



# ISKF MOUNTAIN STATES



## Eyes Up! Seeing the Big Picture

by Mark Tarrant

At the headquarters dojo in Arvada we often talk about the concept of seeing the big picture while training, particularly during kumite drills and free sparring. In addition to martial arts, progress in many areas of life can be advanced by seeing the big picture – that is, by not focusing on the less important details or minutiae. In karate this becomes evident while sparring. Dropping the eyes or zeroing in on an opponent's every movement can be dangerous. It's usually taught to keep the eyes up, at least as high as chest level, and not to "eyeball" every technique with the hopes of blocking or evading attacks. The danger of lowering the eyes is that things seem to speed up, and by focusing on our partner's every movement, we risk the chance of being hit by something we never see. Raising the eyes and using more of the peripheral vision tends to slow things down as well as lessen the chance of being hit by a technique we never see coming. It seems counterintuitive, but often the clearest perspective is from the outside of a situation. The person deepest into a certain subject might seem to have the best insight, but that vantage point can be problematic. Being in the middle of the fray, one is often blind to his own biases and can be bogged down by focusing on nonessential things. In karate, we do our best to remove those blinders, to reduce that tunnel vision, by raising the eyes and getting the bigger picture.

Many years ago, when I was just starting to understand this concept, I was watching a tournament with Dan Mueller, our (continued on page 2)

December 2025  
Newsletter

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region's highest-ranking student and a world-class competitor. From the bleachers, with the matches going on below, he was able to predict the exact technique that was coming from the competitors a second or two before they threw it. He was accurate 90% of the time. That was very impressive and seemed almost magical at the time. Being farther away from chaos on the floor gave us a clearer perspective of the situation. When he taught, he was adamant about the position of the eyes. For him, it was imperative to always look directly at his opponent's eyes. Doing this was completely unnatural for me, but when I finally tried it, it worked almost flawlessly. It never became natural

for me, and I still have to make a conscious effort to do it, but it continues to work. Simply raising the eyes changes everything for the better. If you find yourself at a plateau in sparring (it works for kata and kihon, too!), experiment with raising your eyes. Try looking at least as high as chest level – or higher yet, look at the throat and notice your opponent's breathing patterns. Some people even find it best to look at the opponent's eyes. The goal is to make things slow down, to see things coming, to gain better control of the situation, and to improve your karate. That's what seeing the big picture is all about. Eyes up!



**Don't think, feel....it is like a finger pointing a way to the moon. Don't concentrate on the finger or you will miss all that heavenly glory!**

**(Bruce Lee)**

## Technical Paper: Strengthening Motivation

by Lara Zimmerman

*The following essay is an edited version of Lara Zimmerman's Instructor Training Report #34.*

New students walk through the dojo doors eager to learn karate only to quit just months after starting. This could be because what they've seen in movies or on TV formed their expectations of karate-do training, or they didn't have a support group who understood their reasons to start karate in the first place, to help keep them motivated to train. The teacher (sensei) who has a clear understanding of the student's why—their reasons for training—can remind them of their goals.

When new students join the karate-do school (dojo), the sensei or a senior student (senpai) should find out what brought the student to the dojo. Most who start training want to learn self-defense, be active and healthy, get a black belt, and compete against others. Parents want their younger children to learn discipline. Once an instructor understands why students want to learn karate, they can start looking at ways to keep them motivated to train.

Keeping the students motivated starts with the sensei teaching them in a way that tailors to their goals; with multiple people in the dojo, it can take multiple days to cover each student's desire to train. While covering their reasons for training, the sensei takes the opportunity to explain what karate-do is about and what the sensei's goals are for the students. Shifting the student's mind from having an end sight in karate to understanding the lifelong endeavor of training with each class, an instructor can see the shift in the students' motivation. There are five ways a sensei motivates the students during class:

Sensei will often give short benchmarks or goals to individual students for them to work toward. Keep the goals relative to the

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If you are working on something exciting that you really care about, you don't have to be pushed. The vision pulls you.

— STEVE JOBS

### Technical Paper (cont'd from page 2)

student, and do not make the goal so farfetched that the student would never reach it or take years to achieve. Give them little goals during their training to progress them toward the end goal. Each kyu (color belt) test sets little goals, and the sensei will help them progress with small goals for each training, from remembering to keep their draw hand in the proper position to finishing the kata (form) they just learned by themselves.

Alongside the benchmarks for motivation, the sensei can praise a job well done. When a student works hard to overcome an obstacle, a quick "You got it!" can work that student's motivation into high drive. The repetition of karate training can make a student think they are not becoming better at the technique, so giving a positive comment can help drown out any negative thoughts the student may have about their technique and keep them motivated.



The way sensei conducts the class generally can motivate the students. The way they count can make the students work hard. The energy the sensei gives the students will be returned by the students to the sensei. Upbeat instruction keeps the students in the right mindset for class. The instructor's voice communicates confidence in what they are teaching and confidence in the students' ability to reach their goals. A hesitant instructor creates confusion in the students, and they will lose their motivation to continue training. Using the voice to control the class is the easiest way for an instructor to keep everyone motivated and on the same page. If you want them to move fast, count fast. If you want them to slow their technique and focus, count slower. Sensei can quickly motivate the class by the power of their voice.

There are times when a student needs constructive criticism. Punishment is never a motivation, so we do not want to punish our students for not performing to our standards. Criticism needs to be done gently, as some students do not respond well to constructive criticism and quickly lose motivation and become

defensive. One example of a way to give constructive feedback to the student is if they struggle with correctly placing their draw hand, the sensei can walk up and tap their draw hand. This will force the student to notice their error and move their hand to the correct position. The use of mirrors in the dojo also gives constructive criticism. Asking the students to watch as they do their technique in the mirror and observe the leaning or moving up and down will help them notice their mistakes on their own. A handful of students appreciate a more direct approach, where the instructor tells them precisely what they're doing incorrectly and how they can fix it.

Visual aids can motivate students in their training. The visual aid can be from a black belt performing a flashy kata or technique, taking the student to a national tournament to observe other students perform, or watching karate videos on YouTube. Even reading one of the many inspirational books we have about karate-do can inspire students who may be struggling to find the motivation to keep training.

The sensei motivates their students through many means. It may not seem like they are the primary source of motivation, but from the ever-changing drills to the way they count, instructors motivate every student who walks through the doors of their dojo. With the different reasons why each student came to karate and the different levels of experience and ability, they can reach out and motivate every student in one way or another during a single class period. This is why the instructor is sensei; they, too, have struggled, yet they learned the way from their sensei, and now they are showing their students.



# 5 Questions: Gordon McDaniel

## 1. What is/was it about Shotokan karate that initially appealed to you and inspired you to practice it?

I was living with my girlfriend in the '70s and she started a belly dancing class, Tuesdays and Thursdays. So to keep myself busy, I took up classes in karate, Tuesday's and Thursdays. I totally enjoyed it! That was 50 years ago. She gave up belly dancing and me after a few years. I continued to train.

## 2. What was the atmosphere like at the Denver dojo when you started and how did that evolve through the years/decades?

After my instructor had a pinched nerve and was forced to quit teaching, I was driving down South Broadway and saw a sign: "KARATE." I went in and watched a Tuesday night class. Tuesday was sparring day! And I got my eyes opened! Shotokan was what I wanted—rough and aggressive. After class, Cathy Cline asked if I would like to come downstairs and meet Sensei Yaguchi. Downstairs, she asked if I'd like a beer. I said yes! We talked a while. I could not understand anything sensei said, but he laughed and smiled and when she asked if I'd like another beer, I said yes, and an application, too!

## 3. Who were some of the biggest influences in your karate life (instructors, peers, idols), and in what ways did they influence you?

Sensei Yaguchi, of course, was the biggest. The students he gathered added influence—Dan Mueller, Derrek Aragon, Bruce Green, Cathy Cline, and Lucy

Queeney. I later met my sempais Jeff Heermans and Mark Tarrant.

## 4. What are some of the highlights or most memorable experiences in your karate life?

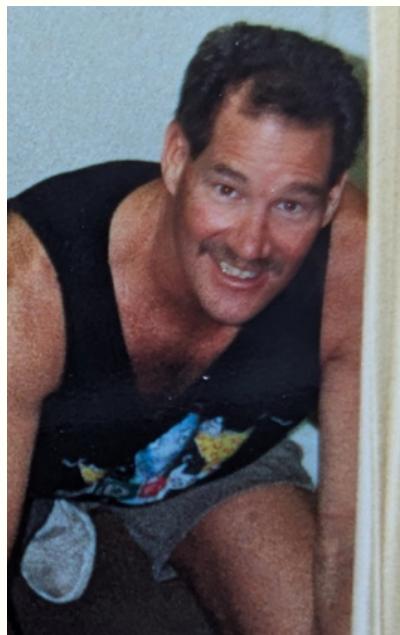
For about 5 years I traveled to medium-sized cities doing sales. I would spend two or three days in each city where I looked up local karate classes to work out. I visited maybe 250 different dojos with many different styles. Some styles were good. Shotokan was best. But everyone was nice and inviting. I made some great friends. Karate is a great common ground.

## 5. For whatever reason, many karate-ka do not appreciate boxing and some even mock it. We know that you and Sensei Tarrant are a big fans of boxing. What is it about boxing that fascinates you, and in what ways does boxing offer a valuable perspective on karate or martial arts in general?

Boxing as a formal martial art can be traced back to gladiatorial days. It was a stand alone sport. It became more refined and rules added until 1800s and John L. Sullivan became heavy weight world champion. Today, it's not unusual for a famous boxer to make 50 million dollars in one night! No other sport comes even close.

## 6. Bonus question: Please tell us about what karate-do means to you and the role it has played in your life (for better or worse!).

I have always asserted the discipline that Karate-do gave me carried over in my business life. A very necessary component for success.



## Spotlight on Youth: Coyle Uchanski

**Let's start with a basic introduction. How old are you, what is your Karate rank, and how long have you been training?**

My name is Coyle Uchanski, I'm 13 years old, I'm 2nd Kyu and have been training for 3.5 years at the Fort Collins dojo with Senseis Brian Davis and Marius Lehene.

**What got you interested in starting your Karate training?**

I had been wanting to try a martial art for some time when I saw an ISKF class listed in the city of Fort Collins' recreation catalog. I joined and I practiced for a while and really loved it, and it just stuck.

**You have embraced tournament participation, even choosing the 2024 Nationals as your second tournament! What got you interested in competition?**

Sensei Davis announced there was going to be a tournament soon at Lone Tree; I was nervous and didn't think I wanted to go. But then Sensei held a mock tournament at the dojo and I realized how fun it was and decided to sign up for the competition at Lone Tree that weekend. I did well at that tournament and decided to go to Nationals in Las Vegas the day of the deadline. Through this I've realized how fun competition is and getting to spend time with the Mountain States people from other dojos and learning from them has been a really valuable experience. Now I try to compete at most every tournament to learn and spend as much time as possible with other students of karate.



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Photography

**What do you enjoy most about competition? What would you say to other young people who are maybe on the fence about trying competition?**

Competition allows me to spend time with a wonderful group of people and always learn and improve. Even though it might be scary in the moment it is actually really fun to compete.

Nervousness about performance might get in the way of competing, but no matter whether you come away with medals or not, it is still a ton of fun and a chance to learn more. Winning medals is really nice but it's not a big deal if you don't. The point of competition is to improve on your best and not necessarily to medal.

**Earlier this year, you spent six months in New Zealand and continued to train over there. Who did you train with, and what was that like? How was it similar to training here and how was it different?**

I trained with Sensei Trevor Foster with JKS Christchurch at the Te Kura O Wairakei school. It was a much smaller dojo than I've ever trained in before. JKS had some slight differences from ISKF rules. Training was much more intense, we did free sparring at all levels and ages, and Sensei Foster demanded near-perfection in everything his students did because he knew we were capable of achieving more. Most of the moves in kata were the same, but there were a few small differences that were easy to adjust when I returned to Colorado and ISKF rules. Sensei Foster definitely pushed me to my limits and really helped me learn about tactics in free sparring. I really enjoyed spending time with him and I learned a lot that will give me more confidence when I start free sparring under ISKF rules once I'm old enough and have the rank to do so.

(cont'd on page 9)

## Back in Time: Sensei Dennis Bower

by Laura Davis

One of the most dedicated teachers in the Mountain States region, Sensei Dennis Bower was the founding and long-time instructor in Fort Collins, teaching his club for more than 30 years prior to retiring. Along the way, he impacted the lives of countless students and fellow instructors, leading by example with his integrity, work ethic, and quiet humor.

Dennis was born in Denver in 1939. Growing up in the shadow of World War II perhaps influenced his life direction, as he chose the United States Marine Corps for his vocation as an adult. His affiliation with the Marines was a lifelong source of pride and commitment that he took very seriously, and he carried the principles of hard work, dedication and loyalty with him into civilian life.

His service in the Marine Corps took him overseas, and two of his service posts shaped the path of his life going forward: Norway and Japan. In Norway, as Dennis stood guard duty at the US Embassy, he met his future wife Eva, whom he married in 1967 in Virginia. In Japan, he met Sensei Hitoshi Akiyama, with whom he began his journey in karate. Sensei Akiyama was a student of Shotokan karate founder Master Gichin Funakoshi, and taught karate to many Marines at that time. They were fortunate to be permitted to train in any traditional Japanese dojo, and even more fortunate to train under a direct student of Master Funakoshi himself.

The early karate years were far from easy in some ways, and Dennis would sometimes share tales of the rigorous training and unexpected challenges that his sensei would put him through. Sensei Akiyama's teaching style was evidently repetition based, as Dennis would share stories of afternoons spent doing hundreds



of punches, hundreds of kicks, and countless repetitions of kata, all under the critical and unforgiving eye of his instructor. If the twinkle in his eye and soft chuckle were anything to go by, however, Dennis had no regrets about the training regimen (although it may be noted that he did not feel the need to be quite so strict with his own students when he started his own dojo!). Never afraid of hard work, and with a keen appreciation of the fact that anything worth doing takes effort, Dennis applied himself to karate, gained the respect of his first instructor, and was rewarded with a solid foundation upon which to build his later practice.

Upon retirement from active duty, Dennis and Eva relocated to Fort Collins, where he worked for Hewlett-Packard as a security guard. It was during this time that Dennis became a student of Master Yutaka Yaguchi, another student of Master Funakoshi and one of the first graduates of the ISKF Instructor Training program, who had opened a dojo in Denver in 1974. Their partnership as sensei and kohai would last for decades, marked by mutual respect and loyalty. Under Sensei Yaguchi's guidance, Dennis attained his dan ranks, ultimately achieving the rank of 6th degree black belt.

Master Yaguchi encouraged Dennis to start a dojo of his own in Fort Collins, and so began a legacy of over 30 years of instruction. His first club shared quarters with a gymnastics academy, but he was uncomfortable with the complicated financial arrangements at that location. He began looking into alternative situations that could provide more consistent attendance along with reduced cost of operation, and eventually formed a partnership with the Fort Collins Parks and Recreation Department. The Shotokan Karate class Dennis established has become the longest continuously running program in the City's Recreation department, with 30+ years under Sensei Bower and another 10 years (and counting!) under Senseis Brian Davis and Marius Lehene.

The early years of ISKF Fort Collins were building years, as Dennis introduced Shotokan karate to an ever-changing student group, slowly building up greater membership and an increasing number of loyal students who became the backbone of his dojo. Being run through a recreation department for the city, the teaching style was more relaxed and less demanding than in some traditional dojos. Master Yaguchi told him at one point that he should not attempt to duplicate the training style of dojos like his own in Denver: "Family feeling, with parents and children, is a more relaxed feeling - more fun!" As sensei, Dennis



(cont'd from p.3)

managed to walk the line perfectly, providing traditional instruction and an excellent karate foundation with a good sense of humor and never-failing support for his students and their efforts. Thanks to his encouragement, many went on to successfully attain their Shodan and higher, and no one was more proud of his students' accomplishments than he was.

Always eager to continue his karate journey as a student as well as an instructor, Dennis would drive to Denver to train with Sensei Yaguchi once a week whenever possible. Sensei Yaguchi also administered all of the kyu exams for the Fort Collins dojo for many years, as a way to check the progress of his students and give guidance and feedback. Sensei Bower later completed the Instructor Training course in his own right, earning his Instructor Certification as well as his Examiner Certification. He continued to train with Sensei Yaguchi, and was a faithful attendee of regional events including Kangeiko and the annual Summer Camp, as well as Master Camp in Philadelphia. He constantly emphasized to his students that karate was a lifelong learning endeavor, and led by example as he took advantage of every opportunity to train with higher level instructors and a wide range of fellow karateka.

Sensei Bower had a special appreciation for self-defense and bunkai, the application of kata. One story that stands out was from Dennis' yondan examination at the annual Mountain States Summer Camp in Greeley, Colorado. Sensei James Field was the attacker for the self-defense portion of the exam. Sensei Field was legendary for his strong and intense style of karate, and was an intimidating attacker during examinations. In response to one of Sensei Field's

attacks, Dennis managed to surprise everyone by actually throwing Sensei Field! It was the talk of the camp, and continues to be a memorable event for many from that era. However, here is where Sensei Bower's inherent modesty was apparent. He was intensely embarrassed at the attention, and honestly considered it a lack of control that should not be praised!

One of the lasting legacies of Sensei Bower in our region is our annual March Tournament. It was his idea to provide a regional tournament along with dan testing opportunities, and under the supervision of Sensei Yaguchi, Dennis hosted the tournament in Fort Collins for many years beginning in the early 1980's, continuing as Tournament Director after it was moved to Denver. The March Tournament is an invaluable asset to our region, bringing us all together for "special training" but also providing the opportunity to socialize and reinforce the tight bonds and high spirit for which our region is noted. In later years, Sensei Bower trained his students, Brian and Laura Davis, in the details of running the event, which they later took over. He encouraged them to mentor others in turn, as he felt that tournaments provided such an important resource for everyone. Among the helpful details he passed along were tips on how to keep the senior Senseis at the head table happy! The fine art of making good competition brackets, training of ringside table workers, and staging of competitors were all concepts that were addressed, but arguably the most important, in terms of tournament management, was how to keep things running smoothly and quickly. Anyone who worked a tournament with Dennis will tell you that nothing bothered him more than seeing a ring sitting empty!

In his later years, Dennis began to ease back on some of his activities and responsibilities, passing them on to his peers and his senior students. Still actively instructing until his official retirement, he mentored his senior black belts, encouraging them to complete the Instructor Training course, observing their teaching and giving feedback, and ever and always encouraging them to continue their karate journeys and keep a straight and true course.

(cont'd on page 9)



## (cont'd from p.8)

When he felt the time had come to retire, Dennis did so with grace and consideration. Having passed his dojo down to his proteges, he empowered them to teach in such a way as to make it their own, while trusting them to honor his legacy by keeping true to the basic principles of Shotokan karate, both in execution and in philosophy. He told us, at that time, that he felt it was time for the next generation to step up and for their voices to be heard, as it was essential for karate to evolve along with the times, and felt that younger perspectives and energy were necessary and valuable.

Always self-effacing and humble in his approach, Sensei Bower left an indelible impression on his students. His passing in 2024 left a deep void, but his legacy will live far beyond his years.



(cont'd from p.5)

**Did you compete while over there?**

I competed in both kata and kumite at two regional tournaments for the South Island. The first kumite event came as a shock because of the free sparring and I didn't feel fully prepared for that. But by my second event I felt a little more confident and was starting to use more skills from practice. Sadly my visa expired two days before the New Zealand national tournament so I could not compete there.

**What do you feel is the biggest benefit you receive from your Karate training? What do you like most about the dojo?**

Karate definitely helps me improve in both discipline and physical ability. It pushes me to my limits and makes me realize my limits are further than I'd thought. At the dojo I mostly just enjoy spending time with other people who are also pushing themselves and learning from fellow students every time I meet with them for a training session. We help each other out.

**What would you say to other young people interested in Karate?**

If you're interested in it, just give it a shot and see how you like it. Even if it is hard you might find that you love it.



“

You've got to think about big things while you're doing small things so that all the small things go in the right direction.

— ALVIN TOFFLER

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**TO BE A CHAMPION,  
YOU HAVE TO SEE THE  
BIG PICTURE. IT'S NOT  
ABOUT WINNING AND  
LOSING; IT'S ABOUT  
EVERY DAY HARD  
WORK AND ABOUT  
THRIVING ON A  
CHALLENGE. IT'S  
ABOUT EMBRACING THE  
PAIN THAT YOU'LL  
EXPERIENCE AT THE  
END OF A RACE AND  
NOT BEING AFRAID**

The best way to simplify things is to step back and look at the big picture.

THE PROBLEM WITH  
TUNNEL VISION  
IS YOU MISS  
ALL THE COOL STUFF  
OUTSIDE THE  
TUNNEL

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The ISKF Mountain States Region is composed of 14 member dojos in Montana, Colorado, and Oklahoma. Mountain States dojos follow traditional teaching and training methods of the ISKF, host regional events including tournaments and training camps, and support a regional competition team that participates in national and international events. We are administered by an elected regional Board of Directors in conjunction with the Chief Instructor.

The Mountain States Region was founded in 1974, with the ISKF of Colorado in Denver. The Mountain States has produced many national team members, multiple national champions, and members of the Shihankai.

**Learn more at  
[iskfmountainstates.com](http://iskfmountainstates.com)**



ISKF MOUNTAIN STATES  
**KANGEIKO**  
**2026**

January 26th-31st

6:00am - 7:00am  
Monday-Saturday

**ISKF COLORADO**  
226 S BROADWAY  
DENVER CO 80209

**\$50.00/ adult**  
(15 and under: \$30)

Please make checks payable to ISKF

There will be a Kata tournament and party after training on Saturday!

*The purpose of the training is to assist you in setting your goals and foundation for the new year.  
Don't miss it!*

**ORDER YOUR  
ISKF MOUNTAIN STATES  
TEAM JACKET!**

**ORDER DEADLINE: JANUARY 8, 2026**  
**ORDER FORM:**  
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## **2025 Mountain States ISKF Nationals Results**

### **Youth Individual:**

Kumite  
 Matthias - ISKF Montana - Gold  
 Kata  
 Matthias - ISKF Montana - Silver

### **Collegiate Individual:**

Kumite  
 Hanako - ISKF Lone Tree - Gold  
 Kata  
 Gwennie - ISKF Fort Collins - Gold  
 Hanako - ISKF Lone Tree - Silver

### **Adult Individual:**

Kumite  
 Julian - ISKF Arvada - Bronze  
 Kata  
 Julian - ISKF Arvada - Silver  
 Team Kata  
 Julian, Martin, and Michael - Qualified for finals - forfeit due to injury

### **Senior Individual:**

Men's Kumite  
 Phuc - ISKF Lone Tree - Silver  
 Men's Kata  
 Phuc - ISKF Lone Tree - Gold  
 Michitaka - ISKF Arvada - Bronze  
 Ken - ISKF Fort Collins - Qualified for finals - Forfeit due to injury  
 Women's Kumite  
 Ruth - ISKF Lone Tree - Gold  
 Monica - ISKF Monument - Silver  
 Womens Kata  
 Janice - ISKF Arvada - Silver  
 Team Kata  
 Phuc, Michitaka, and Monica - Gold  
 Men's Team Kumite  
 Phuc, Michitaka, and John - Gold  
 Women's Team Kumite  
 Ruth, Lara, Monica - Gold

### **Fighting Spirit Award:**

**Michael Berberich**

### **Meritorious Service Award for Mountain States: Monica Silva**

### **RokuDan:**

**Janice Dickter**

**CONGRATULATIONS MOUNTAIN STATES!!!**