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MAGAZINE

FRANK E. SANCHEZ

GUAM'S LEGEND

GARY WASNIEWSKI

FROM KARATE
TO HOLLYWOOD

CHENG MAN-CHING

THE GROUNDED
SPIRITUALITY

PANKRATION

THE GROUND GAME

Published by
Val Mijailovic

ADAM JAMES

ONE-ON-ONE
INTERVIEW

RAYMOND CROW

Sports
Science
Program



MOHAMMED INCE
THE FUTURE OF WING TSUN





GRANDMASTER FRANK E. SANCHEZ

Guam's Martial Arts Legend and America's Martial Arts Pioneer

Interview by MASTERS Magazine

Grandmaster Sanchez is the founder of Guam's Art of San-Jitsu. He has won numerous accolades in his 50+ years in the martial arts, but his most prized awards are the Legend awards he received from the Hawaii Martial Arts Society in Hawaii in 2003 and his late instructor, Professor Sig Kufferath's Kilohana Martial Arts Association in 2018. His system of San-Jitsu was officially recognized by the Kilohana Martial arts Association by signed certificate from its Seniors, the late Professor Imi Okazaki-Mullins (daughter of the founder of Danzan Ryu Ju-Jitsu, Professor Seishiro Henry Okazaki), the late Great Grandmaster Ming Lum, the late Professor Russ Coelho (Sanchez's Senior dojo mate in Danzan Ryu under Professor Kufferath), Professor Bob Maschmeier and Kilohana President at the time, Professor Hans Ingebretsen in 2000. It was also officially recognized by the 33rd Guam Legislature with Resolution No. 334-33 (COR) issued to him via proxy through his Nephew, Tommy Aflague, a former Army Ranger and Officer in the Guam National Guard on Sanchez's 68th birthday, April 21, 2016. He currently teaches San-Jitsu and runs his worldwide organization called the "World Head of Family/Sokeship Council" in Jacksonville, Florida.

An Interview with Grandmaster Frank E. Sanchez



When and where were you born?

I was born on April 21, 1948 in the village of Higatna, Guam. Guam is the largest island in a chain of islands known as the Mariana or Marianas islands in the Pacific named after Queen Mariana of Spain during the time of Megellan's discovery and conquest of the Islands. It later fell under Japanese rule which was very harsh and finally was liberated during WW II and brought under U.S. control when the Marines successfully liberated Guam from the Japanese. Guamanians were given U.S. citizenship because of their participation in the war against the Japanese through the U.S. Organic Act and Guam became an unincorporated territory of the U.S.

Your family background (parents and siblings).

My Father, Francisco Cruz Sanchez was a native Guamanian and sailor who served in the U.S. Navy under Admiral Nimitz during the war in the Pacific. He was also a boxer in the Navy and my first martial art was Boxing which I learned from him. My Mom, Rita R. Sanchez was a beautiful Chamorita (native island girl) and my only sibling was my younger Brother, Fred who was a genius with the guitar. He actually ended up auditioning for and being put on a waiting list to study with the great Classical Guitarist, Segovia, but died living his life as a popular musician in California, touring the world before ever achieving that goal.

What was Guam like during the time you lived there?

Guam was not as modern as it is today. There was more native vegetation and dirt roads and although you had modern transportation, you could actually walk from say the Village of Tamuning to Higatna which is about two miles in distance without too much trouble because there was no traffic to speak of. There were also no house numbers on the homes at the time. Now, it is a modern paradise with paved roads, super markets, malls and hotels. It's number one business being tourism from Japan and Russia. It is also as its proud motto states "Where America's Day Begins" as it is the western most outpost for the U.S. in the Pacific. The gateway between the Orient and America.

What was the image of martial arts at that time? Was there anyone in your family in the arts?

Bruce Lee's movie "Enter the Dragon" really brought the focus on the martial arts at the time. Although I was practicing Judo and Jujitsu in the early 60's prior to the movie coming out and again, boxing from my Father

What were you like as a youth?

As a youth, I was quiet. Growing up, I was bullied because of my size, but as I got stronger from body building and martial arts I became the bully picking on people that were bigger than me-LOL. My parents took me to a psychologist to see what was triggering the aggression and they were told that I had a "Napoleon Complex". In short (no pun intended), because of my size, being 5'5", I was picking on people taller than me to prove



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something to myself. In time, I grew out of it because I was aware of why I was getting into fights.

Was there any aspect of growing up in Guam and the States at that time that motivated you to pursue the life of a warrior?

Just the fact that I liked to fight and that martial arts would make me a better fighter

You had a career as a musician as well. Which came first, martial arts or music?

That's kind of a hard one to answer, If you mean when I was seriously doing music? It probably was at the same time I started martial arts, which was around 11 years old. Both were great stress relievers . When you sang, it temporarily took you away from your problems. When you did martial arts it allowed you to use up the pent up stress to "take it out" on the mat or the heavy bag in a controlled way where no one got hurt. I became one of the pioneers of modern Chamorro (native island) music in Guam during the 70's as a popular singer/ recording artist there during that time and you will find me mentioned in Guam's "Guampedia" which is Guam's internet site of its history and people, as one of the historical figures for music during the 70s and also as the founder of Guam's first international martial art of San-Jitsu

Did they compliment or hinder each other? How so?

They actually complimented each other. If you think about it, one of the qualities of a good martial artist is to have good flow or rhythm (along with good power and timing). For example, you can equate an opponent's attack as being on the full beat while your counter would be on the half beat, intercepting the attack before it gains full power. As for music, martial arts teaches you to be confident and to reflect that in your movements. So, you move confidently on the stage. It was a perfect combination. Especially when you consider that some of our most famous martial artists have a connection with music.....Bruce Lee was a dancer in his youth and I'm sure that had a lot to do with the perfect flow and rhythm of his movements in fighting. The Aikidoist and actor, Steven Seagal is also an accomplished Blues musician and his timing in applying locks and throws was probably enhanced by his studying the elements and timing of his guitar playing and singing. I can think of other martial artists that I know as examples, but I guess you get the point. Rhythm and timing are important to both music and martial arts, so they both are complimentary to each other.

What first led you to start martial arts?

Like I mentioned, as a youth, I was bullied, so my Father taught me boxing and things started turning around for me with fighting where I was actually winning and it became kind of a fun thing to do. Until I came across An older kid who happened to be trained in what I found out later was Judo. The fight ended rather quickly with me throwing a punch first, him blocking it and twisting my arm behind my back then throwing me to the ground. It took me a few minutes to "clear my head" while lying there before I picked myself off

the ground thinking that I really didn't want to fight this guy anymore. I'm pretty sure he probably read my mind because the guy just walked away without continuing the fight. It was kind of humiliating.

Who did you study with first? What was the training like?

After the incident with the fella who threw me, I hounded my Father to find somewhere I could learn this "neat" Art and as things turned out, my Father knew a guy from Hawaii who he actually met at work (my father was working at the Veterans Administration Hospital after leaving the Navy) that taught Judo. The gentleman's name was "Moon" Watanabe. The only problem was that "Moon" taught only adults at the time (unlike today, it was very rare to see a child in a martial arts school and I was 11 yrs. old). So, to prove that I was "serious" about training and could handle it, "Moon" trained me at his home first on the weekends, learning "break falls" in a spare room he had covered with tatami (straw mats) and when he found out I could retain what I learned and actually handle falling and doing it correctly. He took me to his school located on the 2nd floor of a Y.M.C.A. There, I flourished with the training which was strenuous at times with no air conditioning to speak of, except for open windows and a water cooler located on the first floor which we had to get permission, of course, to get to. My gi was always drenched with sweat after training, but after cooling off a bit, "Moon" would take me back to his home where I would wait for my Father to pick me up. I really got to know "Moon" and his family during those times and I was treated like one of the family. It was only years later when I left him that I learned from a new member joining my WHFSC, the iconic Professor

Wally Jay, that "Moon's" first name was actually Yasutoshi and that "Moon" was his nickname. he was also a former All Hawaiian Islands Judo champion, as well as a sumo champion, pre-Statehood....All those years with him and I never knew it! Not once did I

“If you think about it, one of the qualities of a good martial artist is to have good flow or rhythm (along with good power and timing).”



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hear him brag about anything, although it was obvious to me that he was “clearly” a genius on the mat, especially in randori where he would display some confounding athleticism that would leave you scratching your head and thinking silently to yourself, “now, how in the heck did he do that?!” After “Moon”, I would train with Professor Sig Kufferath who became the appointed leader of Danzan Ryu Jiu-Jitsu through the American Judo and Ju-Jitsu Federation after the death of its founder, Professor Seishiro “Henry” Okazaki who died without leaving an inheritor. He was another genius who was also developing his own Art at the time called Nikko Jiu-Jitsu. While “Moon” taught me how to break balance and throw larger individuals with leverage. Sig taught me the fighting aspects of Ju-Jitsu and although I studied other Arts such as American Karate which was devoid of any forms and Jing Jow Pai (Eagle Claw Kung Fu), attaining Red Sash level which was just under Black Sash, these two instructors made the biggest impression on me. Sig and “Moon” honored me later in life, by becoming members of my World Head of Family/Sokeship Council. Something rarely heard of in martial arts where an instructor joins a student’s group.



What do you consider your greatest accomplishments in martial arts?

No doubt, the founding and development of Guam’s Art of San-Jitsu. As well as the formation of America’s first internationally recognized grandmasters/masters Council, the “World Head of Family/Sokeship Council”. An organization that evolved from a successful organization I had at the time called the “American Martial Arts Association” in 1992. Mike Stone who was an Honorary Member of the AMAA was the first real member of the WHFSC (other than myself) when his membership was transferred from the AMAA to the WHFSC. Now it has hundreds of elite members worldwide

How would you like to be remembered?

As a good and likeable gentleman who was an innovator that did his part in fostering the growth of martial arts in Guam and America. 🐉