

STREET-FIGHTING MEN FIND A NEW GROOVE

BY JERILYN COVERT '04

What's more surprising than a mathematics professor highly skilled in street-fighting techniques? Perhaps that he also trains a wheelchair-bound computer-science major. Together, Dickinson's Dick Forrester and Nathaniel Klein '05 are exploring some new dimensions of an ancient martial art.

Forrester, an assistant professor of mathematics who specializes in operations research, holds a third-degree black belt in Chidokwan karate—a blend of traditional and modern techniques that, he says, emphasizes “practical street-oriented self-defense, sport competition and artistic expression.”

Forrester has practiced karate for almost 20 years. He started when he was 12 because all his friends were joining the Alfred University karate club and he “didn’t want to be left out.”

The 31-year-old attended Alfred, about 10 miles from his home in Almond, N.Y., so he could continue to train under his sensei, or karate teacher. In 1999, he founded a karate club at Clemson University, where he earned his Ph.D. and met his wife, Jill, who works in Dickinson’s admissions department and holds a purple belt in Chidokwan karate.

In the spring of 2003, just one semester after arriving here, Forrester organized a karate club at Dickinson. He hung posters, sent e-mails and generated enough student interest to establish the club, which meets twice a week in the Kline Center loft.

Each session about a dozen barefoot students, many of whom don a white gi and yellow belt, train in the martial arts. Along with basic training and self-defense skills, the students practice sparring, which involves mock fighting with another student, and kata—Japanese for “form”—a pre-arranged set of movements that places the student in combat with an imaginary opponent.

Such a training environment is not suitable for Klein, who was born with Larsen syndrome, characterized by severe muscle weakness and dislocations of the major joints. A mechanical wheelchair serves as

his means of transport.

Klein values karate as a way to strengthen himself physically. “I knew [karate] was something I could do, unlike most sports,” says the 20-year-old from Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.

He trains every Sunday afternoon in the Kline Center lobby, amidst the leather couches and chairs that Forrester arranges for him.

“I used to be in a club for disabled people, and we practiced karate,” says Klein. “That karate was developed for disabled people.” He and Forrester improvise. “Each week it’s like we’re coming up with new things,” Klein explains.

He trains with arnis sticks, 26-inch-long bamboo rods. The movements that Forrester has adapted for him are geared toward realistic self-defense scenarios.

“The sticks offer a nice set of exercises and techniques he can do and are practical to do,” says Forrester, who focuses on Klein’s range of motion and suggests various blocks based on Klein’s abilities.

“Often, Nathaniel and I work as a team,” explains Forrester. “I develop a specific block or strike, and Nathaniel, who obviously has a better understanding of his range of motion, says, ‘I can do that, but I think it would be more practical if I did it this way instead.’ In this way, we developed a great working relationship.”

Klein, who has noticed an increase in upper-body strength in the last year, says that “the training has helped, not only in teaching me how to use the sticks or my

arms to defend [myself] but also [in maneuvering] my chair.”

Klein’s wheelchair moves “like swiveling hips,” says Forrester. “It’s amazing the extra power you get with the centrifugal force.” At one point, the sensei thought their “sticks were going to break; [Klein] had so much power” in his blocks.

As Klein pivots his wheelchair and blocks Forrester’s fake blows, he smiles in reaction to Forrester’s emphatic “bang” and “bam.”

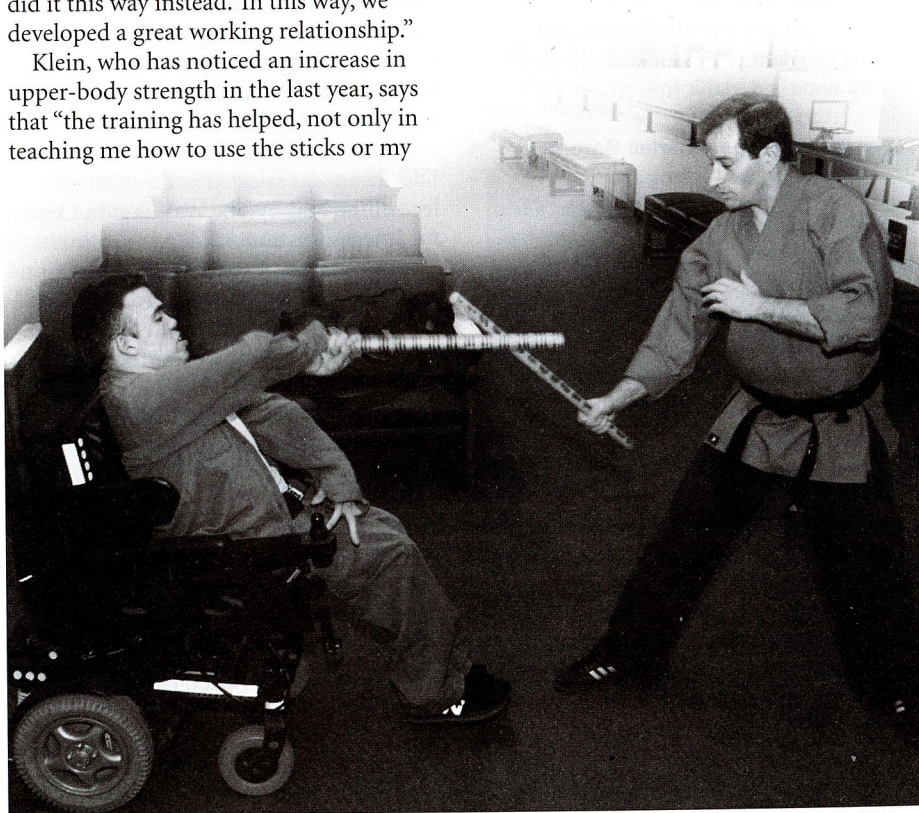
“He always makes fun of me because I make sound effects,” Forrester comments with a smile.

Forrester insists that his students take karate seriously, “make a commitment, come to classes and really try hard.”

“It’s like mathematics,” Forrester adds. “If you miss two weeks of lessons, you’ll not know what’s going on, and that’s not going to work.”

Karate complements his academic career because it teaches focus. “It’s not just about [the] physical,” Forrester says. “It really can help with academics as well.”

It “teaches confidence,” he continues, “the kind of confidence that doesn’t necessarily come from other sports, that comes from knowing you can defend yourself.” ●



Nathaniel Klein '05 (left) deflects a blow from Prof. Dick Forrester during a sparring session.