

TURNING
POINT

BY HERB BORKLAND

IN THIS INSPIRING MONTHLY COLUMN, WE EXAMINE THE PIVOTAL POINT IN A PROMINENT BLACK BELT'S CAREER THAT TOOK HIM OR HER ONTO MAJOR SUCCESS IN MARTIAL ARTS BUSINESS, SPORTS OR FILMS

Cezar Borkowski: Defying His Father, Who Wanted Him to Become a Doctor or Lawyer

Canadian Hanshi Cezar Borkowski is a 9th dan certified by Japan's All Okinawan Karate-do Federation. He's the International Director of the Ryu Kyu No Kaze Society, dedicated to the preservation and propagation of traditional martial arts, and Director of Karate for the World Kobudo Federation, the largest global, multi-discipline martial arts organization.

A former internationally-ranked competitor and six-time Canadian Champion, Borkowski was rated number-one by the North American Sport Karate Association (NASKA). He authored Modern Shotokan Karate, co-wrote The Complete Idiot's Guide to Martial Arts, and researched and edited History and Traditions of Okinawan Martial Arts. In 1972, Borkowski founded Northern Karate, today one of the world's most respected martial arts and personal-development organizations with 9,000 members. His videos include the Essential Okinawan Kobudo series. He lectures internationally on martial arts and related topics.

Herb Borkland: Where did you grow up, and what did your father do?

Cezar Borkowski: I was born in Warsaw, Poland in 1956, when the country was still Communist. My father was a self-employed businessman. Our family immigrated to Canada in 1966.

HB: How did you first hear about martial arts?

CB: At age five or six in Poland, at a National Book Fair, my older brother, Alex, bought a judo how-to book. The last page was a picture of two men in white gis, one poking the eye of the other, with a caption that read, "The most deadly form of judo is called karate." That did it. I knew I had to learn karate.

When we arrived in Canada, I began studying at the YMCA and then met Sensei Monty Guest. As a teenager, I studied at the main dojo of Master Masami Tsuruoka, the "Father of Canadian Karate." It became my religion. I trained every day. I received my black belt in December 1971 and, one year later, took over a class of unruly teenagers nobody else wanted to teach. So, I was a student one day, the sensei the next.

In 1972, I established Northern Karate. We've grown from those few teens in an after-school program to 13 full-time dojos and 9,000 active students. We feature a blend of traditional Okinawan karate and kobudo, boxing, submission grappling and silat.

In 1986, I ranked number-one in the nation. What mattered was earning the respect of my American peers: Jeff Smith, Pat Worley, Larry Carnahan. We became friends, and I became the first President of NASKA [North American Sport Karate Association].

HB: Turning point?

CB: A conversation I had with my pragmatic European father, who wanted me to become a doctor or lawyer. I told him I wanted to teach martial arts. He didn't speak to me for a few weeks. And he never came to the schools or tournaments. Finally, he stopped by and saw the thousands [of people] at his son's tournament and asked me, "Did everybody pay to get in?" "Yes," I answered. He said, "You're a success," then turned and left.

HB: Future?

CB: I want to get to 20 schools. It's about success. Our motto is, "Under-promise and over-deliver."

I'm more people-oriented than number-oriented. I have umpteen business associates. You bet on an individual, and so mentor him. There were problems in the past with people willing to wear the uniform and the patch, but their ideology was a little different. There were crises of faith. Others

who work for me started as white belts and have put in 25 or 30 years with me. Who can say where franchise ends and family begins?

My personal mantra is, "Do good by doing well." Charity needs to be part of daily practice. When you improve the community around you, you succeed. If you don't do that, I think you've failed as a martial arts leader. 🏆

