



COBRA KAI IS BETTER THAN YOUR DOJO

Cobra Kai series is awesome. I am going to talk about it. So watch it first if you don't want any spoilers.

QUIET!

The Cobra Kai series continues 34 years after the Karate Kid movie. It is funny, goofy, and violent. The story is mostly told from Johnny Lawrence perspective, the blond bully of the first movie. Johnny hasn't got his life together. And then this happens.

Being at the right place at the right time, Johnny rescues a teen, Miguel Diaz, from bullies ganging up on him. Johnny uses his old fashioned American karate, kicking left and right while pulling his groin. Getting older is no fun.

Miguel asks Johnny to teach him karate. At first reluctant, Johnny gives in. Cobra Kai is reborn... but with a twist.

No cool guys show up. It are the social outcasts and the nerds who are being bullied that become Cobra Kai's recruits. But Johnny will make them badass.

Johnny is stuck in the 80's which leads to many cringe worthy scenes. If calling a kid with a cleft lip "lip" doesn't make you cringe.... But "lip" becomes the badass "Hawk", and learned a valuable lesson on mental toughness. Johnny makes the teens badass with his overboard unique methods. Let us just say that Johnny's awesomeness collides with the political correctness of the 21st century.

Meanwhile Daniel LaRusso, the hero of the movies, sees the rise of Cobra Kai. Daniel was himself bullied when he was young. Now Daneil wants to protect the youth from the Cobra Kai bullies. He creates Miyagi-Do. He will teach what Mr. Miyagi thought him.

It is all a matter of perspective of who is the bad guy in this series. Dumb decisions are made on both sides and Daniel and Johnny's rivalry reignites. Cobra Kai and Miyagi-Do clash in spectacular way.

To make the chaos complete, the evil sensei and original founder of Cobra Kai, John Kreese, enters the stages. He sweeps Cobra Kai from underneath Johnny's legs.

Johnny loses Cobra Kai. He restarts a dojo with a few students. Eagle Fang Karate. Because Eagles

are awesome and can beat cobras. And fangs are awesome. And karate is awesome. And mongooses are fictional animals.

We end up with Miyagi-Do, Eagle Fang Karate and Cobra Kai. Now these dojo's get more right than many a dojo I have seen. I am ignoring the many poor life choices the three sensei make. Nor the violence their students get involved in. That is all for entertainment's sake.

Certain training methods and objectives have been ignored in too many karate dojo's. Miyagi-Do, Eagle Fang Karate and Cobra Kai dojo's do certain things write that I hope your dojo does to.

KNOW WHY YOU TRAIN

People start training for all kinds of reasons. Self defence. Because it looks cool. They want to get stronger. They want to learn how to fight.

At the core of these issues lays confidence. Many people train to increase confidence. Bullying destroys confidence like nothing else. Victims often suffer their whole lives from low self esteem. Even leading to suicides.

Daniel was a victim. Miguel was one. Lip/Hawk was one. George Saint Pierre, karateka and arguably the best MMA fighter on the planet was one. I was one.

Karate saved us.

Learning to defend yourself physically and becoming mentally tough, without losing your kindness, is a worthy goal. You will only have the courage to stand up verbally, when you feel safe physically. It will make your life and those around you better.

Many a new student seeks karate for confidence. They don't know about styles, kata, competition rule sets,... It shouldn't be about that. Be kind, be strong.

Maybe you have a different goal. That is fine. Don't lose sight of it.

Now how do we build that confidence?

By hitting stuff.

Cobra Kai has the standing BOB dummy. Miyagi-do has a sand bag. The characters hit them.

Old karate books describe punching bags and makiwara, a wooden board for striking.

HIT STUFF!

You want to get good at hitting and kicking.

Don't just strike the air.

Especially now with all the extra equipment that can be made which the old masters didn't have. Mitts and kicking shields to name a few.



You need experience transferring the energy of a bare knuckle punch into a target without damaging hand or wrist. Most people can't. Even experienced fighters who always wrap their hands and put fluffy pillow gloves around their hands can't. Karate we go bare hand. It is in the name! Empty hand. Not pillow hand.

If you are only used to doing side kicks in the air, you will push yourself away instead of the bag/opponent. You need to use your standing leg to push your kick diagonally through the target.

All this stuff you pick up naturally if you just hit stuff.

Go hit stuff!



THROW SOMEBODY, GRAPPLE A BIT

During the training and actions scenes you will see the characters of Cobra Kai, Miyagi-Do and Eagle Fang Karate throw, clinch and ground and pound each other.

Karate has throws. It has clinch techniques. In one of the old books I even have seen collar chokes, knee on belly, shoulder throws, ...

Mabuni Kenwa writes in his 1938 book "Karatedo Nyumon" that karate has throws and locks but that they were not introduced to Tokyo. Karate came from Okinawa and was still rather new on the mainland of Japan at that time. The man who introduced it in the Tokyo area left these throws and locks out to distinguish karate from Judo and Jujutsu. Mabuni urges for those who think about karate's future to look into these throws and locks again.



Unfortunately many dojo's don't train throws or locks. And those who do often do it with minimal resistance. Let's face it. We, karateka, dropped the ball here if you look at the popularity of Judo and Brazilian Jujutsu. Pull and push each other. Catch a kick and dump your training partner. It is good for you.

If you don't know where to start, choose a hip throw and a double leg take down, also called Ude wa or "arm circle" in the old karate books. They are used in Cobra Kai.

Learn the Rear Naked Choke. Johnny knows it. So should you.

And remember: "There is no tapping in Karate!" according to Johnny. (Please do tap.)

TRAIN STRENGTH AND FLEXIBILITY

Karate is physical. You should have some basic strength and flexibility.

Johnny throws the kids in the back of a cement truck. They have to make the cylinder move.

His star student, Miguel Diaz, is made to do push ups. Miguel makes it a part of his morning routine.

Daniel makes the kids do chores for conditioning and ingraining techniques. Making kids in the 21st century do chores is a bit over the top though.

If you pick up again Mabuni's 1938 book you will see a barbell, dumbbells, and other traditional weight training tools.

So strengthen your body with bodyweight routines or other methods. The floor is right there. And swing your legs in all directions, higher and higher, for some dynamic stretches. It will teach your nervous system to be flexible in motion. Good for those cool high kicks.

Now some of you will say that old school Okinawan karate doesn't have flashy kicks.

Johnny would say. QUIET!

ILLEGAL TECHNIQUES!

No mercy!

And Daniel used an illegal crane kick to the face in the Karate Kid movie. So there.

I believe that most of your training time should be spend working on techniques proven in combat sports. Punches and kicks that KO people. Good investment of your time. Drill throws and chokes that work in competition.

There are many safe methods to train these techniques. On top of that, they have been proven to work against the best. Don't spend your time with make believe techniques.

But a few "illegal" techniques are found in karate that really do work. Even seasoned UFC fighters need time to recover when hit with these. Often they never fully recover and loose shortly after receiving such a blow.

Eye pokes, groin shots, strikes to the back of the head, kicking a person who is down,...These strikes can be trained safely with helmets, metal groin cups, and dummies. Don't used these techniques lightly. However, they might save your life if it is truly a serious life and death struggle.

If you find these too harsh, just crane kick them.

LEARN SOME WEAPONS

At Miyagi-Do, Daniel's daughter learns to work with the bo staff. Her nemesis, one of the Cobra Kai's ladies handles the nunchaku well. And they slug it out.

Kobudo is the weapons art that goes with karate. It contains bo, sai, nunchaku,... Ninja turtle stuff.

Pick these up and swing them around a bit. Just enough so that you stop whacking yourself in the head.

Then wonder what kind of weapons you might face in the 21st century. How would you deal with them if running wasn't an option?

DO KATA

Kata are these weird solo drills karate people do. Some people even do them for points. Like gymnastic competitions. Imagine that.

Kata is only trained by Miyagi-Do. The two main students of Miyagi-Do work hard on such a kata. Only later do they understand the combative applications of the movement. Then they kick ass.

Train kata in a proper way. Learn proper body mechanics based anatomical correct movements. With each movement goes minimum one bunkai, or combative application.

The movements are there to defend yourself against the HAPV (Habitual Acts of Physical Violence, documented by Patrick McCarthy). This is a list of the most common 36 moves humans do against each other in one on one violence. Learn to defend yourself against these.



Once you know how to move and what the movement is for, then you can start adding resistance with a partner. When it also works against a resisting opponent, you can look for variations and counters. Now your kata becomes alive and will work in a real self defence situation.

Learn Kata and the applications of the movements for combat. Add resistance with a partner. Play around with variations.

Make Mr. Miyagi proud.

HIT SOMEBODY

Sparring! I saved the best for last. Spar.

Unless there is a world wide pandemic.

Cobra Kai, Miyagi-Do and Eagle Fang Karate spar. All of them. Sparring is nothing more than testing out techniques on a partner that doesn't cooperate. You know, like in... fighting.



What I really like about the way they spar in the series is that there are no rules. At my dojo there is only one rule “Don’t injure your partner.” It works great. Then you can use the full repertoire of punches, kicks, throws, ground work, kata applications...

You can add rules to develop certain skills. Like: “You only kick, and you only punch.” Or “You strike. You take him/her down.” Great fun.

What unfortunately happened in history is that people started to train only for a certain set of karate rules for competition. For example, Kyokushin karate used to train head punches, and they were allowed in competition. Then it was decided to do no more head punches in competition. Eventually, most dojo’s stopped training head punches to maximise their training time to be effective competitors. Their kicking skills went up, but their head defence against punches went down. Similar things happened with other styles.

Sparring can be done with all kinds of levels of speed, intensity, and contact levels. You just adopt the intensity depending who is in front of you. Tuning down the intensity and contact level if the person is not as skilled as you. Cobra Kai’s contact level to the head is too much though. Always protect the brain. Or you will become as smart as Johnny.

CONCLUSION: GO TRAIN AND MAKE YOUR KARATE BADASS!

Know why you train.

Hit stuff

Throw somebody, grapple a bit

Train strength and flexibility

Illegal techniques!

Learn some weapons

Do Kata

Hit somebody

I hope your dojo does all these things. If not, start adopting them into your training regime. I looked for a long time to find a style that taught all this in an effective and smart way. I hope you found yours.

For me it was in Rishinjuku karate (and their competitions are insane: bare knuckle, full contact, punches, kicks, knees, elbows, head butts, throws, ground and pound,... have a look <http://sfdojo.be/en/>).

Watch out Cobra Kai!

Be kind, be strong

Filip Swennen