

Jim Harrison

Past Member – USJJF Board of Directors

Member of the Masters Caucus



Born in 1936, the tough Jim Harrison was a major force in the early competitive environments of both Judo and Karate in the U.S. A former AAU Judo champion, Harrison won numerous karate titles including the first ever full contact kickboxing match held in 1970 U.S. Karate Championships.

Among his many legendary fights, one of the toughest on record was his match against Fred Wren for the United States Karate Championships in 1969. Harrison also held the first ever World Professional Karate Championships at his Dojo in Kansas City, 1968. This was a heavy contact, no pads competition that drew six of the toughest fighters of the time, Joe Lewis, Bob Wall, Skipper Mullins, Pat Burleson, David Moon and Fred Wren. Both Burleson and Moon had their ribs broken during the competition. Moon, with broken ribs, finished the final fight with Joe Lewis. The winner, Joe Lewis, besides the title of being the first World Professional Karate Champion, earned one dollar for his efforts.

Jim Harrison was known for both hitting hard and taking hard hits. Perhaps the most feared of Harrison's abilities was his Judo ability. Karate fighters who had not learned to fall had much to fear when facing Jim Harrison who was known to frequently dump his opponents with judo throws throughout the match.

Harrison, one of the toughest and hardest training competitors of his day was also known for many impressive and dangerous breaking feats, including shattering with a shuto strike a bottle full of gasoline with a lit wick that erupted into a ball of flame. During Jim Harrison's 1970, first ever, full contact bout in Dallas, Texas, he received a cut from a glove lace over his eye. Attempts at taping failed to stop the bleeding, finally, between rounds a physician came into the ring, and without anesthetic stitched the wound over Harrison's eye. Harrison calmly laid on the floor of the ring during the stitching without a flinch, then went on to win the fight with a knockout.



Perhaps his most legendary feat of toughness was when as a police officer, he was ambushed by an ex-con who came out of a bathroom stall and fired point blank with a high caliber pistol at Harrison. Harrison managed to subdue his attacker before passing out from his wounds. The wounds, very serious in nature, kept him down for a while, but he recovered and came back stronger than ever.

A member of the elite USKA Trias International Society, Harrison has garnered membership in the Official Karate Magazine's 1979 Legion of Honor. Jim Harrison began his karate training in shorin-ryu under St. Louis, Mo. karate pioneer Bob Yarnall under whom he received his black belt. Harrison, a retired police officer, continues a long and successful career as teacher, coach, competitor, and promoter.

On February 26, 2005, the USJJF's Central Technical Committee (CTC) through its National Program of USA TRADITIONAL KODOKAN JUDO (USA-TKJ), officially announced the Recognition of Life-Time of Achievements, Outstanding Leadership & Original Contributions to Traditional Judo by Jim Harrison and his Promotion to the Traditional Kodokan Judo Dan Grade of Kudan, 9th Degree Black Belt.