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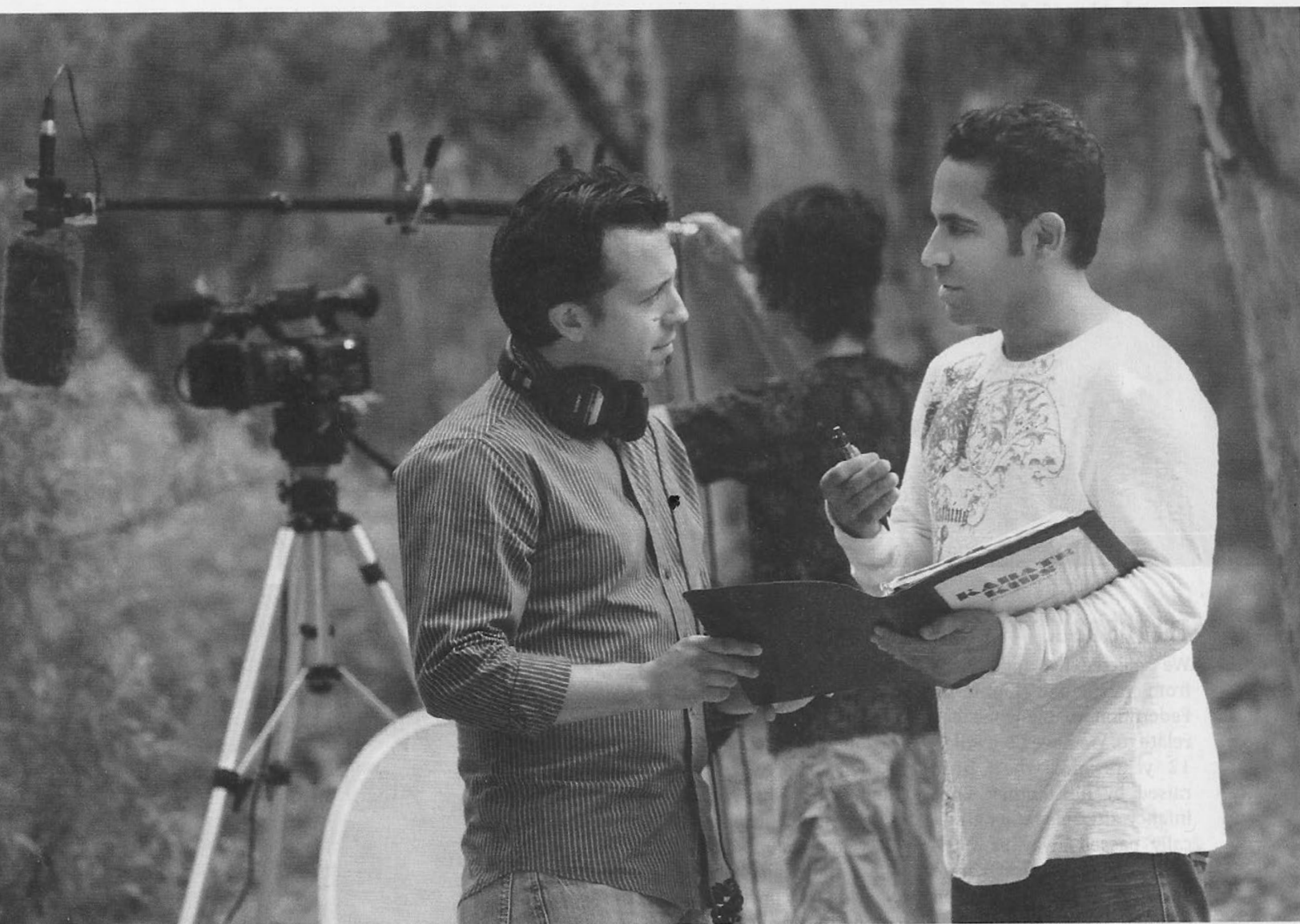


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EMPTY HAND

SPORT KARATE TAKES CENTER STAGE IN A NEW FILM ABOUT 5 STANDOUT SHOTOKAN PRACTITIONERS

by soren patrick xavier • photos courtesy of kevin derek



Sport karate—legitimate manifestation of the traditional Japanese martial art or watered-down impostor?

According to filmmaker Kevin Derek, a karate practitioner and competitor since childhood, the sporting side of the art has gotten a bad rap. For him, it's a modern expression of the classic values of honor and tradition. The act of testing one's skills against others, he says, forges one's character like fire forges a blade.

It's this world of strength and perseverance he hopes to showcase in *Empty Hand: The Real Karate Kids*, a documentary that follows five young *shotokan* stylists as they fight their way through

the ranks at the 2009 AAU Karate National Championships.

For Ashley West, Giavanna Caputo, Ashley King, Cole Miles and Tommy King, who range from 12 to 21 years old, the film is an open window into their lives. From the confines of the Japan Karate-Do Federation, a *shotokan dojo* in Mission Viejo, California, to the outside world, the fighting five struggle to balance the rigors of training with the demands of being a young person in America.

Ultimately, *Empty Hand*, Derek's directorial debut, is a tale of dreams, aspirations and the hope of becoming a champion. >>

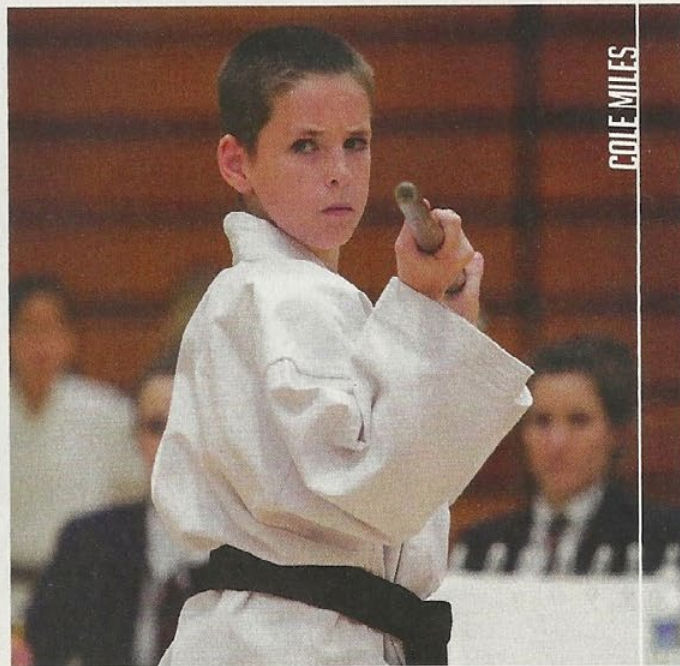
HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN KARATE? DID YOU COMPETE?

Kevin Derek: I was one kid out of many, I'm sure, that Bruce Lee inspired. Seeing how I was so influenced by him, my parents signed my brother and myself up for *shito-ryu* karate at the local YMCA in Anaheim, California. I was 9 at the time. My brother, being four years older than me, quit after a week of what he said seemed like torture. On the other hand, I couldn't get enough of it. Two years later, we moved to Lake Forest, California, where I found another dojo [teaching] the same style, but that was more serious and stricter—which was what I needed.

During my teenage years, karate consumed my life. I never missed a practice or a tournament and continued for 15 years. The most important lesson karate has taught me is to be a better person. I was a shy little boy and was picked on at school, and karate gave me the confidence I needed to face my fears. The lessons and values that my teachers, *shihan* Fumio Demura and Paul Godshaw, have taught me are priceless and have been ingrained in my head. I'm forever grateful.



ASHLEY KING



COLE MILES

TELL US ABOUT THE COMPETITORS IN THE MOVIE.

We selected five individuals from the Japan Karate-Do Federation that anyone can relate to. We have Cole Miles, 12 years old, who's been raised by his mother since infancy after his father tragically passed away in 1999. He attended his first karate nationals in 2006 as a green belt and has placed in the top three every year since.

There's also Giavanna Caputo, 14, who's been training and competing since [the age of] 5 and has competed in many local and national tournaments, and in all divisions.

Ashley West, now 21, is an adventurer who's circumnavigated the globe and run the Great Wall of China, among other accomplishments. She's competed in two in-

ternational competitions, nine AAU national championships and countless regional [events].

Then there's Ashley King, 19, whose accomplishments these past 10 years include becoming a national champion eight years consecutively, competing in three world championships and even making the USA National Team.

Finally, there's Tommy King, 14, Ashley King's brother. He has his junior *ni dan* (second-degree black belt) and has achieved four AAU national championships in *kata*, *kumite* and *kobudo*, along with seven regional championships.



GIAVANNA CAPUTO



TOMMY KING

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO WORK WITH SUCH A TALENTED GROUP?

These kids are amazing. I don't know how they're able to juggle so many different things—it blows my mind. For example, Ashley King is a full-time college student, does modeling, works full time, teaches at the dojo, trains like crazy, has a long-distance relationship, competes as much as she can and somehow managed to devote a year of her life to this documentary. Can you believe that? If that was me, I would have had a heart attack by now.

SOME PEOPLE WITHIN THE MARTIAL ARTS COMMUNITY BELIEVE THAT SPORT KARATE HAS WATERED DOWN THE ART AND LOST SIGHT OF ITS HARD-HITTING SELF-DEFENSE ROOTS. HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO THAT?

It all depends on which school you go to. We were lucky enough to have traveled around the United States and seen a variety of styles of teaching. When you get down to it, martial arts is a big



ASHLEY KING

business. Looking at it from that standpoint, just like in any other business, you have to keep your clients happy, and the majority of clients in karate dojo are kids ages 8 to 20. If you want your dojo to succeed, you cannot be hard-core. In the dojo that are hard-core, the students get burned out. Therefore, there needs to be a combination of both.



WHAT DO YOU HOPE AUDIENCES WILL TAKE AWAY FROM EMPTY HAND?

I want them to understand what true karate is about. The popularity of MMA has overshadowed the foundation of true martial arts. It's about the 90-year-old tradition that's been handed down from masters to masters. It's about honor, respect, dedication and manners. Unfortunately, these qualities aren't taught to our children as [often as they used to be].

WHAT'S THE RELEASE DATE FOR THE FILM?

We're taking the festival route first, starting in October 2010. An exact date hasn't been nailed down, but you can follow the film through Twitter and our Facebook page, both of which are linked up at the official home page, emptyhandthemovie.com.

HOW CAN AUDIENCE SEE THE FILM? IS A THEATRICAL RELEASE PLANNED?

We'd like to have a limited theatrical release, and then DVD and Blu-ray, cable and finally digital download.

DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER MARTIAL ARTS PROJECTS IN THE WORKS?

We're shooting another feature documentary on one of the greatest masters of our generation, Fumio Demura. ✕ >>

About the author:

Soren Patrick Xavier is a freelance writer and martial artist.