie. The two most famous moves of the movie were one the Crane kick to win the tournament and two Mr. Miyagi's "Wax on Wax off." We will begin with the Crane kick. The Crane kick itself was shown as Daniel LaRusso's final blow to Johnny to win the tournament. The move itself was made up, but there is a similar one-legged kick that originated from Northern Shaolin Kung Fu. The creation of the kick for the film was attributed to Kamen and Darry Vidal. Darry Vidal was Miyagi's stunt double for the Beach Crane kick Scene. The move itself was a fantastic way to represent power and balance as one. And along with the Crane kick move, the movie also shows the use of blocks as it shows Mr. Miyagi's "Wax on, wax off" as Daniel does Mr. Miyagi's chores. When Miyagi assigned the jobs for

Daniel to do, he required him to perform them a certain way moving both his hands in circular motions. By doing this, Daniel was training his blocks whether he new it or not. And with all the thousands of times that he performed these circular motions, he only would become better at them. The more he did it the more it became muscle memory, and he didn't even have to think about it. This use of hidden moves in ordinary actions is call disguised repetition. This method of teaching helps to encourage training of the move itself, while not putting to much stress or hindrance on the user. And similar to the movie, this method can be used in the real world as well. All it is, is incorporating karate into your daily life to help you train your muscle memory. Overall, the *Karate Kid* film's use of the Crane kick, the "Wax on and wax off" blocks intertwined with the method of disguised repetition, greatly help to make the movie more interesting while also showing helpful training principles as well.



(Wax on Wax off)

Along with all the many positive karate aspects of the movie, there is one scene that is sometimes overlooked and that is the Crane kick to end the All-Valley Tournament. For most people when they see Johnny jump for Daniel and Daniel jumps

up and kicks him straight in the face, they get a kind of inspirational feeling. And with all the celebrating following the kick, many people miss one especially important detail, the kick to the face! Even though the crane kick was effective, most official referees would call the point for Johnny and Daniel would lose the tournament. Today, if someone executed a kick like that that wasn't controlled at all, the referee would give the other competitor a point or be disqualified altogether. Much like what happened with the 2021 karate Olympics, with Tareg Hamedi's illegal kick to Sajad Ganjzadeh's neck, that disqualified him and awarded his motionless opponent the gold. So, why wasn't Daniel disqualified? Well, there was a scene where his friend Ali briefs him on the rules of the tournament. She said that everything above your waist is a point, you can hit the head, sternum, kidneys, and ribs. During this time, the producers expect most people to not pay close attention to this part, and why should they anyway? This helps to save the famous Crane Kick and the franchise in general from a lot of problems. Yet even though the movie backs up how the kick was official, according to the Official World Karate Federation, the kick was illegal, and Daniel would have been disqualified in this day and age. And with that, you now understand a little about the other view of the Crane kick.



(crane kick to face)

The final topic, I will be talking about is the karate lessons from the *Karate Kid* film itself. Throughout the plot itself we can pull several life lessons on top of the physical karate. One is the best ways to learn something is through hard work and constant repetition. In the story, Mr. Miyagi has Daniel do many odd jobs all to teach him simple blocks. The trick was, Daniel did those simple moves thousands of times and when the time came for him to use them, he was ready. The movie also highlights the idea that “cheaters never win” as Cobra kai injures Daniel but he still rose to the challenge and beat them. The movie also shows the lesson that if you want something, then find a way to do it no matter what. Even though Daniel was injured badly, he pushed on and won. This shows us that if you want something badly, never give up even when times get really hard. Another deep lesson to truly grasp is explained by Miyagi as he states, “Daniel-San, karate here (taps head), karate here (taps his heart), karate not here (points to belt).” The quote sums up what karate truly is and what too many people are deceived to believe it is. You see the movie shows that karate isn’t about the color of your belt, or the fancy moves you know. Karate is about the passion in your heart to train and get better each and every day. To many people get caught up in what everyone else sees, when in reality that doesn’t matter, it is what is in your heart that really counts. Now that doesn’t mean anything will be easy, you will still have to put in the time and work, but karate is about your spirit and experience not so much your rank or external appearance. The final lesson is to find balance in life. This is shown literally as Miyagi

stands on a stump finding balance while doing the crane kick and when Daniel stands on a boat doing his techniques. This idea means that for one to understand karate, then they must be in balance with all things. And when one finds that balance, he finds, peace too. And with that you now understand the important lessons and aspects of true karate that are expressed in the *Karate Kid*.

In conclusion, the *Karate Kid* was an amazing way to bring karate into the film industry like never before. The movie's use of karate helped to inspire millions for generations to come. The film showed many aspects of karate, such as the styles: Goju-Ryu, Shito-Ryu and "movie-Fu." It also proved to be relatively accurate as they used real karate sets and brought in real karate masters to help train the actors and join in the film as well. While the famous crane kick may be partially made up and not technically legal, Miyagi's "Wax on, wax off" was not. Miyagi shows Daniel the importance of disguised repetition as he teaches him these blocks. But, above all, the *Karate Kid* teaches the true importance of karate through Miyagi. Miyagi explains that Karate is in the heart and not the outward appearance. He also explains that for one to understand karate he must find balance and peace in all he does. The karate in the *Karate Kid* is truly remarkable.

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New York City. He promises that when 40 Inspirational Speeches in 2 Minutes hits 10

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