

“Ichi-Kyu and the Mind, Body, Spirit”

Chris Zapata

Brown Belt The Gi Yu Honbu Dojo Dayton OH

07/16

First and foremost I want to thank all the Black Belts who helped me train for my test. Your time, dedication, and the knowledge you gave me was priceless. I am so proud of the community I was so graciously accepted into.



I started this journey almost three years ago. At the time I was looking for something more challenging in my life and as soon as I met Sukh Sensei I knew I found the place I had been searching for. The positive things that Sensei and the dojo community have done for me and my family are extremely overwhelming. I will always be humbled for the experiences and the sacrifices that everyone has made to get me to the point I am now in training and in my life.

Preparing for my brown belt was a long journey and I learned more about myself this year than ever before. The two biggest things I learned were to relax and focus my mind. These two things were skills I really wanted to work on for many years in my life. I had a conversation with Chuck Sempai back in February regarding testing and he gave me some very good advice. Advice, that I really took to heart. As my fellow student and testing candidate for 1st Kyu (Will G.) and I trained and prepared for our exam, I really tried to work on these skills of the mind. The other issue I have been struggling with is my weight. As life and stress have overwhelmed me over the years, the “demon” of laziness took over. When I started training, I weighed 315 pounds and on test day I weighed 275 pounds. I knew by losing weight, it would help me tremendously with testing and help me better move my body. I still have 50 pounds to lose at least!

This time while preparing for testing I also was given good advice to do the techniques in the air at home. Sensei calls this “solo” training. This was not easy at first, however, once I started doing it, it really paid off in focusing my mind to the movements of techniques. There were techniques in the beginning that I could not get my body to grasp, but after a lot of repetition in the air and many times of practicing the movements... The techniques started to come together making me more confident. When it comes to a training partner for an exam, my suggestion is that you train and pick an uke that is willing to put in as much hard work as you. Although working with the same person is beneficial for testing I found doing these techniques was challenging when working with someone else. So, I decided that I would practice more with different body styles to refine my techniques so that no matter who I did the techniques on, I would feel confident in my movements.

Testing day was very stressful. I had all kinds of things going on in my mind that day. At the end of the afternoon seminar session, Sukh Sensei said something that clicked in me. He has a “knack” with words and finding out what each of his students needs to build their confidence and get them ready for a challenge. Sensei said “class is over go and get your minds right, IT is time.” All of a sudden my mind seemed to just empty. I have never felt such calmness before a test until that day.

When it was time to test and stand in front of all the Black Belts who helped me get to this day I felt more confident than ever before. It was almost like no one was there except me and my training partner/uke Will. I took a deep breath and off we went to showcase our hard work and effort. Before I knew it, the test was over. My body, mind, and spirit were completely focused and “in-step” and I felt free. I felt I performed better than I had ever done before, in anything.

I know I just because received my brown belt, now I have to earn it and become a brown belt.

After my test Sukh Sensei and all the Black Belts came up and congratulated us on a job well done. I heard every comment that everyone gave me and I felt overwhelmed with emotion with what everyone had said about my performance. Yes I trained very hard, but again without the knowledge, encouragement and advice of all the Black Belts I would not have passed. I have now started my journey to black belt keeping in mind I have to perfect my techniques of all the basics with Mind, Body, and Spirit in unison!

