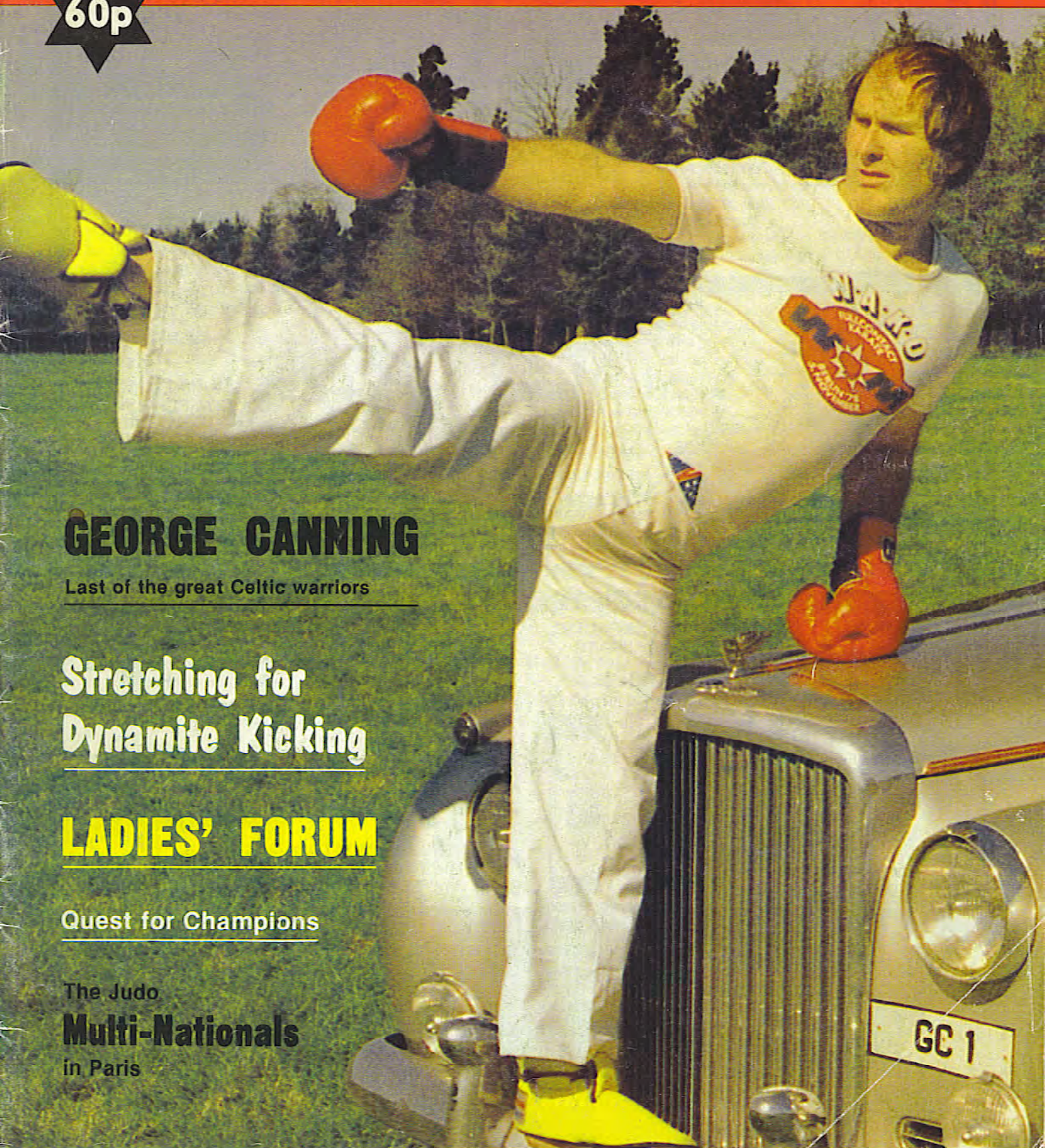


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FIGHTERS

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GEORGE CANNING

Last of the great Celtic warriors

**Stretching for
Dynamite Kicking**

LADIES' FORUM

Quest for Champions

The Judo
Multi-Nationals
in Paris

George Canning—last of the great Celtic Warriors

By TIM WARD

The Irish have always been known as tough. But the combination of Irish or Celtic toughness and karate discipline makes them tougher than average. A person who combines both is George Canning, the 5th Dan Head of The Irish Karate Federation.

George is renowned internationally not only as a great karate man but as a fabulous host, who shows great generosity to others. His sense of humour is a legend and George can be clowning like Chaplin one moment and deadly serious the next. He even has another side to his personality when he is teaching as he takes on the mannerisms and accents of the man he admires most, namely Meiji Suzuki.

George is now totally open minded about his martial arts and perhaps this upsets a few closed-minded traditionalists. But for a man of 42 he is probably one of the fittest and flexible I have seen at that age. He is deceptive because it is normal for someone of a large frame to be slow and inflexible. George is the opposite. He does some amazing exercises, leading his class from the front. His quick, flicking, kicks can dust around the face like lightning.

Private success

Not only is George Canning a good Karate man but he is also a successful and flamboyant businessman. His Bentley and Mercedes are a sign of that and his fabulous two floor Dojo which would do justice to many a large British City. But George is not in karate just for the money; he treats his students like family and they respect him for it. The size of his ladies' classes at his Dojo reflect that he has the utmost respect for women and they in turn respect him also. But George is also outspoken and controversial in his opinions on the



A victorious warrior George Canning, top left, with Walter Seaton alongside, Jim O'Brien, bottom left and Chris O'Sullivan.



George clowning with IKF President John Brennan



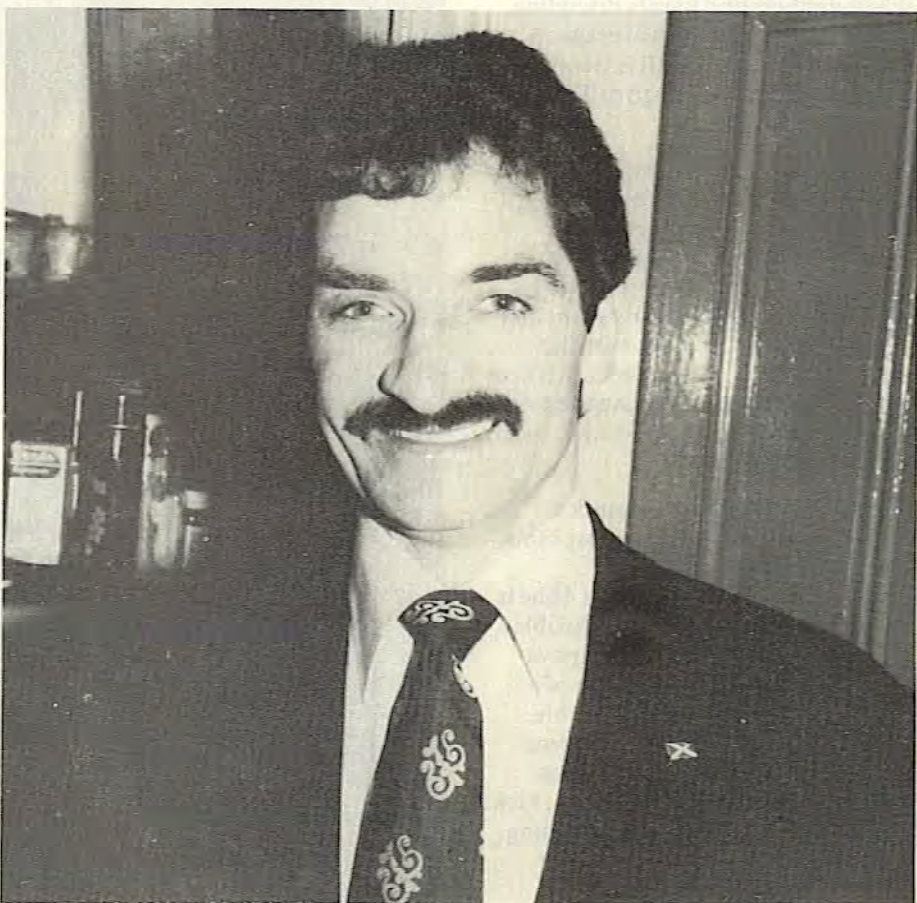
Joe Canning 3rd Dan (left) Brian Carson (Centre) vice-president and owner of Toro Bravo restaurant Dublin, with George

martial arts which, by their directness, may upset a few people who are not so broadminded.

I asked George how he first started training in karate? He answered: "Well, when I left the British Army I was fairly fit. I left in 1965 and moved around and worked at various jobs. After a time I felt that I had lost my fitness and put on rather too much weight. I had always been interested in the martial arts since I had seen some whilst I was in the Army and I had also done some boxing, so I decided to take it up. I first started training with a Japanese called Peter Suzuki, who was over in Dublin. I learned the basics and ran his club for him. Then there was a big split between the Japanese, so I stayed with Meiji Suzuki and more or less taught myself. I also trained with Walter Seaton who taught me a lot. So I progressed from there, building up my organisation as I went along.

I started the IKF with a chap called Brendan Kelly. Brendan already had the IKF but we built it up into a bigger organisation. We had clubs down in the South of Ireland and, as higher grades came through, we opened more clubs, and then we opened clubs in Northern Ireland. So I suppose I was a bit like a builder building houses, I laid the foundation and built the clubs and moved along. So today we've got about fifty clubs with about twelve in Northern Ireland."

I then asked George if he felt that his Army training had come in useful. He replied: "Yes, it did, I learned the art of self defence but the self discipline was the most important. I learned weapon training, using knives and stuff like that. In other words, the normal stuff taught in the Army."



Sean Dent 1st dan Irish film and TV stage student of George clowning

We then talked about the setting up of George's full time Dojo. He went on "This was established three years ago and I now have two floors. If I could have more of the building I'd have three floors, we're that busy at the moment."

I could see by the classes that George had a very large number of women in his Dojo. I asked him about women's self defence, and he went on. "Women are very intelligent people, very critical of what they do. They are very hard people

to impress. I don't do the heavy stuff with the women. In other words, I wouldn't make them do fifty press ups or heavy stuff like that because physically a woman can be as strong as a man but at the same time it's easier to develop power in the man rather than the woman. The woman has more mental power than the man, is more relaxed, accepts techniques better and picks up the techniques. They are just more intelligent than we are, it's as simple as that."

"I give the women good exercise with plenty of stretching and also the type of training which will build up stamina. I think it is essential for the women to have good stamina so they can defend themselves against anybody. This is because most men are stronger than women so I make sure that the woman has the stamina to outlive the man in a difficult situation. I give them abdominal exercises, kicking exercises, punching exercises and self defence. I train their minds to react before the opponent actually comes into contact with them rather than when he has made contact.

I think that this training makes them a lot sharper. I train them to sense their attacker before he strikes so that they are prepared at all times. Most karatemen believe in one punch, one



George Canning with the All Japan Karate Do Vice President, Mr. Fuji.

kick, but I believe in them all. Obviously this depends upon the attacker. Under certain circumstances they would probably break at attacker's limb or render him helpless. So my techniques are designed for this, not to kill an opponent, so that he is rendered helpless in the shortest possible time."

"The most important thing for women is not to get into the situation where they are likely to be attacked. They have to go through life understanding that there are certain things that are open to them and other things that are not. If they obey the basic rules that I set down for them then they are less likely to get into trouble. In other words, I tell them 'never go into company where there is likely to be trouble, be careful who you associate with, never accept lifts in cars unless you know the person well.

If you visit a disco, go home with a friend. If you take a lift with a person make sure that you tell someone where you are going! In other words, women should behave like ladies, otherwise they are open to so many things. If they don't behave like ladies then they have nobody to blame but themselves. Very often when a woman has been attacked, and she talks about it, she discusses what happened afterwards, not the most important thing: what happened before. To me talking about what happened afterwards is a huge mistake."

I then asked George if he has any lady black belts in his club? He answered "I have one but she's retired as she had trouble with her knees. But I have one or two other students coming up. My black belt standard is very high. For a girl to get her black belt with me it is a great honour because she must stand equal to a man.



George in jovial mood. Dutch Team 1978 World Champions.



George demonstrates his stretching techniques.



"I don't give grades away easily. People say that I do, but I don't. A lot of male black belts have come to me from other styles. I tell them that if they want to train, to take the black belts off and then they can enter my Dojo. Most of them, when I have trained them can't do my exercises. If they can do them and can match me in my exercises, then I consider that they are worthy to wear a black belt in my Dojo."

I continued by asking George Canning "How did you rate your Japanese instructors?"

"Peter Suzuki was very good with beginners but his attitude was of the old school; very hard and he believed in contact. There were many other Japanese that I trained with but, as far as I am concerned, Meiji Suzuki is number one. There is nobody who can beat him—not all the Japanese put together. I only wish that I had started with him when I started karate. Not only would I be better, but I would be more successful and would have given

my own black belts better training over the years. I met Meiji through Tom Hibbert who has been a good friend to me. I brought Meiji over to Northern Ireland for a course which was successful and we just went on from there. He told me that my karate was rubbish when he first met me and he was right. In fact he gave me a series of exercises to do and next time he saw me he was very impressed. He has never graded me, but he has graded some of my students including my brother. Anyway, Meiji and I struck up a great relationship. He's a hard man and has a terrifically high standard in both himself and his karate. I consider that his exercises are not to be beaten by anybody."

We then discussed whether George sparred with Meiji a lot. "Yes, I've sparred with him a few times. He's an incredible man. He can do what he likes with you, anytime. I respect that in him, he's never hurt me but he has shown me the power that's in his body. Most times

when I've fought him I've been on the floor more times than off the floor.

I could never beat Meiji. Anybody else but him. I really mean that, he's an incredible man. He has, of course, also given me the business advice to make my club a better standard. This in turn helped to keep my students. I am the only person outside his organisation that he will allow to teach in his own Dojo. So he obviously thinks highly of my teaching capabilities. I have incorporated his training together with my own methods and that's what makes it enjoyable. The style is now much faster and better than traditional karate and I've got better and harder fighters."

"The first thing that I do is to get a man to relax. That means that he has more movements in him—in his body, and he will also have a lot more power. It also means that by being relaxed he's moving and he won't get hurt as much as when he's tense. What I have learned from Meiji is this type of training and I have both traditional and full contact fighters. I don't say that they are good—other people say so! It's as simple as that."

Stretching benefits

I then discussed George Canning's stretching exercises. I asked him "I've seen you doing stretching exercises; you're amazing for a man of 42. How long has it taken you to get like that?" George replied "I've worked with Meiji for about four years but spent only about two years stretching. I always lead my students stretching. Everything they do, I do. I normally stretch two classes per night or maybe three, depending on how busy I am. I also have afternoon classes with mainly private students, so I stretch with them. So I can stretch about four times a day. This means that I am improving all the time and this is why I enjoy it. Meiji says that it always pays to work with the students. The best student I find to work with is a private student. When there are only two of you he's looking at you and wants to match you. This also makes me try harder and in turn improves my own standard. Meiji states that it's always best to work with your students and this is why I enjoy it. It's easy to get lazy so that is why I make a point of working harder."

George Canning has now got many contacts over the world so I asked him "You have been all over the world with your fighters and also been involved in

international tournaments, so can you tell me of the places that you are involved with?" George answered "We're mostly in competition with the English because I reckon the English are the best in the world. I think that if we can beat the English then the rest of the world is no problem. I feel that it's only bias in refereeing that lets the other countries win.

I like to think that I am an unbiased referee. I just see two fighters, I don't see a country or who owns what, I'm not interested. Anyway, I think that the answer to tournaments is to make the fighters better, in that case they will fight better and use cleaner techniques because if the fighters were good the referees would not have to worry. I've seen the best sides lose because the referee doesn't like the country."

"I am now involved with WAKO. Mike Haig who is involved with WAKO introduced me to George Bruckner. Mike is a very close, good friend and I owe a lot of my success in the international world to Mike. From the introduction I've built up

my own relationship with the WAKO people, its fantastic! They are straightforward people and they tell you what they think of you and I like that. I also like the full contact. The semi contact is only in it's youth and has to be developed. But I feel that there is a great future in it.

I've nothing against the tradition of karate, only the people involved in it. As far as I am concerned many of them are small minded and egotistical. They place their ego above the well being of their students. If they were interested they would let their students go anywhere to train. I never stop my students going anywhere to train. In fact, I always tell them to do that, it's good education to go and train with another person or style."

Future events

I then asked George, "Have you any particular aims for the future?" He answered, smiling, "I will make WAKO strong in Ireland and WAKO

is bring in a lot of other styles which probably wouldn't be part of tradition. These will join WAKO and become good semi and full contact fighters. We've good fighters in Ireland and we've a lot of good people in karate generally, but we've got the wrong people at the top. And of course I have my forthcoming event in May this year. This will be a full and semi contact European Championship.

It will be one hell of a weekend. I reckon it will be booked out. It will be booked out because there's a minimum of five hundred competitors coming in from 11-14 countries. The public can expect a good show and anybody who can't get in, I feel sorry for them, it's as simple as that.

The event will be on Friday and Saturday 8th and 9th May. The Saturday will be a brilliant day because there will be a challenge cup for the contact fighters and also seven European title fights on the Saturday evening. There will be no demonstrations but looking at the contact fighters will be demonstration



The successful IKF Team — 1976.

enough. There will not be any of the traditional karateka but they will be karateka with understanding, they're great people."

I continued by asking "How do you see the world of martial arts differing in the future?" George replied "traditionally it's very hard to change unless the traditional people break away from tradition. Now, because the Russians are coming into the martial arts, they are going to change. I have visited communist countries. I had a great visit to Czechoslovakia where I was made very, very welcome. In fact, I have a letter from the authorities over there telling me that I was one of the best referees on the day—and the communists don't give you compliments lightly. When the communists get in they will run the no-gooders out."

"The people I rate the most highly in Great Britain are the people from the old karate times. I have great respect for Brian Hammond, Brian Smith, Steve Arneil and Andy Sherry. Peter Rousseau is a great friend of mine and I also rate Charlie Naylor. I would single out Walter Seaton because he's the one who introduced me to refereeing and taught me all that I knew at the time."



In father's footsteps George Canning Jr.



George with some of his members.

I also got help from the BKCC who, in my opinion, were the best karate administration there has ever been.

It was fabulous to see the top British fighter Eugene Codrington fighting Ticky Donovan two years in a row. The heart of British karate was powerful then and I was proud to be part of it. I was sad to see the split and to my mind the British karate scene will never be so powerful. The British rate number one in my book even before the Americans and the Japs."

"So who are the other individuals that you specifically rate?" "Well, Terry O'Neill, in my opinion, is one of the best fighters in the world; he's brilliant! Then there's Bob Pointon, Steve Cattle and the KUGB lads. They were always there and they are still there which shows that they are good. As far as I am concerned the best coach to date has been Steve Arneil. My wish in British karate would be to see Steve Arneil and Ticky Donovan working together. Steve may have retired but we did win the world championships under him, and they can't take that away from him!

Ticky was one of Steve's team members, so Ticky was, in effect, one of Steve's protégés. Ticky is a very strong minded man and believes in what he does, which is powerful. He earns more than respect from all the fighters no matter what style. Ticky, when he is manager, can fight with the fighter.

If I had a team against Ticky's, I wouldn't worry about the team, I'd worry about Ticky. If I could remove Ticky, I'd be happy. I watched Ticky work the team in Bratislava and they got no sympathy from me, but it was brilliant the way he did it.

So it doesn't matter who is in the karate suit when Ticky is there, Ticky Donovan

makes the fighter out of him, and in my opinion he's the best coach in the world."

"Someone else I have a high regard for is Peter Spanton. I heard a lot about Peter before I met him, he was a hard man, he was this and that. I personally found him to be a gentleman. He is also a good referee. I'd work with Peter anytime, I would be second to him anytime. Peter is very good on kata; he really knows what he is talking about. His ways may seem to some to be a bit antiquated but he's still traditional and he is getting more open minded. I think that says a lot."

"As far as administration is concerned, I consider David Mitchell to be top. When British martial arts lose David Mitchell they will lose a legend. He has been a great friend and help to me. Sometimes he's done things that have not suited me but I think that if British karate lost him it would fall apart. Anyway, the best all rounder I have met is Meiji Suzuki. Because Meiji Suzuki can teach, coach manage and adjust. This is what I like about Meiji. He's a business man as well and I have great respect for him. As far as I am concerned, Meiji is number one."

In conclusion I would like to thank George Canning for this interview which I am sure that readers have found most interesting and enlightening. I would like to thank George for his hospitality on my trip to Ireland. "The last of The Great Celtic Warriors" is a gentleman indeed and one of only a handful of truly enlightened martial artists in the world—A compliment I don't give lightly!

George Canning's Dojo is at
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