

## Shin Shin Ryu Testing

It is our good fortune that *Soke Yamada* visits Arizona so frequently. Several members of the *Yamakawa Dojo* were invited and were prepared to test for the next rank at this year's event. The following people have earned rank this year;

Goya Kenny (Chuden)  
 Patrick Haley (Sandan)  
 Loren Kierstead (Sandan)  
 David Wallis (Sandan)  
 Marilea Major (Nidan)

Testing was conducted in two sessions this year at the *Ryu Shin Kan Dojo* on Stone Avenue, Tucson. Participants had the pleasure of performing their *Kata* on training *Tatami* and there were no new knee injuries.

There is a significant announcement by *Soke Yamada* regarding the American *Renmei*. During *Kaicho McClafferty's* absence to serve in Afghanistan, *Sensei Keupp* is the acting American *Kaicho*. *Soke Yamada* instructed everyone to support Mr. Keupp's efforts while he fulfills those duties.

A special thank you goes to *Yosuke Nishimura* for his loyal service as Japanese translator for *Yamada Soke*. His efforts made *Soke's* directions and comments crystal clear.

The competition was spirited at all levels this year with increasing numbers of middle rank *Kenshi* and well prepared newcomers. The *Kata* events were particularly tight with many excellent performances. Special mention should be made for Patrick Haley who turned in a strong finish with a soft contact lens stuck under his eyelid. I am sure Mr. Haley can verify that there is nothing soft when it is poking you in the eye.

The *Tameshigiri* events were a contest of errors this year. More challenging patterns and targets provided ample room for discrimination. The take away lesson this time was that everyone needs to push themselves to master the more difficult cuts for next year.

**Loren Kierstead** placed in almost every event he entered even after opting into the next higher category. His all around performance earned him the *Yusho* (Tournament Champion) title and a Howard Clark *Wakizashi* blade.



*Ko* (Character for "Child"), *Moji-e* calligraphy picture, Yi Dynasty Korea, 19th Century.

## Events Schedule

<b>2008</b>	
<b>April 12</b>	<i>Sakura Matsuri</i> Washington DC
<b>May 5</b>	<i>Kodomo no Hi</i> Children's day, Japan
<b>May 16-19</b>	<i>Iai and Jodo Seminars</i> Guelph, Ontario (ZNRK)
<b>August 30, 31</b>	<i>West Coast Tai Kai</i> Costa Mesa, CA (USFBD)
<b>2009</b>	
<b>Feb / March</b>	<i>Mizu Hi Tai Kai</i> Tucson, AZ
<b>May</b>	<i>Florida Tai Kai</i> Palm Bay, FL (USFBD)



## Tucson Tai Kai

**Mizu Hi** members from across the country gathered in Tucson this year for the annual *Tai Kai*. Friday morning provided opportunities to take seminars from noted specialists in *Jodo*, *Wakizashi*, *Nakamura Ryu Kata* and *Tameshigiri* and *Tsuka Maki*. *Soke Yamada* personally directed simultaneous seminars of intermediate and advanced *Shin Shin Ryu Kata* at midday, followed by vigorous preparation by all hands for the next day's tournament. Everyone did their part with preparation, setup and clean up. For this we say;

*Domo otsukare-sama deshita*  
 "Thank you for your tireless efforts."



## Dojo Safety

The importance of safety during our practices and events has been underscored this year after an accident and a near miss. Our style presents several unique risks to the body because it was designed as a close-quarters system. We must all be attentive to the critical details that allow us to continue training without interruption. Also, it is important to be vigilant of potential hazards such as slippery floors, open doors, overhead obstacles and other surprises. It is consistent with duties of a bodyguard to anticipate these risks and take action to eliminate them.

It was also pointed out that each of us should be thoroughly familiar with our equipment **before** a competition. *Tai Kai* is not the place to try and learn a complex cutting pattern or put a new blade to the test. All of us have been urged to support our events, but ultimately, you are the best judge of your own preparedness.

Perhaps we should keep in mind the Hippocratic Oath of the medical community, **“Do no harm”**. First, do not put others at risk. Second, do not put yourself at risk. Some dangerous mistakes include finishing a *Tameshigiri* cut over your own front leg, improper grip during one handed techniques, very fast *Noto* with poor technique and many other possibilities. The primary thing to guard against is **distraction**. In industrial settings this is the number one cause of injury and death.

It is also important that you keep your own body prepared for action. Arrive early in order to stretch and limber up. Warm up your joints before doing vigorous cuts or extended “sitting”. According to some teachers, the most important muscles for *Iai* are in the upper leg and hip. If these are tight, they exert tremendous force on the joints of the knee and also by association the low back.

## Kodomo no Hi

The fifth day of the fifth month is a national holiday in Japan. Children’s day is a celebration of the future generation. It is an opportunity to focus our attention on our children by holding special events to remind them of their future place as the heirs to all that we create. Parents take the time to cook favorite foods and siblings are encouraged to act as good hosts. The entire nation of Japan flies special carp flags (*Koinobori*) for their children during the preceding weeks to mark this time of year. It is no coincidence that this holiday comes in spring, the season of renewal.

## Rank is Obligation

Certainly rank in our system is a sign of technical proficiency with a specific set of skills. However, it is also worth explaining that **rank in a Kobudo system is also a sign of obligation**.

At the appropriate time, we are invited to test for the next level of the system. This

only happens when your teachers agree that you are ready. Higher rank in the sense of traditional Japanese *Iai* means greater responsibility to the organization and higher standards of conduct and etiquette. It also translates into larger financial obligations in the support of group events and goals.

In old Japan it was not uncommon for people to decline promotion because the obligation was too onerous. Prestigious positions often required specific clothing and armor to be commissioned at great expense. Gift giving and sponsorship were also obligations for a person of status. For many, this was a hurdle they were not willing to mount.

In our modern context, this translates into copious amounts of time given for the benefit of others often at the expense of personal training time. Teaching beginners the rules of safety and good technique is our duty. Helping the group to grow in a sustainable way is our obligation. The ultimate goal of a traditional *Ryu* is the accurate transmission of the tradition to future generations.

*Soke Yamada* has been very enthusiastic in his efforts to bring *Iai* to the United States and beyond. He often disregards his personal health and comfort to travel from his home in Japan to gatherings of traditional *Kenshi*. It is extraordinary that we get to see him every year for seminars and testing sessions.



“I think someone stole the tatami mat out of our front room...”

contribute to a successful event. This seems to come from an awareness of the needs of the group and from having the foresight to be personally prepared.

Several people also made extraordinary contributions to the preparations and execution of a great weekend. Brand new cutting stands, clean and prepared event space, and a post test feast to name just a few.

The spirit of competition can sometimes create an atmosphere of “me first”, but we have been successful in our efforts to look out for each other and revel in the achievements of our fellow students. The “Big Meeting” (*Tai Kai*) is an opportunity to see the improvement of others and to gain new perspective on our own skills. It is also an important part of correct transmission of the *Shin Shin Ryu* swordsmanship.

Historical lineages of swordsmanship are not just a collection of techniques. The face to face transmission of attitudes and mental aspects of an art have accumulated over hundreds of real conflicts and can never be fully documented in print or on film. A periodic meeting is necessary to preserve the truth and eliminate individual quirks that always appear.

## Practice Times

The regular workouts continue at the same times and locations. Also, it remains our custom, to suspend practice if it falls on a major US holiday where most people will be out of town or attending family functions. Please check your e-mail for specific updates.

### Regular Practices

Monday	6:30 – 8:30	Stone Ave Dojo 3100 North Stone
Saturday	9:00 – 11:00	Yamakawa Dojo 554 East Magee Rd.

## Teamwork

This year, the spirit of teamwork and cooperation was clearly evident. We now have several members who have been through a few testing and *Tai Kai* cycles and know what needs to be done. It was a pleasure to see so many people step up and take care of the multitude of details that

