Reflections of Pittsburgh Judo

by Gary Goltz & Paul Bova

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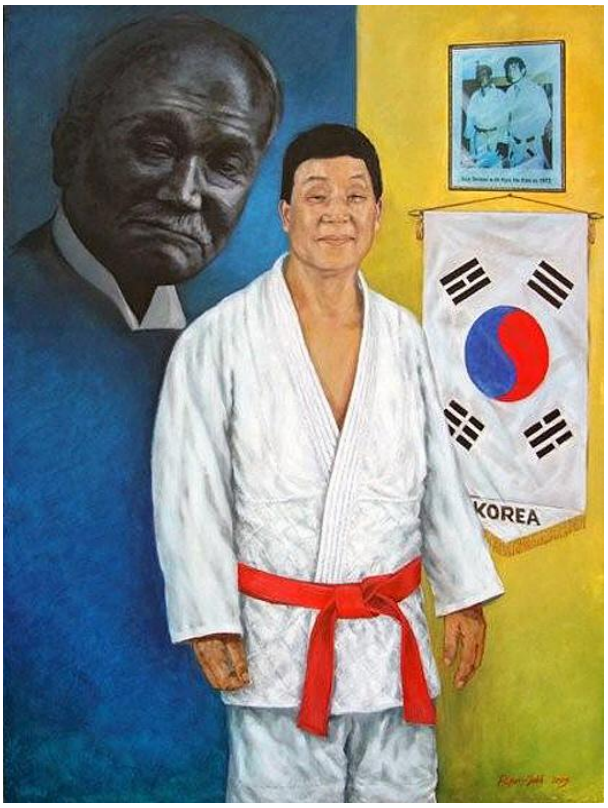
Nick Zaffuto circa 1970

In Yoshisada Yonezuka's autobiography he tells a story about a tournament that was held in Pittsburgh back in 1962. There he took on a challenge line of 15 men in under 10 minutes per the request of the late Nick Zaffuto who was the tournament director. Nick also organized a tag team of Jordi Ludwig and Donna Waxter both black belts to be a regular feature at the Pittsburgh Civic Arena during the pro-wrestling events. They would do an action-packed judo demo during the intermission in the days of Bruno Samartino and 'Judo' Gene LeBell. It really helped put judo on the map in my hometown.

I feel lucky to have started judo under the legendry, Kyu Ha Kim in 1965. Mr. Kim emigrated from South Korea where he graduated from the Korean Yudo College and was their two-time National Champion.



Kyu Ha Kim Photo - 1968 by Gary Goltz and Portrait - 2009 by Andor P-Jobb

After the Korean War, American soldiers who remained often took martial arts training under local instructors. Mr. Kim also trained members of the South Korean air force. His success at the national level cemented his reputation, which led to an invitation to teach judo in Oklahoma in the early 1960s.

In 1964, Kyu Ha Kim came to Pittsburgh. Here he and along with Nick Zaffuto and a handful of dedicated young black belts all practiced at the Judo School of Pittsburgh which was the only existing dojo in the area. Their legacy has now passed on to 3 generations of Judoka teaching judo in the typical Kano fashion to promote the traditional values of politeness, courage, sincerity, self-control, honor, modesty, friendship and respect. To this we owe a debt of gratitude and thanks.

Photo of Pittsburgh Area Black Belts and Guests in the late 60's. Top Row left to right – Jimmy Takemori, Kiel Soon Park, Tom Esenbaugh, Jim Poshall, Andy Bernard, George Mower, Ryozo Nakamura, Kyu Ha Kim, and Lanny Miyamoto. Bottom Row – Joe Bova, Ron Pardini, Pete Saelo, Frank Berzinski, Unknown, Unknown, Rich Reading and Bob Friel

Kim's Judo School 1970

Gary Goltz receiving a trophy from Mr. Kim in 1968

Paul Bova and Tom Eshenbaugh in the early 70's

Gary Goltz on far left as Allegheny Mountain AAU Chair at clinic with George Harris in 1976

In the early 1970's Kyu Ha Kim began teaching judo at the University of Pittsburgh. He also introduced his daughter Mary and later his son Eugene to the sport. It has carried down through his family as judo tends to do, with the introduction of Eugene's sons Tyler and Tanner.

It is noteworthy that after a lifetime of training, competition and teaching, Kyu Ha Kim's greatest physical achievement might be surviving a full-blown heart transplant in 2008 at the world renown University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

Today, Pittsburgh continues to endure with a sport that has not quite yet obtained the notoriety it deserves. However, the teachings and traditions started by a few will continue in the mind and heart of the dedicated teachers of today and the students of tomorrow.

Photos provided by Gary Goltz, Paul Bova, & Andor P-Jobb