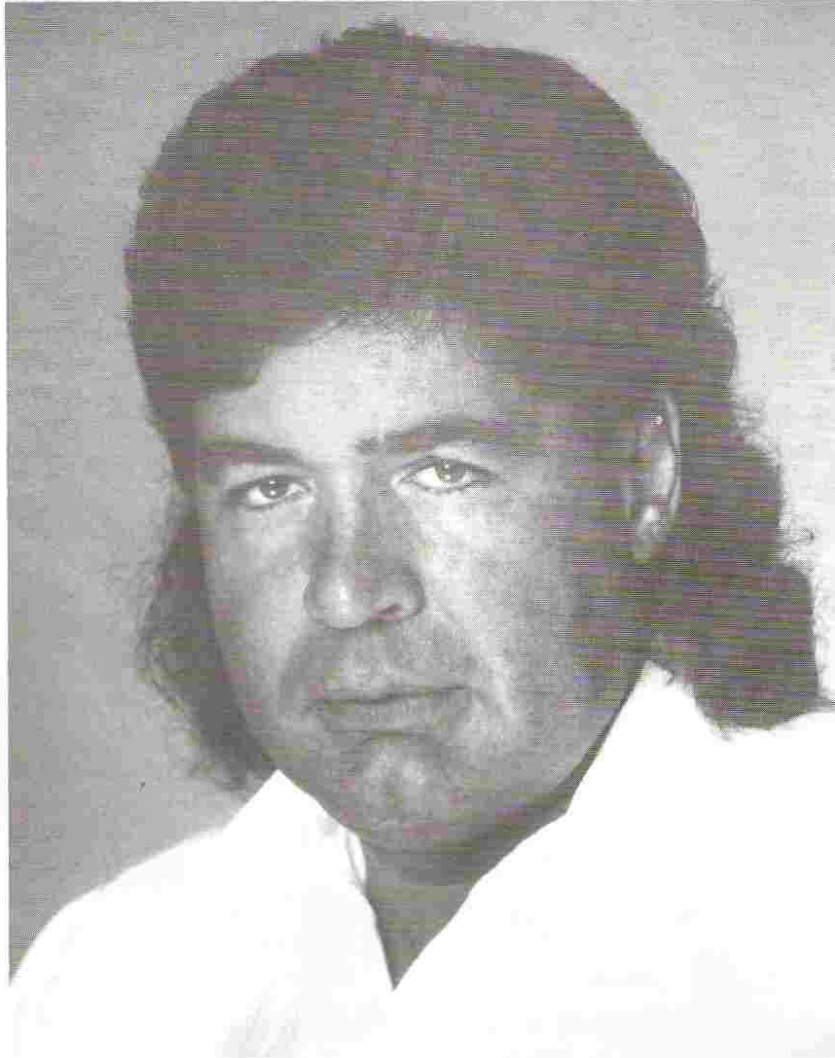


A Talk With



At 6'5" 270lbs, Richard Byrne is one of the biggest men in the martial arts. But size is only a small part of his success and notoriety. He is one of the real greats in this profession. We are fortunate he was able to take time out of his busy schedule for this interview.

A short while ago Traditional Tang Soo Do spoke with Richard Byrne, the "IRON MAN" of karate. Richard is a Master in Tang Soo Do. He owns and operates Byrne's Tang Soo Do Karate Studios located throughout the New England area. Master Byrne is the Executive Director of the American Tang Soo Do Association (ATA), the Regional Director of the International Tang Soo Do

Federation (ITF) and is also a member of the Technical Advisory Committee of the ITF. Following are highlights of our conversation with this prestigious individual:

TTI: When and how did you get started in Tang Soo Do?

RB: My training started in 1969 while stationed at Osan Air Force Base in Korea. One of the men in

the "Ironman" of Karate

my barracks was a black belt and brought me to the school and introduced me to C. S. Kim the chief



Richard Byrne started his training at Osan AFB, Korea. He is pictured here with his instructor C. S. Kim.

instructor. I was very impressed with him and how he presented himself. I consider myself very lucky.

TTI: When did you receive your black belt and what rank are you now?

RB: I received it in 1970 and am presently a sixth dan.

TTI: Can you explain the significance of your belt being navy blue with a red stripe through the middle?

RB: Tang Soo Do traditionally uses navy blue instead of black. The reason being is that black symbolizes death and the end of all things. You can not make a black belt darker by adding color to it. Navy blue can be made darker when adding color to it and therefore does not represent the end of all things. It shows that there is still much to be learned. The red stripe in the middle of the belt signifies the level of Master. You become a Master upon receiving the rank of 4th degree black belt. Senior Masters also wear the same belt.

TTI: How does Tang Soo Do differ from other types of Karate?

RB: Tang Soo Do uses the philosophy that your leg is longer than someone's arm and therefore you can reach them



before they can reach you. This gives us an advantage over all defensive arts that only use their hands. It also helps people of smaller stature or women who could reach a larger attacker before they get close enough to have an altercation become a battle of strength. The primary purpose of Tang Soo Do is to make you a better person and then secondarily be a means of self-defense and physical exercise.

TTI: Is Tang Soo Do considered an art or a sport?

RB: Tang Soo Do is an art first and foremost, although we do conduct and compete in tournaments. We teach all facets of the art such as form, self-defense, one step attacks, and, of course, fighting. We have a proud history in Tang Soo Do and as a result we stress that in our training as well. This is what separates us from just a place to train, to fight, or compete only.

TTI: A major martial arts magazine labeled you as the "IRON MAN OF KARATE" can you tell us how you got that title?

RB: That was given to me because of an extensive article I wrote on breaking all different types of objects. I think they were impressed with my size,

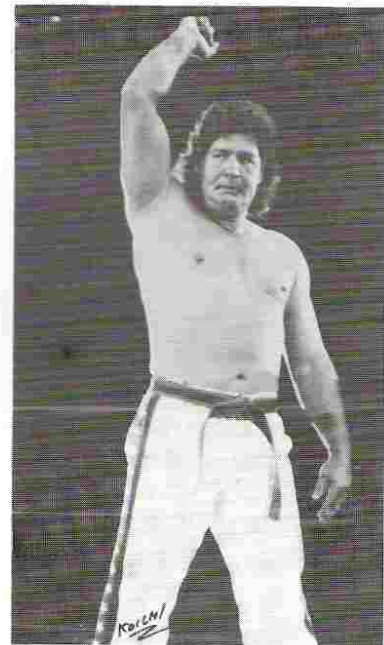


Richard retired from tournament point sparring in '76. Pictured here at that tournament, scoring with a turning back kick

versatility, and training methods that I put my body through. I guess the title just stuck with me.

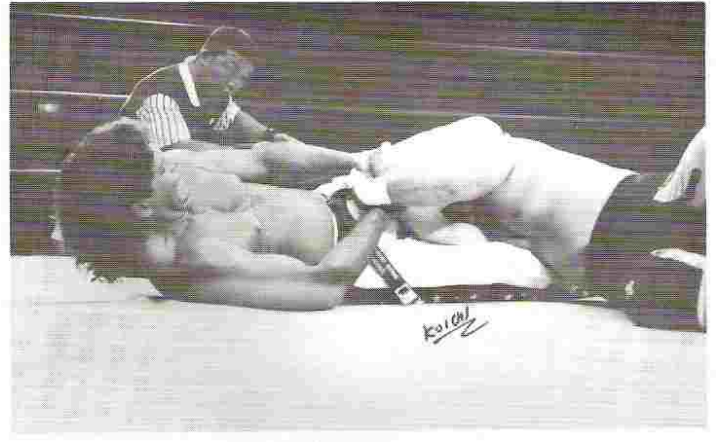
TTI: When did you retire from tournament point fighting?

RB: I retired in 1976 after winning Grand Championship at a tournament in Greenfield, MA. My reason for retiring was because after winning my first round, I had to face one of my own students in the second round. My student simply bowed out and allowed me to continue. At that time, I promised myself I would never let that happen again. At this same tournament quite a few of my black belts entered and they were winning as well. At this point I felt that I had won enough tournaments and it was time to step aside and allow my students to enjoy the thrill of being Grand Champion. That is a decision I never regretted. The only reason I entered tournaments was to get a name and help my studio grow; this tournament proved to me that I had completed that task.



TTI: We know you recently fought professionally in Japan, how did that come about?

RB: About ten years ago I was contacted by a Japanese agent who heard of my size and reputation as a martial artist. A fight was being arranged against Antoni Anoki who was Japan's National hero. He also fought Mohamed Ali at Shea Stadium



Richard Byrne made his presence known in Japan with two successful trips to the ring.

in New York some years ago. The fight was arranged and I even sent over video tapes of me verbally challenging him. As my plane tickets were due to arrive the fight was cancelled. I was very upset. I found out later that because Leon Spinks had just won the Heavy Weight Boxing title here in the United States they had an agreement that he would fight Anoki. If Spinks lost his title shot they were going to use me instead. Of course, I was unaware of this arrangement when making my plans to fight in Japan. Now ten years later Anoki has retired. His predecessor needed an opponent to make a big comeback fight. As a result a group of Japanese agents and trainers actually flew to Boston and came to my studio unannounced. Being a Sunday I wasn't in that day, but some students were getting in an extra day of training. The agents and trainers looked over my photo gallery which included many newspaper articles from my

appearances all over the world. That convinced them that they wanted me.

The next day they called me from New York and asked that I meet with them the following day. I accepted and met them at the famous Gleason's Boxing Gym in New York. There I worked out on the bag, sparred a local boy a little, and posed for photos for the Japanese press.

I signed a contract and began training rigorously upon my return to Boston. On July 9, 1992 I ended up knocking out their champion in the 3rd round. The fight was billed as a "Karate Fighter versus a Wrestler" who is also a boxer. The Japanese have paired fighters from different arts for years and although the United States has just got a taste of it recently with Ultimate Fighting on pay per view it's old hat to the Japanese. That fight was my opponents last, and as a result he was retired to a desk job.

This led to my second fight in September of 1993 which was billed as a "United States Karate Fighter versus a Wrestler" who knows karate. The rules were the same as the previous year. No round limit and to the knockout or submission. When I landed in Tokyo I was informed that they had changed the bout to a four round exhibition fight. I got the impression they did not want me to rough up their new young champion and send him into an early retirement. When the bell rang we were suppose to exhibit our talents, but the Japanese fighter decided to get cute and tried to hurt me. I put him on the canvas once each round and I never left my feet. All in all I was paid well and enjoyed myself.



TTI: We know that your book The Complete Art of Breaking is very popular and that you have three world records in breaking. Will you give us more details on those records.



One of his world's records is 8 boards with an instep round kick. He performs that feat here at a convention.

RB: My first is 11 boards with a chop, together with no separators, then there was 8 boards with an instep round kick, and a speed break where I broke 58 boards in 23 seconds (one at a time) with punches.

TTI: How long did it take you to achieve the world record of breaking 11 boards with a chop?

RB: Close to 20 years. I started by trying to break the old record of nine boards set by Mas Oyama and failed twice. I went back to training hard and stayed away from it for awhile. I had to teach myself patience. I knew I was close and got too anxious too soon. A year later my attempt at ten boards was successful as was my attempt at 11 boards some two years later.

TTI: What would be the most important thing you would stress before breaking?

RB: First is proper training and supervision to avoid injury. Second is proper set-up using the right materials and having knowledgeable people

holding for you. Last is to clear your mind so all of your concentration can be on the task at hand.

TTI: How effective is Tang Soo Do in a self-defense situation?

RB: Tang Soo Do can be very effective. We have the kicking for long range and the Hapkido techniques for close in attacks like grabs. The most important thing is to be able to think and have a quick reaction to be successful in a self-defense situation. This is what Tang Soo Do stresses.

TTI: How long does it take to achieve a black belt in Tang Soo Do?

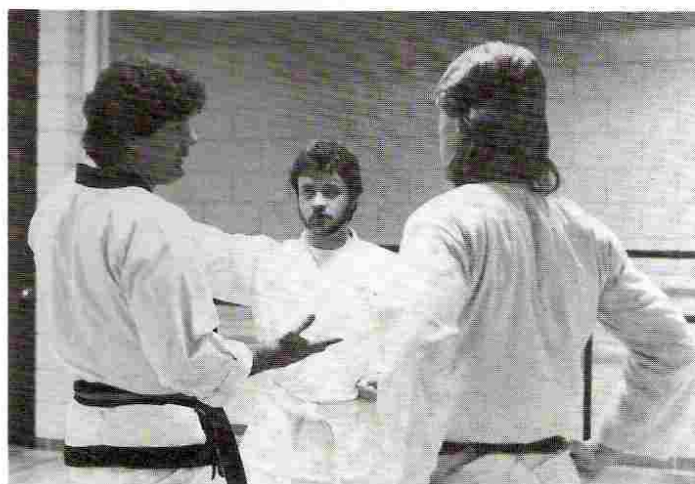
RB: Approximately four years for the average person.

TTI: How many students have you promoted to black belt?

RB: Over 225.

TTI: How many Tang Soo Do schools are in your organization?

RB: Presently I have 16 locations under my direction. However, the International Tang Soo Do



Students intently listening to Master Byrne as he reviews their techniques.

Federation has literally hundreds of studios across the United States and in other countries.

TTI: We understand that you are very busy with performances, demonstrations, and seminars. Does this busy schedule interfere with your teaching responsibilities?

RB: Unfortunately it does somewhat, but I teach as often as I can. I have an excellent staff of masters who take over for me and I know my class is in good hands. There are responsibilities that take up my time when you are in my position and the students understand. They know I care and I give my time outside of class to help any student who needs it.

TTI: Can you elaborate on your most memorable performance?

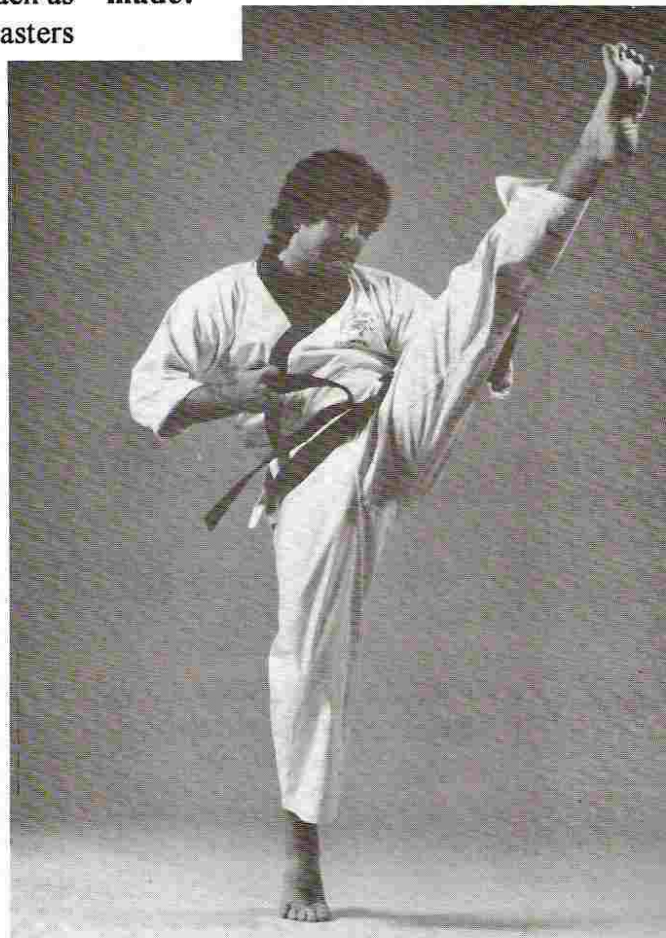
RB: I have many that come to mind; but the most memorable is when I was the main event in Durban, South Africa and I demonstrated prior to my big fight. There were 17,000 spectators in the audience (3,000 had to be turned away). It was really something to think that so many people came to see my performance. I heard people drove as much as eight hours to get there.

TTI: Can you explain a typical day for Richard Byrne and explain any special training?

RB: I start off at 7:30 in the morning. I eat a good size breakfast, take my vitamins and Met-RX, then I'm off to the bank, post office, and the gym. I usually workout for 1 1/2 hours weight training working a couple of body parts. I return home for lunch and begin my phone calls for bookings, events, and covering orders for equipment and supplies. I usually have more Met-RX and then head to the studio. When I arrive there I start returning phone messages, take calls, and go over my calendar which is updated on a daily basis. Then

I teach my classes and usually finish up around 9:30 in the evening and head for home and have some dinner. On occasion I will do a late workout. It's a long day but it's the only way to get things done and stay in shape.

TTI: Can you tell us more about the many movie and television appearances you have made?



RB: As far as TV goes, I've been on dozens of talk shows as well as the series "Spencer for Hire", "Against the Law", "That's Incredible", and quite a few evening magazine shows. For movies; chronologically I appeared in "Departure", starred in "When Death Comes Quickly" with Bill "Superfoot" Wallace and Professor Toro Tanaka, appeared in "Distant Justice" with George Kennedy and David Carridine, and most recently appeared in "The Next Karate Kid". I have done many Wrestling TV shows as well as numerous telethons for various charities.

TTI: Are there any projects you are working on now or are there any plans for the future?

RB: Currently I'm talking with a famous stunt co-ordinator in California for a role in a couple of Martial Arts movies that are in development. My schedule is so busy that I have no time to do auditions or cattle calls. If someone wants me for a movie or TV project it's because they have something specific in mind and feel I'm the best person for that role as a result of my experience and background.

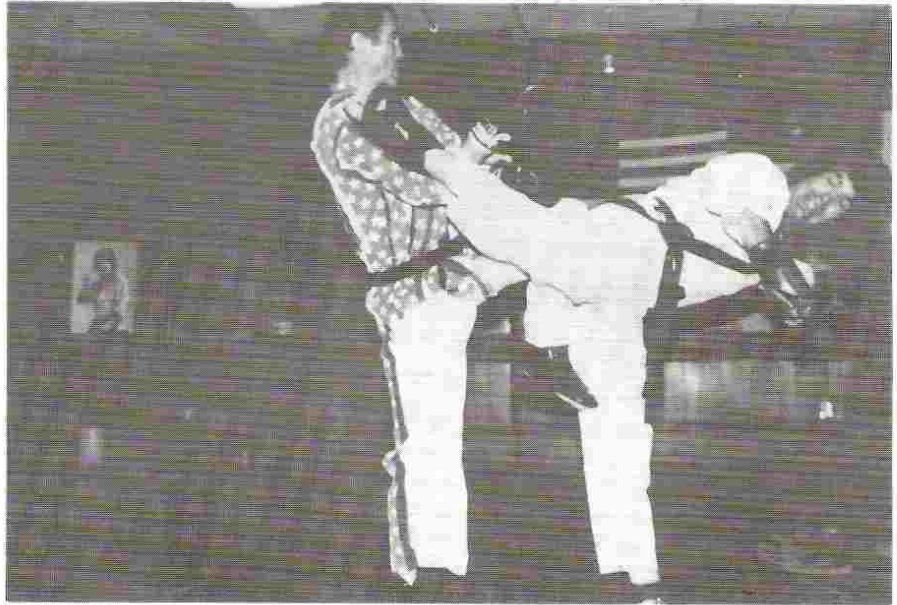
TTI: If you had to name just four current people who you consider great martial artists, who would they be?

RB: First of all Grandmaster C. S. Kim who is my instructor. His talent, intensity, knowledge and energy never ceases to amaze me. Then there's Bill "Superfoot" Wallace and Joe Lewis who are friends of mine and I feel they are two of the greatest fighters of all time. These guys made it to the top the hard way one fight at a time. I believe there are some people who are born warriors and Bill and Joe are prime examples. They have to fight, as a profession that is, because it's in their blood. I've spent a lot of time with both of them and they are just great people. The fourth person that I consider to be a great martial artist is none other than Chuck Norris. He is one of the only Martial Arts and TV movie stars that really knows his stuff. He was a national fighting champion for years and is always a positive role model for all martial artists young and old alike. His high visibility has helped the martial arts greatly. One hundred years from now when we are all dead and gone they will be talking about these names the way people now talk about the old oriental founders of the arts.

These individuals, in my opinion, have helped to revolutionize the Martial Arts in one way or another. I'm sure history will look upon them kindly.

TTI: What do you see is the future of Tang Soo Do?

RB: The future of Tang Soo Do and the International Tang Soo Do Federation (I.T.F.) as I see it is very positive. With Grandmaster C. S. Kim as its leader it has grown by leaps and bounds. The one thing that separates us from other Tang Soo Do organizations is our commitment to traditions as well as staying with the original structure of the forms. Everyone else seems to be changing Tang



Richard states that Bill "Superfoot" Wallace is not only a friend but a man he has a great deal of respect and admiration for. They're pictured here sparring at Byrne's studio in Malden

Soo Do. I trained in Korea, I know what was taught to me and that same system and philosophy is being taught today in the I.T.F. Grandmaster Kim stated "let everyone else change and when people want to see traditional Tang Soo Do we will be the only ones left keeping that history and tradition alive." I agree with him after seeing what has happened over the past couple of years. I also think with so many American Masters in Tang Soo Do that people are finally realizing that the Americans have contributed much to the growth of our art. Traditional Tang Soo Do instills discipline, family values, respect and an appreciation of life as well as setting goals for success. What more can anyone ask for.

Tang Soo Do is a very special gift that is given to a student from their instructor. I hope more people will seek out Tang Soo Do training so they can receive this special gift. (END)