

FIGHTERS

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8 EXTRA PAGES

GEORGE CANNING *The Unlimited Way*
Tae Kwondo Spectacular
Training with the Masters — Mugendo

World Thai Boxing win for English girl

The unlimited way of George Canning

a profile by Peter Lewis

IF YOU have been practising your martial arts at a small dojo in the foothills of Tibet, for the last three years or so, you probably won't have heard of George Canning.

George is a seventh dan in a karate system known as Mugendo (The Unlimited Way). Mugendo is a completely new concept of karate. It is a system which one could truly say was born of our time. There are no secrets about Mugendo, it was not brought from the mystical Far East, nor is it based on an extinct animal that once fought a giraffe whilst a wandering monk looked on with interest.

Mugendo not only fits the bill for our modern age, it was born here as well. This fighting system is a recent innovation and its breeding grounds lie here in the West. George Canning is a master in the art and its leading emissary. He feels Mugendo is short, sharp, and very much to the point. It is a dynamic way of fighting that actually works when the chips are down.

George, an ex Wado Ryu karate man, has become so enthused with this art that he is now training up a team of his students to world standard at his Dublin dojo. He has completely gone over to the system and the regular students all now practise the art. Mugendo is only about three years old; minor teething problems are all but sorted. Now all that remains is to show its worth to the world of martial arts.

So with this in mind George Canning didn't pussy foot around trying out Mugendo on various karate clubs and local tournaments. The enigmatic George went straight to the top, the very top and invited over to Dublin the cream of the World circuit in full contact and kickboxing: Jeff Smith and his USA all stars world champions. The

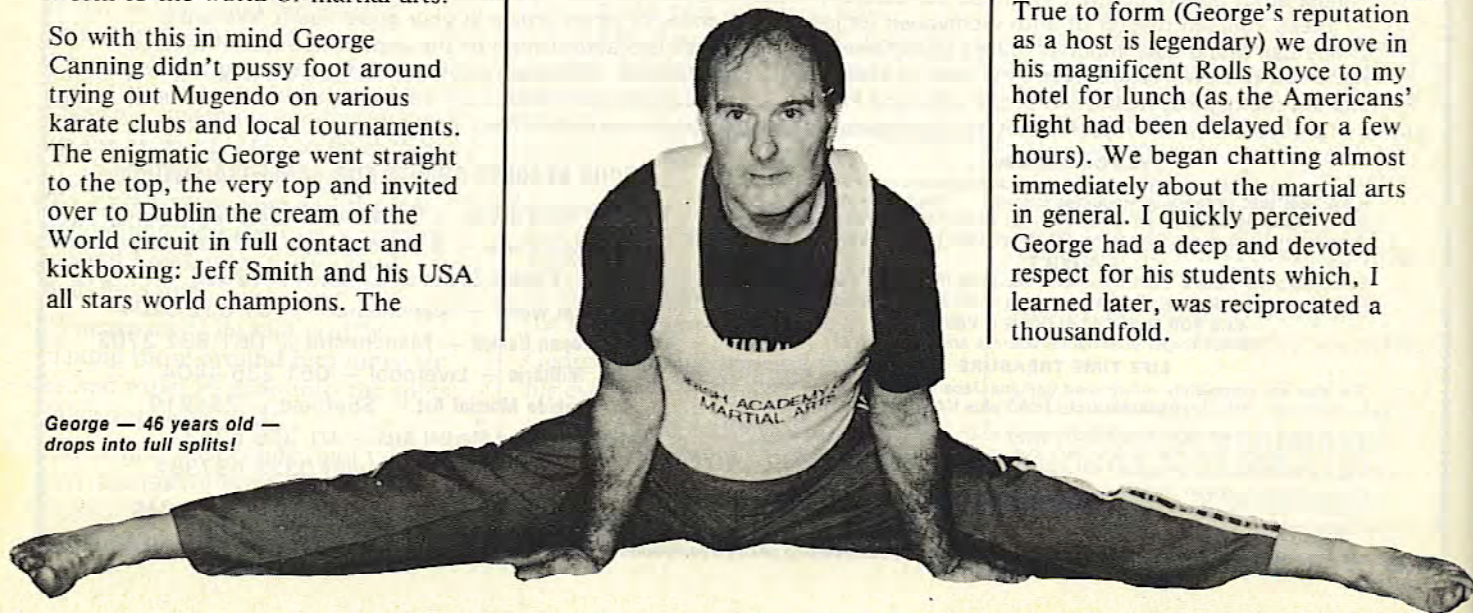
Americans, you may remember, under Jeff Smith, were the ones who took plenty of the trophies in last year's WAKO world championships at Wembley.

To use an American expression, "either put up or shut up". Well! George Canning put up. Under the flag of Mugendo, George's top boys, of whom the best has only been training a little over two years, were to meet men like Tommy Williams (69 kilo champion who has had fifteen straight wins, and all with the reverse spinning kick); Steve 'Nasty' Anderson (WAKO world champion heavyweight class); John Longstreet (WAKO world champion 74 kilo, voted fighter of

the year in America in 1982). Just three of the world class men George's boys would be fighting.

George had met Jeff Smith at the WAKO championships last year, in October. He was so impressed with the way they performed that he invited them over to Ireland at a later date. Jeff Smith, now retired from actual tournament fighting, was equally impressed with George's lads, and he accepted the offer. So, nearly a year later, the USA team were winning across the Atlantic to meet Mugendo in an Irish International. George invited me over to observe the whole proceedings.

In the wake of Ronald Reagan, I arrived in Dublin's fair city in not so fair weather. There to meet me was the ubiquitous George Canning. True to form (George's reputation as a host is legendary) we drove in his magnificent Rolls Royce to my hotel for lunch (as the Americans' flight had been delayed for a few hours). We began chatting almost immediately about the martial arts in general. I quickly perceived George had a deep and devoted respect for his students which, I learned later, was reciprocated a thousandfold.



George — 46 years old — drops into full splits!

We chatted about his time in the British Army, a period in his life that is most dear to him. We talked on the problems up North; about Mugendo, and how he now felt he was channelling his energies along the right lines. I had only met the man a few short hours earlier, yet I felt as though I had known him all my life. This is how his personality comes across. He is the very picture of success, at the top of his chosen field. Yet down to earth, easy going, (but not when training his students) a very likeable man, not at all spoiled by fame and fortune. As we talked, I got an impression of a sort of sergeant-major figure building up in my mind. As though his students were his troops, and when he said 'jump' — by hell, they jumped. I couldn't help feeling though, that there was more to this invitational international than met the eye. I was to find out later that there was!

After lunch, we drove back to the airport to meet the US team. An incident along the way for me, epitomised my feeling about George Canning. Driving down the winding country roads with not a lot of time to spare to catch the Americans landing, we rounded a small bend and approached what looked like an accident. Cars in front of us were managing precarious three point turns to go back the way they had just come, shouting to George that it was no use trying to get through, as the road was blocked. George checked his watch and realized that to go back would have meant a half hour delay and make him late to greet his guests at the airport. Jumping out of the car he strode over to see what all the fuss was about.

Apparently another car had hit a milk float amidst ships and the road was blocked off. After what appeared to be only moments, and with much nodding of heads, I saw the huge frame of George Canning virtually lifting the front end of the offending car out of the way.

Others quickly went to aid him and within two minutes, the road was clear. We were on our way again in time to meet the plane from New York. I thought to myself: 'that's George Canning for you; he gets things done, instantly!'

We met the Americans and drove over to the hotel to check in and



George Canning thanks Jeff Smith for conducting the Seminar.

have an early dinner, after which, we went to George's dojo in Dublin to meet his students. Steve 'Nasty' Anderson went down to Waterford (crystal glass country) to conduct a short evening seminar. George, Jeff Smith, and myself were playing host to George's own students.

After George introduced Jeff to his members, Jeff took over the class and put them through their paces. George joined in, (he never asks of his students anything that he cannot do himself). I had met George Canning, the man; now I was experiencing George Canning, the martial artist. No wonder his students are so devoted and

dedicated to him. He just exudes excellence. His jodan kicks would make any karateka jealous at half his age.

George is forty six years old. He can drop into a full splits at any given time, and I mean full splits, without a warm up first. George feels that he has put Mugendo in the market place, so to speak, so, if it is going to work, it has to be seen to work. As envoy of the new system, he tends to feel that it is up to him to show that it does via his own flexibility and expertise in the art.

When Jeff Smith saw George drop into a full splits, he just stared with his mouth agape, and barely managed to suppress a strangled cough. When the club session was over, Jeff informed the assembled class that he was very impressed with their standard.

As I wandered round George's two floor dojo, a series of photographs on the wall caught my eye. Walking over to them, I saw just about everybody who is anyone in the martial arts, alongside George Canning. The greatest martial arts names in Japan and Europe were all up there next to George Canning. Overly impressed, I ambled back to the dojo to hear Jeff Smith winding up the training session by telling the students that, in fact, Jhoon Ree's taekwondo is not taekwondo at all. The USA team captain went on to say that they use what is needed to win, and that when they fight it does not resemble taekwondo in the slightest. George stepped in, smiling, and remarked, "No Jeff, you're just

Taking tea with the Lord Mayor of Dublin at Mansion House.



like us: you practise Mugendo too eh?

The next day, refreshed from jet lag, the Americans were feted with George Canning's legendary hospitality. The team were driven to Dublin to the Lord Mayor's residence at Mansion House and presented to him. In a very easy going atmosphere, much joking was made of the previous American who had just left Dublin's fair shores (Ronald Reagan). As a memento, after they had taken tea with the Lord Mayor everyone was presented with a book on the City of Dublin. As the afternoon turned to early evening, George had commented that if possible he would like to have a sparring session with Tommy Williams. Tommy duly obliged, half grinning to himself and off he went to George's dojo.

Donning the gloves, both men began to lightly spar. Until Tommy hit the floor with a crash; twice. The pace then began to hot up slightly, with Tommy going in, perhaps, a touch heavier than he had been at first. But no matter what he tried, he could not get through this amazing forty-six years old man's defence. To make matters worse for Tommy's ego, George kept up a running commentary throughout the session, which, I hasten to add, lasted twice the proposed twenty minutes.

I watched with disbelief as a world champion tournament fighter worked himself into a dripping wet state of perspiration, trying to, at least, get the better of George Canning. But he didn't!

One point that I thought deserved mention, is that all the time this sparring session went on, only myself and a few of the American team were allowed in the dojo. George kept his students out, which goes a long way to describe the modesty of this incredible Irishman.

Taking his gloves off after the session, Tommy Williams turned to his team mates and commented, "Man, George is the best I've ever seen. His hands are magic; I was finding it a bit tough out there. He is quite unbelievable."

My only added comment to that thinly disguised sparring session is: "Right on Tommy, you said it!"



A lady Mugendo student squares up ready to begin training.

As the US lads left for their hotel for a good night's rest before the big tournament the following day, much exchanging of badges and tee shirts went on, with jokes and laughter in the best international spirit. When they left, George took his Mugendo team to one side for a last minute lecture on tactics, followed by some light training. Then it was off to bed for them also, in preparation for the big event the next day at Dublin's International Boxing Stadium.

Whilst George and I were left alone talking in his dojo, he explained to me how far his martial arts had come along in the past three years;

how he felt Mugendo was at home, both on the street and in the dojo. He explained his reasoning behind putting up his Mugendo students against the best the world has to offer.

George added: "My lads have not had that much experience, as of yet. When they fight the Americans they will be going against the best. They will be learning all the time; that will be the bonus coming from tomorrow's event. If they meet champions and fare well, especially champions of the American's calibre, then they will be convinced totally of the techniques of Mugendo.

Not that they're not convinced already, but everyone has that deep nagging doubt somewhere in the recesses of their mind. Don't forget Mugendo is still very very young. If some of my boys win, well, that will be an added bonus. But most of all the purpose behind this fight is to get up there into that ring and prove to themselves that even if they have been practising and training in Mugendo for a short time, it really does work!

Enthusiasm is OK, but to be of world class you need something more. You need the belief in yourself that you are capable of winning. You need the absolute confidence in your art, to know that it is the best around. I can only instill into my lads expertise in techniques, confidence in their ability, stress the importance of regularly training. It is up to themselves to know, deep down,

USA team members, Tommy Williams left and Troy Dorsey right, pause to read about George Canning in a copy of Fighters Magazine, in the departure lounge at Dublin airport, prior to them leaving Ireland.





(Top left) George Canning Junior spars with his father. (Centre right) George Canning and Jeff Smith pose for the camera outside Mansion House, George's Rolls Royce being the topic of conversation. (Bottom right) George Canning goes through his daily routine of flexibility stretching exercises.



that they are the best. No matter what or whom they come up against they can overcome by their own natural ability and true belief in their own fighting skills.

So you see, tomorrow is just an exercise along those lines. If all the team were beaten so what? Just as long as they *learn* and learn well.

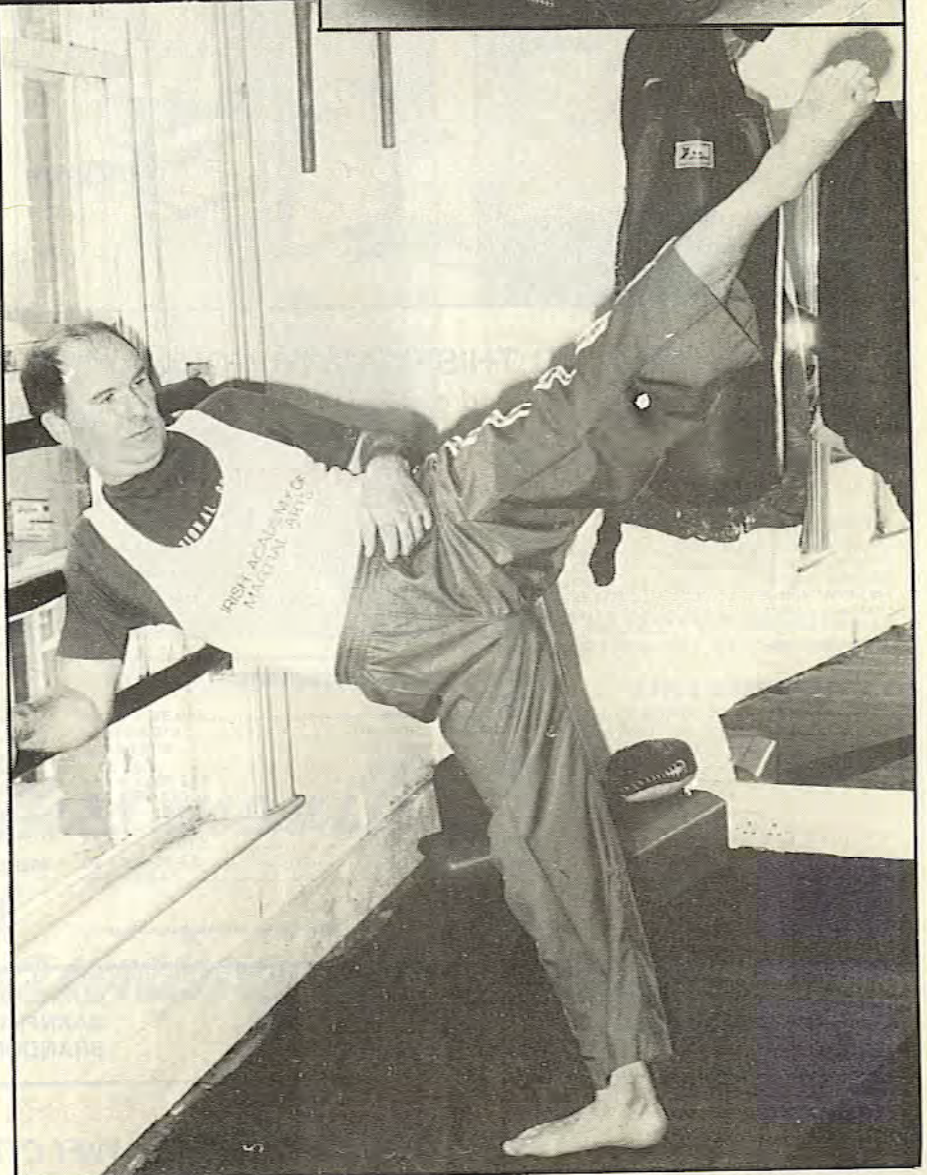
After all, what slur can be associated with a group of young martial artists who take on the best the world has to offer? What people don't see is what we ourselves are picking up to use at a later date. Some day my Mugendo team will be champions of the world."

Having seen George Canning and his students at work; having seen the tremendous enthusiasm shown by all of them; noticing how George is not only Master to his students, but coach, trainer and — most of all — friend; having observed all aspects of their training and the awesome determination they bring to it; I am fully prepared to see, one day, the Irish Mugendo team become World Champions.

To borrow a phrase beloved of George Canning, himself: No Problem!

To know the outcome, look to the root.

Study the past to know the future.
Lao Tsu



Training with the Masters

THIS MONTH we are going to take a look at a comparatively recent innovation in fighting methods, namely the art of MUGENDO.

Mugendo, although looking at first sight a little similar to karate, employs many techniques from Western boxing. Not surprisingly, as this fighting concept was conceived in Europe, unlike its many contemporaries which are of Asian origin.

As always, we are only concerned with the beginner's angle in this training with the masters series. We are only examining what is basically taught within the first six months. Mugendo's easy style, coupled with the special flexibility exercises, and its unlimited scope of techniques based on natural movement, make it one of the more accessible and down to earth arts around.



The Mugendo prepared stance.

We invited George Canning, who heads the Irish Karate Federation and is himself a master of Mugendo, to guide us along the beginning stages on this interesting new concept in fighting methods, which, as George says, is at home either on the street or in the dojo.

As with learning any new art, the basic stance is very important. It is from this initial position that the art is systematically built on to. In Mugendo, this stance is known as the prepared position. It is very important at this stage to adopt the correct body position, as faults can often occur, which are usually habit forming and difficult to correct at a later stage.

From this basic stance, a gradual building-up process is employed, adding movements, step by step,

This month...
George Canning on Mugendo

Breathing, as always, must be regulated. You should breath short, through the nose. Short breaths stop you from tightening up; if you tighten up you have no power.

The next stage in training is combination of movements. You move forward and jab three times, step back, punch, duck, punch again and then step through. This basic stepping through turn is particularly effective when attacked by multiple assailants.

We are now about six weeks to two months into training. At no time in this period is any actual sparring done. Next comes the kicking. The



(Top) Stepping through, thus enabling one to quickly turn around and face an attack from an opposite direction.

(Bottom) The basic Mugendo front kick, executed in a leaning back position. All the weight is taken on the back leg.

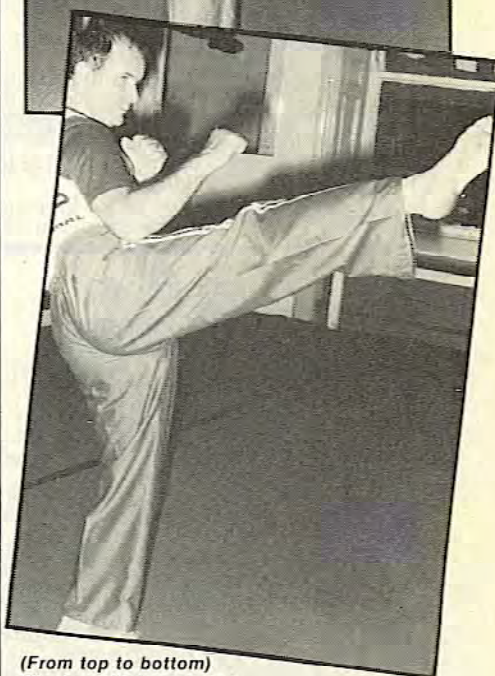
basic Mugendo front kick is executed in a leaning back position, kicking off the front foot. All the weight is taken on the back leg. This kick is also performed in a very short, sharp, snapping motion. After a beginner has learned that, he would go on to learn the next kick in the sequence, which is kicking off the back leg. When performing this kick, it is important to turn the foot of the front leg slightly at the same time as the knee comes up on the kicking leg. The hands change as well; this is all one motion. Once the kick has been executed, return to the original position. Double kicking off both legs is the next technique to master, incorporating along the way the use and execution of the roundhouse kick.

So now, in effect, the beginner has learnt the use of his hands to punch, following on by using his feet to kick in an order of natural progression. As the underlying theme of Mugendo is to use the body naturally, it would seem only reasonable that the next step is the joining of the hands and feet into practical techniques. Which is exactly what you do. Simplicity is the byword of this Mugendo system.

By now, a beginner will be being prepared for his first grading which comes after three months. Unlike a lot of martial arts, Mugendo is structured for the beginner to learn the maximum number of effective techniques in the shortest possible time.

The following three months, after the grading, are spent applying all the movements so far learnt, to enable the student to become proficient in defending himself. Great emphasis is placed upon speed, timing, plus a special set of exercises for stretching that develop hidden strength, which ultimately leads to flexibility with power and speed.

This, then, brings us up to the end of our six months time limit. A student by now, should be quite capable of defending himself reasonably well. All Mugendo training is geared to be enjoyable and at the same time making you fit. To become aware at the end of the day of your own capabilities, thus instilling confidence in yourself that spills out into your own day to day working life. There is no limit to what can be achieved. Perhaps that's why Mugendo is known as the 'Unlimited Way'.



(From top to bottom)
The front kick executed.
Kicking off the back leg. Very important, when doing this kick, to turn the foot of the front slightly.
The second basic Mugendo kick executed off the back leg.