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# KARATE

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**CHERYL  
MURPHY**  
TIME ALWAYS TELLS

**WKF**  
Antonio  
Espinosa  
visits  
USA KARATE

**PARA KARATE**  
Benefits for  
the Students

**2017 TEAM TRIALS**  
Colorado Springs

**USA KARATE  
IN NEW YORK  
STATE**

**ANTONIO  
OLIVA**  
The Master  
Tactician

**SANDRA  
SANCHEZ**  
A Focused  
Mind



# SANDRA SANCHEZ

## A FOCUSED MIND

By Jose M. Fraguas

**W**hen people around her went to movies, parties, or on vacation, she spent time in the dojo, always focused on two things: her dreams and goals about what she wanted to accomplish in karate. Dedicated training and focused mind. These two things, more than anything else, have made her championship dreams come true.

If you meet Sandra Sanchez on the street, you will see a happy person with a quiet, pleasant personality. If you meet her in the dojo, you will see an exceptionally skilled and passionate athlete. And if you meet her in competition, you will see one of the most fierce and powerful kata champions of modern times.

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### How long have you been practicing Karate?

I started practicing karate at age 4. It has been more than 30 years dedicated to this great art and sport. I began training in a Dojo that was very close to my home. This Dojo closed its doors and after a short time I found myself training in Goju Ryu under the guide of Sensei Javier Pineño. He has been not only my Sensei, but also my friend. I remember that when I was 4 years old and it was time to do Kumite...I used to run away and get my “hula hoop” to play!

When I decided to focus on competition, I knew I had to study the elements of Shito Ryu and it was then, when I asked Sensei Jesus del Moral to help me. He got the best of me and always reminds me to stay close to the true roots of karate.

Shito Ryu and Goju Ryu are similar in many ways since the Shito “curriculum” encompasses the “Naha” kata. Of course, they are different but not like Goju Ryu and Shotokan, for instance. The delivery way of the techniques is very different, Shotokan uses wide motions, very open and wide stances, the body moves differently. Shito and Goju use different kind of approach but the truth is that Kata competition is unifying very much the way all competitors move. It is becoming more and more unified the overall approach to Kata.

### Did you feel comfortable with the process of learning new physical movements and karate techniques?

I have always been very natural for sports; enjoyed training all my life. It was never a difficult thing for me to go and train in other sports. When I did get involved in karate, it was the same. I truly love the training.



I feel more comfortable in Kata as far as the competition goes. I don't know...it matches more with my personality. I can "express" more who I truly am through Kata. As a karateka, obviously Kumite is part of my training but my focus for competition is on Kata.

### **How has your personal expression of karate developed over the years?**

My karate has evolved greatly throughout the last decade or so. Elite competition always adds an external pressure to everything that you do in the dojo. You have to plan your training from every possible angle and make sure that all the components of your preparation are in place. The maturity in your training will be reflected in your performance when you enter in a competition. The pressure is also bigger and some times it is "just do it". Every training session establishes the foundation for the next session, therefore what you do today will influence what you will be doing tomorrow. Give your best today, all you've got today... leave it on the mat. The rest will be taken care of by itself.

### **What are the most important points in your current training methods?**

My personal training encompasses many different aspects. My Coach knows exactly how to organize and create my training cycles according to my competition schedule. Today's elite competition is not "simply" train a lot of kata or a lot of kumite. In Kata you have many details that you have to make sure are correct: rhythm, tempo, technique, intensity depending the segment of the kata, etc. You need to have all these down. Is that little detail that you may think is not so 'relevant' that makes the difference in a European or World Championship.

I do a lot of conditioning training but the most important part is that you need to know "why" and "how". Find a good Coach because everything you do must help to make your karate better. Going to the gym and training with weights, running and using conditioning equipment randomly won't help you to make your karate better.

### **Do you think the Olympic recognition could help karate?**

I think it can be a double edge sword. It is going to help in all the sportive aspects and the worldwide recognition but we have to be careful and not to make the mistake of focusing on a 'sport-only' karate-do. Karate training is not only for competition. It provides practitioners with many positive things that are not competition related...and we must preserve these values and principles. If we focus only on the



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sportive aspect of it, we'll miss many of the important things that it teaches. I have always learned from my teachers that karate represents tradition, spirit, discipline, martiality, etc. Even if I love to compete, I try to maintain these roots and don't walk away for the "do" in my training. I like to think that with this approach it can be seen when I perform kata. I have learned that the different styles provide us with different approaches or perspectives of the same thing: the way of the empty hand. I believe all these styles, philosophies and methodologies are a beautiful legacy that we must preserve for the future generations. Karate is not only about winning a medal or a trophy, it is about living life like a warrior.

### **How do you see the technical level in Europe and American when compared to Japan?**

Many countries are getting very close to Japan and other Asian countries. In the Western world the training is more based on athletic and physical development. In Japan, they base the training on "kohon". Everything is Kihon and technique related. The important thing to keep in mind is that they are incorporating many great physical conditioning programs and methods... You add these to their already very high technical level... and they are very difficult to beat.

I truly enjoy going to Japan and Okinawa for training. Of course, there is a lot of knowledge there that any karateka needs. I love the atmosphere, the philosophy, the ambiance and the spirit. I'd recommend everybody to go at least once in their lifetime and enjoy it the more traditional aspects of the arts.

### **Karate is nowadays often perceived as a sport by many people around the world... would you agree with this definition?**

I think we have to adapt to the current times and to the society we live in. When I started karate, I was very young; no idea of what Budo or Do was and is. We need to bring karate to the young kids more like a sport with qualities like discipline, respect, etc. They are simply too young to understand the more traditional parts of the art. Then, with time, they begin to understand the intrinsic principles and philosophy and they can appreciate these elements more. They will realize that karate-do is a way of life and can be used as a vehicle for personal growth and development as individual.

Finally, you learn that the more you grow and develop as a martial artist, the less you know. Karate is a growing process until the day you die.

### **What is the most important element for you; self-defense, health or tradition?**

I believe the term "tradition" encompasses all aspects, but obviously depending on the practitioner's age there are certain aspects that you emphasize more. Younger people will focus more on the sport, more physical side of the training. Competition is always a good thing. Either you win or lose, you gain something just from the experience... you gain a great amount of self-understanding and always you can learn from your mistakes. Later on in life, you see that the whole art of karate is bigger than the sport, being able of kicking high or winning championships. There is more to it. It is then that you understand why the traditional element is important.





**Do you have any advice you would care to pass on the practitioners in general?**

Enjoy what you do. Enjoy your training beyond the competition. Do your own research for things, find a good and honest sensei and be dedicated to the practice of the art. Karate will help you to shape the “best you”.

**Who would you like to have trained with that you have not?**

I assume that like every karate practitioner, I’d love to train with the old masters, the ones who developed the styles and methods we practice today. In my personal case, I’d love to train with Chojun Miyagi and Kenwa Mabuni for Goju and Shito. I have read a lot about them and I truly believe they were ahead of their time.

**What is it that keeps you motivated after all these years?**

I like to feel that I am improving in what I do; that my technique gets better, that my kata gets better, that my body expresses the style better, etc. I like that feeling. I know there is a long way to go ahead and the journey never ends...we never get the perfect technique, the perfect kata...never. But that is the real challenge...keep trying to get the best of us. The reward is in the daily training, in the struggle. That is what makes us stronger for our journey in life.

You can’t never give up, just keep pushing forward, keep training. Karate has helped me very much in other aspects of my life, but sometimes you don’t see it right away. Perseverance is the key word.

**Have there been times when you felt fear in your karate training?**

Fear no... but some days after training for 6 or 8 hours...I look at the watch hoping the end of practice is near [laughs].. **USANKF**

*“Competition is always a good thing. Either you win or lose, you gain something just from the experience...”*