

# Chief Master John Godwin 21<sup>st</sup> Century Warrior

By **Kenneth P. MacKenzie**

Growing up on the mean streets of southern New Jersey in the 70s, John Godwin was

often susceptible to the negative influences of his peers. He spent too much time with the party crowd, a gang of Maple Shade youth ready to fight and looking for trouble, and often finding it. Godwin's teenage lifestyle

led him one evening to a night club in Camden, New Jersey (one of the most dangerous cities in the U.S.) where he was involved in a fight that could have proven deadly. Greatly outnumbered, Godwin and a close friend took a serious beating. Regaining consciousness two hours after being clubbed in the back of the head, Godwin found himself face down in the street with welts on his back and a badly broken collarbone.

The pain and disappointment from that encounter led him to the phonebook, seeking out a Karate school where he could learn to fight and defend against multiple opponents. He enrolled in Yi's Karate Institute in Pennsauken, New Jersey to study Tang Soo Do, Moo Duk Kwan and Hapkido from Master Ki Yun Yi, a wise Korean master who is a great technician and mentor. At that point, Godwin began a lifelong journey towards mastery in the martial arts, dedicating himself rain or shine to practice five to six days a week. He arrived at the dojang early, helped with the kids' classes, and stayed late to train. His dedication did not go unnoticed. His master rewarded his efforts with special attention and advanced instruction. John quickly latched onto martial arts as a way of life, a lifeline to pull him away from the troubled crowd. An academic underachiever, having been held back in two grades, John had always been behind in his school work. Developing self-discipline and the ability to focus on goals changed that for John. In 1981, John graduated from Maple Shade High School, becoming the first person in his family to earn a high school diploma. In just several short years, it was traditional Korean martial arts that took young John from the cold streets to a new path of meaning, adventure and excellence.



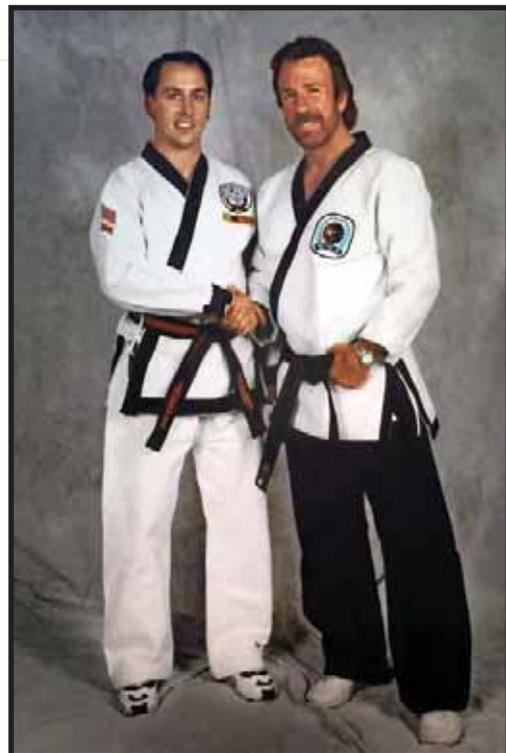
Godwin with Ki Yun Yi

## Personal Achievement

Knowing that it would give him an edge over his competition, John developed a plan to work harder and practice more than anyone in his dojang. By the rank of green belt, his work ethic started paying off, earning first place awards in tournaments in the tri-state area. Godwin still remembers a turning point, where at Grandmaster Jon Chung Kim's Keystone State Championship he received compliments and encouragement on his win from several famous Korean masters. He had been noticed, and people would come to know his name and talent. Later, John would go on to become Grand Champion at that tournament and many others. His goals now included becoming a world champion like his hero, Chuck Norris. Godwin knew that if he was to compete effectively as a black belt, he needed to gain as much experience as possible.



Red belt fighting 1981



Godwin with Chuck Norris

With proper guidance from his teachers, he was destined for success. In 1982, John earned his black belt and he began to distinguish himself in competition. Earning more than 150 first-place awards, over 500 trophies and numerous Grand Championship titles, Godwin was known throughout the eastern U.S. as a formidable competitor. Following more than a decade of victories, Godwin was inducted into the *TaeKwonDo Times* Hall of Fame as Forms Competitor of the Year in 1990.

## Opportunity Knocks

In 1983, Grandmaster Jae Chul Shin was looking for the perfect full-time chief instructor/manager for Shin Karate, the World Tang Soo Do Association (WTSDA) Headquarters dojang in Southern Philadelphia. Grandmaster Shin needed to focus his attention on the growth and development of the newly-founded Association (1982). John was recommended as a likely candidate and was soon hired. The position represented a 'dream come true' for John, dedicating his life to the martial arts and being compensated for it. In his eyes, he was compensated first in education, second in motivation and inspiration and third in salary. As a direct student of GM Shin, he was encouraged to study other arts to broaden his understanding and became involved in Hapkido, Kickboxing, Tai Chi, and many other arts. Because GM Shin had been Chuck Norris' first martial arts instructor, John believed that full-time study with him would help him become a world champion and true master of the arts. Plus, John would actually be getting paid to teach, compete and train. If he was successful at managing the school, his income would grow and so would his skills. He could stand on the shoulders of giants, and have a clear view of what lay ahead. GM Shin taught John how to work hard (12 hours minimum) and manage the school in a professional way. He provided opportunities for growth, and encouraged John to learn all that he could, teaching him to always value the roots, philosophy, and traditions of Korean martial arts. A lifelong bond was created. John dedicated himself to supporting the growth and development of the WTSDA, and has stood ready at the right hand of GM Shin ever since.

## KMAI

In 1986 John sat down with GM Shin to plan for the future. GM Shin explained to John that he was a Big Cup, not a Small Cup. "You are a young man who has real passion and drive. You need room to grow," He then directed John to search for a good location in the state of Delaware to establish a new school, his own school. In the fall of that year, John opened Godwin's Korean Martial Arts Institute (KMAI) in Delaware. The following year, he joined the Educational Funding Company (EFC) school management group and began studying studio management from Mr. Nickolas Cokinos, a business guru and the Chairman of EFC. With hard work, business knowledge, focus, dedication, tenacity and time, his school grew. He has since expanded the KMAI to include eight locations in three states. He has also served 15 years as an EFC advisory board member, learning school administration from the Cokinos family and their board of directors. He earned several national awards for multi-school excellence and ambassador awards for contributions to international instructor training. Godwin's KMAI has produced over 1500 black belts, hundreds of instructors and a large number of qualified master instructors. Chief Master John Godwin takes great pride in respectfully and loyally supporting his teachers, both GM Jae Chul Shin (Tang Soo Do) and DoJuNim Ji Han Jae (Sin-Moo Hapkido). With the success of KMAI, thousands of students have joined and been taught leadership skills. Chief Master Godwin's schools serve as powerful vehicles in the propagation of both Tang Soo Do and Sin-Moo Hapkido.

## When the Student is Ready

Hapkido training was always an important part of John's martial arts training. John's teachers had taught at a Tang Soo Do dojang on the Osan Air-Force Base in South Korea. Their good friend, famous Hapkido Master Bong Soo Han taught Hapkido there as well. GM Shin had also received HKD certification in the 1960s. When he later started his school in the U.S. in 1968, he would often share the powerful and devastating Ho-Shin-Sool skills of Hapkido, especially with instructors. Once John started KMAI



Studios, he affiliated with several HKD groups and hosted numerous seminars on the art of Hapkido. In 1997 at the America's Cup World Karate Championships (held at the Corestates Center in Philadelphia) John and I (Ken MacKenzie) reconnected. I remembered, as a teen, John being the absolute best competitor on the Korean martial arts tournament circuit. We had always enjoyed a level of mutual respect, and John had been somewhat of a role model to me, top-competitor Robert Ott, and many other young warriors. While we had not seen each other for several years, our connection remained strong. Seeing the 'Korea Sin-Moo Hapkido' patch upon my chest, John questioned the origin of my Hapkido training. I remember his amazement in finding that I was studying with Hapkido Founder "DoJuNim" Ji Han Jae himself, and had been since he had moved to the U.S. in the mid 1980s. Days later, I introduced him to my teacher, DoJuNim. Little did either of us know that this would change our lives significantly. John enjoyed his first private lesson, although painful, with DoJuNim at my dojang in Voorhees, New Jersey, and was awed by the skills and concepts taught. A special bond formed immediately, and John dedicated himself to learning all he could from DoJuNim while the opportunity presented itself. There is a saying that goes: "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." John had always wanted to further his Hapkido skills, and he referred to this newfound relationship and opportunity as a "gift from the heavens." John soon began hosting weekly private instructor seminars with DoJuNim Ji Han Jae at his school in Delaware. To date, Godwin has hosted over 300+ instructor seminars with DoJuNim, more than anyone in the world. As DoJuNim Ji Han Jae announced at the International Hapkido Summit, Chief Master John Godwin, Chief Master Scott Yates and I have enjoyed more 'mat-time' with DoJuNim than anyone in history. DoJuNim Ji has generously shared all of his skills with us over the years. Based on his ability and dedication, DoJuNim has ranked John as one of the top Hapkido practitioners. Today, John continues to serve as a loyal supporter and close advisor to DoJuNim Ji Han Jae's World Sin Moo Hapkido Federation (WSMHF).

## Going Global

Martial arts brotherhood has led John and I to travel the world together. In 1999, John was selected as a member of the U.S. Hapkido Team to compete at the World Hapkido Games in Mok-Po, South Korea. Both Dr. He-Young Kimm, founder of Han Mu Do, and I had confidence that he had the right stuff to compete and represent well. It was the first time that we were on the same team and representing our country. John went



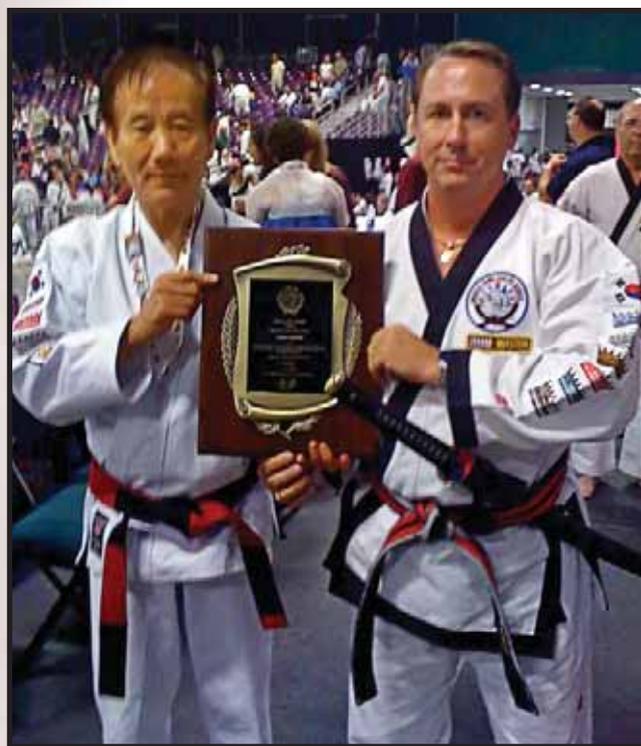
on to win two Gold Medals and a Silver that year. We enjoyed being part of delegations led by Grandmaster Dr. He-Young Kimm again in both 2002 and 2005. At the All-Korean Martial Arts World Championships (Olympic Park, Seoul, South Korea) in 2002, John competed in full-contact fighting. Wowing the crowd of thousands with his trademarked jump spinning back-kick, he had fought his way to a Gold once again. This win marked a high point in John's career, representing both his teachers GM Jae Chul Shin and DJN Ji Han Jae on an international playing field. He was also proud to have represented Dr. He-Young Kimm, whom he considers one of his most important teachers as well. (Dr. Kimm, one of the world's leading martial arts grandmasters and historians, has written some of the most authoritative books on Hapkido and Korean martial arts). In 2005, both John and I accompanied Dr. He-Young Kimm and *TKD Times* Publisher and CEO, Grandmaster Woojin Jung



**Three legendary grandmasters, Dr.Kimm, Jae C. Shin and Ji Han Jae**

on a historic trip as Ambassadors to North Korea for TKD's 50 year anniversary. Together with Dr. Mark Fabi, Chief Master Scott Yates, and a group of our highest ranking student instructors, we performed the first ever Hapkido/Sin-Moo Hapkido demonstration in Pyong-Yang, North Korea at the TKD Palace. In addition, John and his team gave an outstanding Tang Soo Do presentation. The tour was a success, and much international goodwill was established. The chance to travel with and learn from such a wise scholar and Grandmaster had proven a great experience. Dr. Kimm taught John that in our journeys we have many teachers and we learn different things from each. As John will tell you, "In life you are indeed a very lucky person if you have had one wise master. I have been fortunate enough to have had several." With these legendary teachers, John L. Godwin indeed "stands on the shoulders of giants," carrying on the torch and leading the martial arts into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Since becoming chief instructor at WTSDA headquarters, John has traveled throughout North America, Europe, Africa and Asia. As Director of Business and Finance, he has facilitated business and



**GM Jae Shin presenting 2010 Master of Year**

studio management trainings each year, helping the WTSDA grow to over 400 active schools in more than 40 countries. Having traveled as an advisory board member for EFC, he has coached thousands of instructors. He has been a demonstration performer at many World Tang Soo Do World Championships, and has taught HKD and TSD in mainland China, Japan, South Korea, and beyond. Taking all of this into consideration, along with over 30 years of substantial commitment, the WTSDA board of directors selected John as Master of the Year in 2010.

## Into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

His sincere gratitude towards his wise teachers manifests itself in a deep commitment to build and carry on their legacy. He plans to follow in their footsteps, while also blazing new paths. Keeping busy throughout the year, John hosts 24 management workshops annually in Delaware, and 52 instructor classes at his KMAI dojangs. Participating in WTSDA and WSMHKF events and seminars, he will lead the next generation of masters and instructors in pursuit of even higher standards of black belt excellence. Now age 50, the Chief Master will be an honored guest-instructor at Chief Master Robert Ott's 2011 Super Summer International Korean Martial Arts Seminar in Olympia, Washington this August.



John Godwin family & Dojunim Ji Han Jae

Whether it be spending quality time with his family (children: John Jr., Ali, Madyson, Aspen, Arden,



The author Ken & John

and his mate Christina), training sword techniques in the mountains of South Korea, practicing an ancient form with the monks at the Shaolin Temple in mainland China, competing against the best of the best in the main ring at Madison Square Garden, or teaching and training his own student masters in Delaware, Chief Master John Godwin is more than at home wearing his 'martial arts skin'. Godwin has attained the pinnacle of what a martial artist aspires to become. With this being said, the journey continues, and the best is yet to come. Keep your eye on this 21<sup>st</sup> Century Warrior. **TKD**

To read a list of Chief Master Godwin's accomplishments, visit [www.taekwondotimes.com](http://www.taekwondotimes.com)

For more information check out:  
[www.KMAIweb.com](http://www.KMAIweb.com)  
[www.WorldTangSooDo.com](http://www.WorldTangSooDo.com)  
[www.WorldSinMooHapkidoFederation.com](http://www.WorldSinMooHapkidoFederation.com)

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Grandmaster Ken MacKenzie is the President of the World Sin-Moo Hapkido Federation. Having been elevated to tenth-dan by Hapkido Founder DoJuNim Ji Han Jae in South Korea (June of 2010), Ken has enjoyed sharing his lifelong pursuit of martial arts excellence with friend and colleague Chief Master John Godwin since the days of their youth.