

Soke Saito's Visit to Ichibankarate December 2011

Ichibankarate was honored to host Saito Soke at our dojo, located in Northern Virginia, USA, December 3 through December 5, 2011. We invited Soke to preside over the testing of fourteen students for their Shodan Ho through NiDan ranks. We were also pleased to host Danilo Torri Shihan from Trumbull, Connecticut, USA, to participate on the testing panel along with Dwight Grover Shihan and Giovanni Granados Shihan. Many of the Ichibankarate students had begun their karate-do training at another school and have diligently been training in Saito-ha Shito-Ryu since Ichibankarate's founding in May of 2009. They were eager to experience the rigors of a comprehensive black belt testing process and earn their ranks from TKFI. Soke also conducted two seminars during his stay.

The students officially began their preparations by attending a six week seminar on Saturday afternoons to develop and refine their skills so they could demonstrate the proper principles of Saito-ha Shito-Ryu Karate-Do kihon (basics), their selected kata bunkai (analysis or meaning of the form), oyo (application or actual self defense) and various self defense scenarios. Each candidate selected an uke (partner) with whom they were to demonstrate their appropriate rank kata bunkai/oyo during the actual test. To view photos from the test preparation, you may visit [the Ichibankarate photo site here](#).



Although Soke was originally scheduled to arrive Friday afternoon and conduct a seminar on the Kata Seienchin, his plane was grounded due to weather. Soke graciously drove to another airport and took a later flight so he would be available for the first part of testing on Saturday, December 3. The Ichibankarate Instructors and Students were very grateful to Soke for going out of his way to be available as soon as possible.

The weekend progressed with testing Saturday morning. After beginning the day with testing, including basics, self defense, sparring and board breaking, Soke taught the candidates a new variation of one of the basic kata, Pinan Sandan. After a short lunch break, Soke then conducted the Seienchin Seminar. To view photos from the testing, please visit [the Ichibankarate photo site here](#).



The candidates, other students and their families reconvened at the dojo in the evening for a reception for Soke where each of the candidates "treated" Soke to Karaoke singing. We also were treated to live music from a few of our members and their families. To view photos from the reception, [visit the Ichibankarate photo site here](#).



Testing continued Sunday morning with the candidates performing their rank testing kata and bunkai/oyo. After deliberation with Soke and the Shihan-Kai members, the students that successfully demonstrated the skills required for the next rank were presented with their diplomas.

The activities continued with escorting Soke to a "Christmas by Candlelight" tour of the home of George Washington in Mount Vernon, Virginia, a short distance from the Ichibankarate dojo. Participants were treated to actors in

period costume playing the roles of characters guiding them through the home decorated in a traditional Christmas evening at Mount Vernon. Soke also participated in a traditional period dance with some of the students.

On Monday evening, December 5, the activities concluded with Soke conducting a seminar on Saitoshi Godan. To view photos from the seminars, please visit [the Ichibankarate photo site here](#).

One of our students, Nico Yardas, who participated in the seminars and testing shared his personal experiences of the weekend:

"December 3-5, 2011, Del Saito Soke, the head of TKFI, came and visited us for three days in order to enable us to have so many high ranking students, a total of 12 black-belts and 2 brown belts, test for their next rank. Soke's visit meant a lot to all of us. It gave many of our good friends at the dojo the opportunity to test for their next rank and to test themselves. It was inspiring, being able to watch the candidates and see how much work they put into preparing for their test. The candidates pushed themselves to their limits; it was an inspiration to all of us! We were focused on the upcoming test, so during the two months prior to Soke's visit, I felt like we got to see the traditional side of karate that is often pushed aside during competition season. I was fortunate enough to be part of this, as Karl Mellen decided that I would be his uke for his test. I got to participate in all the seminars, which was an experience. We pushed ourselves to better our basic, and along the way got to jyu kumite and break some wood! When Soke arrived, he taught two seminars, one on the kata Seienchin on Saturday afternoon, and one on the kata Saitoshi-Godan on Monday night. The ideas he taught during each of the seminars, such as the idea of keeping inner and outer calm no matter what comes to assail you in the Seienchin seminar. The idea of what leadership means and how to manifest it in the dojo was a point of focus in the Saitoshi-Godan seminar. After the Seienchin seminar, there was an evening reception for Soke at the dojo during which every candidate testing for first or second degree black-belt was required to sing karaoke! Everyone was full of hilarity afterward. Then on Sunday evening, Soke and several families went out to Mt. Vernon for a candle-light Christmas tour of George Washington's house. That was an experience; there was dancing, black smithing, and everyone who we met was dressed up as a late 18th century individual and spoke in the dialect of the time. On Monday night, the dojo was packed for the Saitoshi-Godan Seminar as Soke concluded his visit with praise for Ichiban Karate Dojo, our Shihans, Senseis, Shidoains and students. It was an honor to have Soke out visiting us. He has so much knowledge to give to all of us, and I am very thankful that we are all a part of this traditional karate-do lineage. I hope all of us will continue to always be part of it."

All of us at Ichibankarate were honored to have Saito Soke and Danilo Torri Shihan be part of such a special weekend in the short history of Ichibankarate. This was a milestone not only for those testing but also the school in its entirety. We will continue to strive to uphold the standards established by the Saitoha Traditional Karate Federation International and continue in our quest to be better karate-ka and citizen leaders.

