

DAN INOSANTO ON: Bruce Lee -- The Public -- Jeet Kune Do (Part 2)

Interview conducted by Chris Kent

Dan Inosanto is leading the group of students through focus glove training drills at a public gymnasium in Dallas. In some of the drills he counts off a certain number of repetitions, while in others he allows the students to freelance. He stops the class momentarily to emphasize a particular point, then lets them continue as he moves about the group, answering questions and working with individuals one-on-one. He checks his watch as he moves the class into basic jun fan trapping hands, then some kali empty hands, then back to the jun fan. "The main point ...• " he explains, "... is not to concentrate on the technique he is using, but on the concept or principle behind the motion. The technique is merely to teach you body mechanics ... but sensitivity is the highest point.

From there the students move into a quick review of double-stick (siniwali) drills before working with a single stick. There is so much material to cover, and though he teaches very quickly, he never seems to cover everything. Checking the group, he notices the point he is trying to teach is not coming across, so he switches to another method. This time it works. And you can see the students understanding. It is a rapid pace of continually shifting from empty hands to weaponry and back again. Six hours later the students are exhausted but happy with the knowledge they have gathered. They have not spent hours being drilled on one or two moves. Instead they have been given a broad overview of the incredible diversity and functionality of both the jun fan and Filipino martial arts.

Dan Inosanto is a martial artist who seeks to educate rather than indoctrinate, who allows an individual to make up his own mind about what he has to offer. Born in 1936 in Stockton, Calif., Inosanto grew up in an area featuring many heritages. His father's occupation as a farm labor contractor exposed him to Filipino martial arts and other arts as a child. At the age of 10 he was exposed to Okinawan Te by an uncle who was also an escrimador. He studied judo as a youth, and at college was a standout track star. In the armed forces he encountered a potpourri of styles, and when he returned to civilian life, earned his black belt under Ed Parker. He became one of Parker's better instructors. In 1964, he was introduced to Bruce Lee, and the rest is history. Upon Bruce Lee's sudden passing in 1973, the future of jeet kune do was placed squarely on Dan's shoulders. He not only has held the art up very well, he has lifted it to new heights.

Here is his story:

IKF: What about his fight scenes? A top Hollywood director stated he admired Bruce's knowledge and use of camera angles. You worked with him on "The Green Hornet" and *Game of Death*. How knowledgeable was he?

INOSANTO: Bruce knew that you cannot make a good fight scene entertaining if you made it like a real fight. Anybody knows that. Therefore, you have to learn how to exaggerate certain things. You have to know when to cut. If you just shot one fight scene without cutting into it, it doesn't make for an exciting fight scene. And people have to separate what is practical for

fighting and what is practical for making a good movie. Bruce, in his early endeavors, made a lot of mistakes. Like on "The Green Hornet," he discovered that his economical motions didn't look good on screen. So he decided to use kicks, northern kicks, because they'd be wider in motion and they gave a clear picture and time for the action to register in the mind of the viewer.

IKF: Sort of a payoff for the viewer's attention.

INOSANTO: Yeah. That's basically what he had to go into. So his fighting movements, he found out, were not too good for filmmaking. So he went to exaggerated moves. I've seen many people, in a friendly challenge, and in not-so-friendly challenges, try to challenge Bruce to a fight. Usually on a monthly, and sometimes on a weekly basis, where they were going to show Bruce he wasn't so good. Most of them, in fact all of them at that period couldn't cope with him. He was just too far beyond the caliber of people. You take Daniel Lee, who knows what contact is. He was the welterweight boxing champion of Mainland China when he was younger. I think he will verify that. I firmly believe he's the best man I've seen. I mean, I am sure that anyone can be beaten, but that doesn't mean the person is not qualified or good enough to teach his art.

IKF: What about Bruce supposedly kicking air all of the time?

INOSANTO: I've trained with Bruce since 1964. I didn't see him kick the air at all. Most of the time it was on heavy bags, focus gloves, football shields, paper or cardboard. But kicking the air ... he might do, say a three-minute round of shadowboxing with kicks, but most of the time it was against objects.

IKF: And this was during the time when most other martial artists were kicking air.

INOSANTO: Most people practiced in the air. In fact in 1964 and '65 that was the criticism of most of the people who saw Bruce Lee's classes. They said Bruce's people shouldn't be kicking heavy bags with their sidekick and roundhouse kick until they learn how to kick properly in the air. The prevailing thought back in 1965 was that you didn't hit objects. First of all, most schools didn't have heavy bags, and most people did not use heavy bags in class. Bruce's classes always made contact, whether punching, kicking, elbowing or kneeing. Always on an object. Everything was contact, because his thing was if you are going to kick a football, are you going to practice your form without kicking a ball? So it was always contact, whether on a light, medium or heavy object.

IKF: Wasn't he one of the first martial artists advocating equipment and full-contact training?

INOSANTO: Right. Most of Bruce's kicking at that time was heavy bag, top and bottom, even speed bag because he had the flexibility to do it. Obviously, focus gloves were the main thing, and for different kicks he would work different things. We had sandbags, and he even kicked on the wing chun pad (sandbag on the wall). So it's an out-and-out lie when people say he just kicked air. It's ridiculous. But people who trained with him know all those stories about him aren't correct.

IKF: Didn't several top U.S. martial artists train with Bruce and credit him with making major improvements in their abilities?

INOSANTO: Joe Lewis was one. I like his attitude because he always gave Bruce credit. But yet in his own right he was a champion, and in my opinion, highly talented, particularly at that time. -

IKF: Any others?

INOSANTO: I think that Mike Stone and Bruce obviously exchanged ideas and I think Bruce taught him and Mike shared a couple of things. I know that Chuck Norris

trained under Bruce in the beginning basics. And Louis Delgado trained under Bruce. And Louis paid Bruce the biggest compliment when he said that Bruce was the most baffling man he's ever sparred.

IKF: Wasn't this all taking place before full-contact became popular in the U.S.?

INOSANTO: I think it would be good to note at this point with people saying, "Why didn't Bruce enter tournaments during that time?" It would have been for Bruce to go backward. See, Bruce was already doing full-contact. In fact, Bruce claimed, and I believe he's right, that a boxer, if you train him to go against the kicking ... without using kicks themselves could beat most karate men that competed in the tournaments from say, 1964 to 1972. Number one, the boxer already learned to take punishment. Two, the boxers were used to contact and the karate men were not. And the boxers were in better condition. Karate men would end up studying with him. He would say, "Okay, listen, I'm just going to use Western boxing against you, and you use all your karate. But the only stipulation is that we've got to make contact. You make contact with your feet and with the boxing gloves." And he did the same thing with me. I remember in 1965 I had just come back and was really happy because I had a second-place trophy in the lightweight black belt division in Salt Lake City, Utah. And I remember talking about my trophy to Bruce and he said, "That doesn't mean anything because it's not contact, full-contact." Then he proceeded to show me with a jab and hook how he could take my kicking and punching. He had done this before, but he did it again and sort of re-educated me. That's why (Richard) Bustillo like him so much, because most people told him to throwaway his boxing. Bruce said, "Keep your boxing because it's more real than the karate hands." At that time Bruce would have preferred to box, and he was an excellent boxer, rather than to do tournament karate.

IKF: Another magazine interview stated Bruce's comprehension of martial arts was low. Is it factual?

INOSANTO: No, I don't think it was low. But then again we're talking about opinions, and everyone is entitled to his opinion.

IKF: Was he anti-kata, or anti-form?

INOSANTO: Let me just say this: One of the best form men I ever saw was Bruce Lee. But he separated them to what he called martial art gymnastics. I don't think he was anti-form but everyone misunderstood him as being that way. He just believed in getting down to the bare essentials, and he felt kata were unessential, that it would be better to freelance and shadowbox fighting motions than to put it into a set, rigid type of sequence where it wasn't really relating to what combat was all about.

IKF: To develop an immediate "relationship" by feeling what it would be like to hit, and then freelance shadowboxing?

INOSANTO: It would be like learning a kata to be a shortstop in baseball. I think you can fake it and go through the motions of picking up the ball and throwing it, or you can actually have a grounder hit at you. He believed you might as well have someone hit a ball at you rather than mimic it.

IKF: What about the individual being more important than the system?

INOSANTO: Well, he always believed the individual was far more important than the established style or system. He once said to me, "Who created shaolin, who created praying mantis, who created wing chun?" And the answer I gave was, "Different individuals created them." "Since individuals created styles," he said, "then man definitely has to be more important than style or system." If a person became very successful in say, picking peaches, he says, "This is my style. You put two buckets around your waist and you have an aluminum ladder." And another guy says, "You use a wooden ladder and only one bucket." You see, everyone has created a system, whether it is picking peaches or whatever. What works for one individual doesn't work for another. Therefore, it's got to be modified for each individual.

IKF: Do you still receive letters from all over the world asking about Bruce Lee and jeet kune do?

INOSANTO: Yes.

IKF: What do the people want to know?

INOSANTO: They want to know about the man, what he ate, what he drank, how he trained. Many, many questions, on his philosophy, on where to train in jeet kune do. I usually cannot answer them because of my time schedule. Even if I had two or three secretaries I don't think I could answer the mail.

IKF: How do you feel the public can best be educated about jeet kune do?

INOSANTO: For me, I think seminars are a really good source.

IKF: What direction do you see yourself taking JKD in the future? Are you planning on writing more books or possibly doing videos?

INOSANTO: I think I might go the video way for a little while. And I might write a book. But I think the book writing I do will be on the Filipino martial arts.

IKF: You're very comfortable in the diversity and functionality of the Filipino martial arts. Are the concepts of these arts similar to JKD?

INOSANTO: I would say yes, they're similar in many ways. I think the Filipino martial arts in the U.S. have gone through a kind of metamorphosis. They have evolved and changed according to the practitioner. And then each practitioner, as he became a teacher, says, "Okay, this is the path, everyone follow the path." And many people followed the path. But many of the concepts of constant flow, sensitivity of movement to movement have remained unchanged.

IKF: Do you feel the Filipino arts have improved the total JKD concept?

INOSANTO: Yes it has. In many ways JKD has helped me to understand things in kali, and the escrima and kali have definitely helped me to understand many of the concepts and principles of JKD. In my kali there's a lot of JKD, and in JKD there's a lot of kali.

IKF: Do you find now you can no longer teach just one art?

INOSANTO: I sometimes flow from system to system, but I can stay straight JKD as handed to me by Bruce. And I can stay straight kali. For me, in my wing chun there's kali, and in my kali there's wing chun. And in my kali there is Thai boxing and vice versa.

IKF: Do you plan to push more in the direction of promoting the Filipino arts?

INOSANTO: Yeah. I like it because it's opened up the avenues in JKD. It made a lot of things more understandable in JKD. Had I not had the kali I don't think a lot of these areas would have opened up as much.

IKF: Will you continue to teach both arts in seminars?

INOSANTO: Yes. And as time goes by I'd like to teach other arts as I become more proficient and as I get permission to do so.

IKF: You've incorporated a great deal of Thai boxing into your curriculum, and you've also brought in savate and pentjak silat. What is the purpose of adding these arts?

INOSANTO: Everything is so (the students) can see there is a beauty in each art, and that each art has something to offer. For example, I've never believed, as good as the sensitivity is in wing chun, in let's say chi sao. People are not aware that the Indonesian pentjak has a form of chi sao called saboetan, which I think is the equal to wing chun. So you can't say their method of sticking hands is superior to the pentjak. Both are very good. The pentjak people are very secretive and don't like to give it out.

IKF: So your intention is not necessarily to train people to become Thai boxers, but to understand and appreciate that art?

INOSANTO: If they want to go that way it is fine, because everyone is different. If a person wants to go straight Thai boxing I think that would be pretty good. And if, they wanted to go more into the grappling aspects of JKD that's fine too. You go to where you feel comfortable.

IKF: With all the garbage being printed about Bruce and JKD, and with the growing number of phony schools advertising that they teach Bruce's art, hasn't a society been formed to perpetuate JKD?

INOSANTO: First of all, if you look at Bruce's literature and writings, Bruce did not want an organization. He did not want a society. And I believe in wholeheartedly respecting his wishes. He even wanted the name to be dropped. But there are so many people abusing and misusing the terms "jeet kune do," not only in America but in foreign countries, because they just don't know any better. We thought it would be better to form a JKD society as a sort of clearinghouse for the different letters and questions regarding whether or not someone was authorized to teach JKD.

IKF: So what is the main thrust of this society?

INOSANTO: One is to preserve the concepts of Bruce Lee. One is to serve as a clearinghouse for policies and authenticity of JKD instructors. And the third is to obviously educate the public on what Bruce was trying to do as far as the promotion of jeet kune do.

IKF: Why has it taken so long before someone decided to do something?

INOSANTO: We were not planning an organization as such and we really didn't care. JKD to Bruce was having five or six, people over and training for the fun of it, enjoying it. That's basically what it was all about.

IKF: But that doesn't mean that if say, five or six guys in Spain decided to get together and bang around, they would be a JKD group, does it?

INOSANTO: That's true. There is an authorization point in JKD.

IKF: How many authorized commercial JKD schools are there today then?

INOSANTO: At the present time there are four. We have the 1MB Academy in Carson, Calif., the Inosanto Marina Academy in Marina del Rey, Calif., the Lucaylucay JKD-Kali school in Huntington Beach, Calif., and the Larry Hartsell school in Charlotte, N. C. And those are the only four schools where JKD is being taught. But there are schools in the U.S. that are under apprenticeship.

IKF: You have four levels of instructorship in your "in-house" program. Can you

list them?

INOSANTO: The four levels are (1) apprentice instructor, which takes three to five years, and after being an apprentice you may be promoted to (2) associate instructor, which will be anything from five to ten years. And after that you may be promoted to (3) full instructor. The full instructorship should take about ten years. Some people might get it a little sooner because they've been privately tutored, but about ten years is a full instructor. But that is at my sole discretion though. Then you have three levels of senior instructor. At this time there is nobody at the second and third levels, but four people at the first level.

IKF: What about someone who cannot move to where these schools are located, but wants to become involved and eventually teach. Is there anything he can do?

INOSANTO: We have seminars which they attend, and by attending them, and certain summer camps, or maybe attending our academies on a summer vacation, they can qualify in maybe five years as an affiliate associate instructor. Or it might be seven years. See, there's no set timing. I just sort of look and know if the guy is or is not there.

IKF: Do you differentiate between a JKD instructor and a JKD exponent?

INOSANTO: Definitely, there is a major difference. An exponent can possibly do it. He may be proficient, he may not be proficient as an exponent. However, even a proficient JKD exponent may not be qualified to teach. You may have a thorough knowledge of history and yet not have a teaching credential. That's not to say you don't know it. So it is with JKD.

IKF: SO just because someone can do damage doesn't necessarily mean that they can teach the art.

INOSANTO: That's true.

IKF: What do you look for in JKD instructors?

INOSANTO: I think the ability to take a person from A to Z, or the ability to take a student from the lower to the higher echelons of the JKD.

IKF: Are you eventually planning to phase out the name jeet kune do and to replace it with jun fan martial arts?

INOSANTO: As it is right now, at our academies we teach three phases of jun fan kung-fu. Phase one is a different blend of martial arts we feel is necessary to make a good martial artist. Then you have jun fan phases two and three. And the fourth phase is jeet kune do. But even being in the JKD class does not mean they are instructors.

IKF: As happens with many celebrities in every endeavor, some people place you on a pedestal, almost deify you. Do things like that concern you?

INOSANTO: It concerns me a little. I don't want to be worshipped or whatever you call it. Nobody is greater than the creator upstairs.

IKF: Do you ever regret leaving your backyard gym?

INOSANTO: Yeah, obviously. Less trouble, less headaches. A lot of things. Sometimes I wish I had just stayed in my backyard and progressed. But then again I am really happy because there are a lot of people who deserve to know a good art..

IKF: Finally, can you list your current senior, full and associate instructors?

INOSANTO: Yes, but remember this in the jun fan only. We have people in the Filipino arts with different qualifications. The list includes:

Senior Instructors: Richard Bustillo, Daniel Lee, Jerry Poteet, Ted Wong.

Full Instructors: Ted Lucaylucay, Chris Kent (formerly Chris Nudds), Jeff Imada, Alfonso Tamez.

Associate Instructors: Larry Hartsell, Tim Tackett, Jeff Chun, Steve Golden, Dick Harrell, Pete Jacobs, Seph Lamog, Richard Lee, Cass Magda, Bud Thompson, Paul Vunak, Craig Honma, Jerry Iida, Guy Mato, Fred Jin, Tim Cordoza, Blaise Loong, Steve Martinez, Nyom Piboonakarin, Paul Boetcher, Dave Lear, Floyd Adkinson, Hector Reid, Steve Reid, Tony Luna, Celso Davila and Steve Connolly.