

## ALWAYS START WITH THE HIPS

By Master Teruyuki Okazaki

People ask me why I always stress proper hip rotation with every karate technique. This is because good movement must always start with the hips. As a thirteen-year-old boy back in Japan I was fortunate enough to learn this lesson firsthand from my middle school kendo instructor.

When I was in school, everyone had to take kendo. I hated it. It was very boring! We had light bamboo swords called shinai and for years we just walked up and down the floor slicing the air. Of course since we were very excitable we usually ended up hitting each other until the teacher took the swords away. After a few years, our kendo teacher took us outside for a demonstration one day. He made us all sit down and then he took out a real sword! He stood in front of a bamboo tree and was very calm and relaxed as he raised the sword. Suddenly the blade whistled through the air and sliced the tree in half. It was amazing!

Needless to say, I was very excited when I saw this. That night, after my parents were asleep, I crept into my father's study and borrowed his sword so I could cut down a tree just like my teacher. I went into the woods, made stance and sliced through the air. The blade hit the trunk and bounced off with almost no damage to the tree! I thought maybe I did not swing hard enough, so this time I swung really hard and again, the sword just bounced off the tree, only this time much harder. I replaced the sword in my father's study. The next day when I walked up to my kendo teacher and asked, "Excuse me sir, but last night I borrowed my father's sword and tried to cut down a bamboo tree, but it didn't work. What did I do wrong?" The teacher raised an eyebrow very high and said, "You borrowed the sword, your father does not mind?" I said, "Oh no, it's okay, really." The teacher said, "Next time you must first relax, breathe deeply and then use the hips and the lower abdominals to make the cut." I was confused and said, "How do I use my hips?" He said, "Try it, you will see."

That night I got the sword and went back to the forest. I stood in front of the tree, relaxed and tried to imagine using my hips and abdominals. I closed my eyes, raised the sword and then swoosh! I opened my eyes and the tree was cut perfectly! It worked! Later, we learned from Master Nakayama's research that the hips and the lower abdominals (which we call seika tanden) are the basis for proper body movement. When the hips and seika tanden work together they enable the body to generate tremendous power. It's the same with golf, baseball, boxing, etc. It is crucial to have these core muscles connected and working in unison. When you have this connection, the rest of your body can become very relaxed and your movements are much quicker and stronger. Now you know why I place so much emphasis on using the hips in karate.