



the Chinese form pioneered by Bruce Lee. Changes were needed in karate at the time, though Lieb says he was not so much a visionary as he was outspoken.

"Others were doing the same thing at the same time, unconsciously, I'm sure. There were some who were doing the exact same thing I was but were just afraid to speak out," Lieb said. "They didn't want the verbal abuse, the physical threats that came with it by speaking out and saying, 'I am American. I teach American karate, and that's it. If you don't like it, put on a uniform and let's do it.'"

"Most of 'em, what they did was sit back and say, 'I'm American. I think it's a great idea, but I think we need more years for development.' So they'd agree with the Oriental way and philosophy or the traditional way. There were many who were probably trying the same thing because of necessity. Sure they were. They were just afraid to speak out and say so. I said it in every magazine article I was in. I always speak up.

"Now, everybody before their style uses 'American.' If you look, the majority of schools, commercial schools or others, will say 'American' in front of them. Yet, they're still trying to be traditional."

The AKS is definitely not traditional, and deliberately so. It was designed to overcome the weak points of traditional styles without giving up any of their strengths.

"When I put together the AKS, to be blunt, I was like a thief. I went to all these different schools—I went to Ko-

rean styles, Chinese styles, Okinawan styles, Japanese styles. I went in and I reviewed all their requirements. I watched what they did. I went in there and free-fought. Sometimes I put on a white belt because as a black belt they wouldn't let me in. They would not allow any outside black belts in, so I went in as a white belt and pretended that I didn't know anything. And I watched what they could do, turned around, came back, put on my proper rank and said, 'Let's work out.' They said, 'You cannot work out here. We do not allow black belts.' I said, 'I was here. I'm not

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impressed. There are shortcomings. Let me work out with you. Let me help you and you help me with what I saw that I think is good."

"And they had some good techniques, but they wouldn't do it. Regardless of results, they'd say, 'You can't do that that way. It's improper. It's not our style.' I'd do it anyway. Many times if they did (let him in), they'd try and set me up in free-fighting. They'd try to hurt me. Well, when it comes to fighting dirty, I think there are very few people who can surpass me. But I like sportsmanship a lot better. Sometimes they'd open their doors and come to me in friendship, but most times they didn't. And that's when somebody got hurt. I

always was able to walk out the door, so you know who got hurt," he added.

"But that's what I did. I studied films. I went to tournaments. I spent an average of \$9,000 each year just flying to different tournaments. If I didn't compete, I'd pick up the ideas. I'd take movies and I'd take the best techniques in fighting and develop them; scale them to my own size. And I'd use them in competition and win. If one thing didn't work, I'd try something else. If that didn't work, I'd try something else.

"I found that in American karate, where the foundations are your four major systems, versatility is what makes it strong. Not the philosophy, the versatility. Philosophy is second. The philosophy is strong in the sense that it allows you to change and adjust to whatever you want to do. But the versatility—all these things being your style, you can pick and choose what you want—that makes it strong.

"I've had instructors of all ranks come and work out with me at one time or another, and I have gone to them. I don't believe it's humbling myself because their rank is lower. I will go all over and work out to learn something. Believe it or not, sometimes the best things I've learned are from my white belts. No one has all the answers. I constantly look for new approaches, improvements.

"The traditional way is not always the best way. In the United States it doesn't work. In the Orient it works extremely well because kids are brought up to believe that this is the way, and for every one who quits, ten will take his place. In the U.S.A. when a student quits, you don't have ten to take his place.

"And the other thing is that even though the interest is great, and it's one of the greatest sports there is to be part of, Americans are competitive. Americans are self-determining. They do not like to be told. They like to have it shown. They do not like to be told, 'This is the way; there is no other way.' They like to know why this is the only way. They always question everything, and if you don't have the answer, you're gonna lose them. So you have to show them."

That's what Lieb has been doing for 15 years. Showing people that his way—American karate—works. It hasn't always been easy.

"In the old days, you would see, literally, people's teeth broken, their noses broken, their jaws broken, their chests caved in by kicks and punches, simply because the competitor across from