

BKF 2.0

A Standard Setter for Sport-karate Excellence

By Adam James

Since 1969, the Black Karate Federation has been a standard setter for sport-karate excellence and community building. From the day it was birthed in Southern California during the golden era of the sport, the organization's members have achieved great success in competition.





The pivotal role played by the BKF is further evidenced by the group's appearance in *Enter the Dragon*. During the film's opening sequence, an African-American martial arts champion, played by Jim Kelly, visits a BKF dojo, and Steve Muhammad, then known as Steve Sanders, is shown leading the class.

Although this inspired a generation of martial artists who saw strength, courage and dedication on display, the greatest achievement of the BKF surfaced in local communities, where instructors taught thousands of young men and women the principles of karate and the keys to excellence in life.

The early leaders of the BKF were known as the "magnificent seven": Cliff Stewart, Jerry Smith, Ron Chapel, Karl Armelin, Curtis Pulliam, Steve Muhammad and Donnie Williams. In addition, Glenda Ingram, the first female black belt in the organization, proved herself an excellent instructor and competitor.

From the beginning, the BKF was about more than just fighting for trophies — but that doesn't mean fighting skill ever received short shrift in the training that took place in affiliated schools. K.C. Jones was a standout BKF competitor and instructor back in the day, and he recently became the organization's president.

Training at a BKF dojo was considered a privilege and a challenge in the 1970s.

Many karate schools struggled to transition from traditional training to a modern sports-science approach that coincided with the growth of competition. However, the BKF adjusted quickly, and its curriculum became renowned for maintaining traditional toughness while imparting winning ways. Under Jones, it will be no different.

Closing the gap and moving into and out of striking range have always been integral to the success of BKF fighters. Muhammad became famous for his lightning

speed, and Howard Jackson, one of the greatest sport-karate and kickboxing champions in history, was renowned for his ability to close the gap. Jones was fortunate to have learned from both experts, as well as from Jerry Smith, his close friend and predecessor as president of the BKF.



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Among the lessons that BKF 2.0 emphasizes nowadays is maintaining the calmness and mental clarity needed to use those aforementioned physical tactics. Instructors teach that it's essential to be in tune with an opponent as one strives to move with fluidity and explosiveness.

Jones says that in sparring, it's crucial to stay calm and move at a pace that's slightly slower than you're capable of. Then, when you see an opening, strike with maximum speed. Other lessons BKF instructors prioritize include staying slightly out of range — not standing so far away that you don't pose a threat but also not standing so close that you can easily be hit. He likens it to dancing on the edge of the strike zone so you can enter and hit, as well as evade.

Simply remaining outside the strike zone, of course, will not lead to victory, so you must enter with speed and conviction, he teaches. First, you must cultivate a sense of calm. As soon as you detect an opening — essentially, an opportunity — you must move quickly. Explode to close the gap, knowing that the exact footwork you use will vary but the crucial elements will be the same: speed, power and precision timing.

Clearly, the BKF will continue to churn out world champions under Jones. More important, it will continue to develop champions of life. Jones and his leaders are taking the principles of excellence that were used to build the iconic organization and passing them along in an effort to build better communities around the world. 