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BRANCO BRATICH  
Yoseikan Ryu Australia

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# SENSEI BRANCO BRATICH

## YOSEIKAN RYU KARATE-DO

**Branco Bratich** has been described as a controversial and arrogant person, but also an honest friend, brilliant motivator and a dominant force within the Australian Karate Federation. Love or hate the person we acknowledge the fact that he has produced some outstanding karate-ka and he has built **Yoseikan-Ryu Karate** into an **Australia** wide organization.

**Branco** knew early in the history of his organization that it is not just enough to be a technically good karate instructor. You must also be a leader amongst others, a communicator and a friend and a very efficient administrator. These qualities engender respect in the people whom you come into contact with and form a solid basis for the future. Leadership does not come easy.

**Branco** did not start studying karate to learn self-defence or become tougher. His introduction to martial arts was by accident. At 22 years of age a friend of Branco's wanted to study martial arts.

Branco's interest was casual only he did not realise at the time how completely it would dominate his life.



Jessica Bratich and Nives Bratich

His introduction to karate started in **1973 at Jujutsu Kan, Perth**. It was more of a social interest than any serious commitment to the martial arts. His initial interest was karate closely followed by jujutsu. He found the training enjoyable but not physically demanding. In later years **Branco** realised that the jujutsu training made it easier for him to understand and appreciate the "bunkai" of kata.

After two years training, **Jan de Jong**, founder of Jujutsu Kan, approached **Branco** about teaching karate and **Branco** accepted becoming increasingly aware of his great enjoyment of teaching karate even though he felt his knowledge was limited.

In **1974 Jan de Jong** invited **Sensei Yoshiaki Unno** to Perth from the **Yoseikan-Budo Hombu dojo** in Japan.

Thirty Jujutsu Kan instructors and senior students were invited to his first karate training session. At the end of six weeks only five participants were left. **Branco** was one of them. He easily adapted to the repetitious hard training.

Many students quit finding that they were unable to meet the training demands of

**Sensei Unno**. In particular he stated that none of them could punch properly, **Sensei Unno** insisted that his students punch until they got it right. A simple solution.

**Sensei Unno** taught six days a week for Jan de Jong. Wherever **Sensei Unno** taught, **Branco** was there to assist and learn. It was under Unno Sensei that Branco first studied kobudo and aikido and dabbled in judo.

**Branco** passed his 1<sup>st</sup> Dan in karate March **1976**. **Sensei Unno** felt that to gain credibility for the newly introduced style he

had to make sure that his first two black belts proved beyond any doubt that they were worthy. In his mind the only way to do that was to make his first Australian black belts better than the others.

With this in mind **Sensei Unno** graded **Branco** and **Steven Weir** over a full week. It required superb kata, perfect basics and too many fights to remember. Injury was not considered an excuse to stop fighting. **Branco** remembered getting his finger dislocated twice in the same fight. The fight was stopped just long enough to stick it back in the socket.

**Sensei Unno** had also promised all the students that he would present his personal black belt to the most deserving student. This goal more than any other drove **Branco** to train hard. It was not uncommon for **Branco** to do 1500 kicks in a single training session. Looking back we all realise that quality rather than quantity is the key training issue.

The hard training was more about mental strength. **Branco** constantly drove himself to the limit of his endurance, determined to prove to **Unno Sensei** that he deserved the coveted black belt. He must have impressed **Unno Sensei** because he was presented with his black belt after his successful 1<sup>st</sup> Dan grading.

It was in the latter part of **1976** that **Sensei Unno** opened his own **Yoseikan Budo dojo** in William St Perth. It was a small dojo. The training was still rigorous. It was surprising that any student would let them self be subjected to the brutal kumite training that was done in those days. However they did! **Tony Smith** survived the tough training and is currently a 5<sup>th</sup> Dan with Yoseikan-Ryu Karate. Perhaps Yoseikan students were not technically the best in those

days. They did have courage and perseverance.

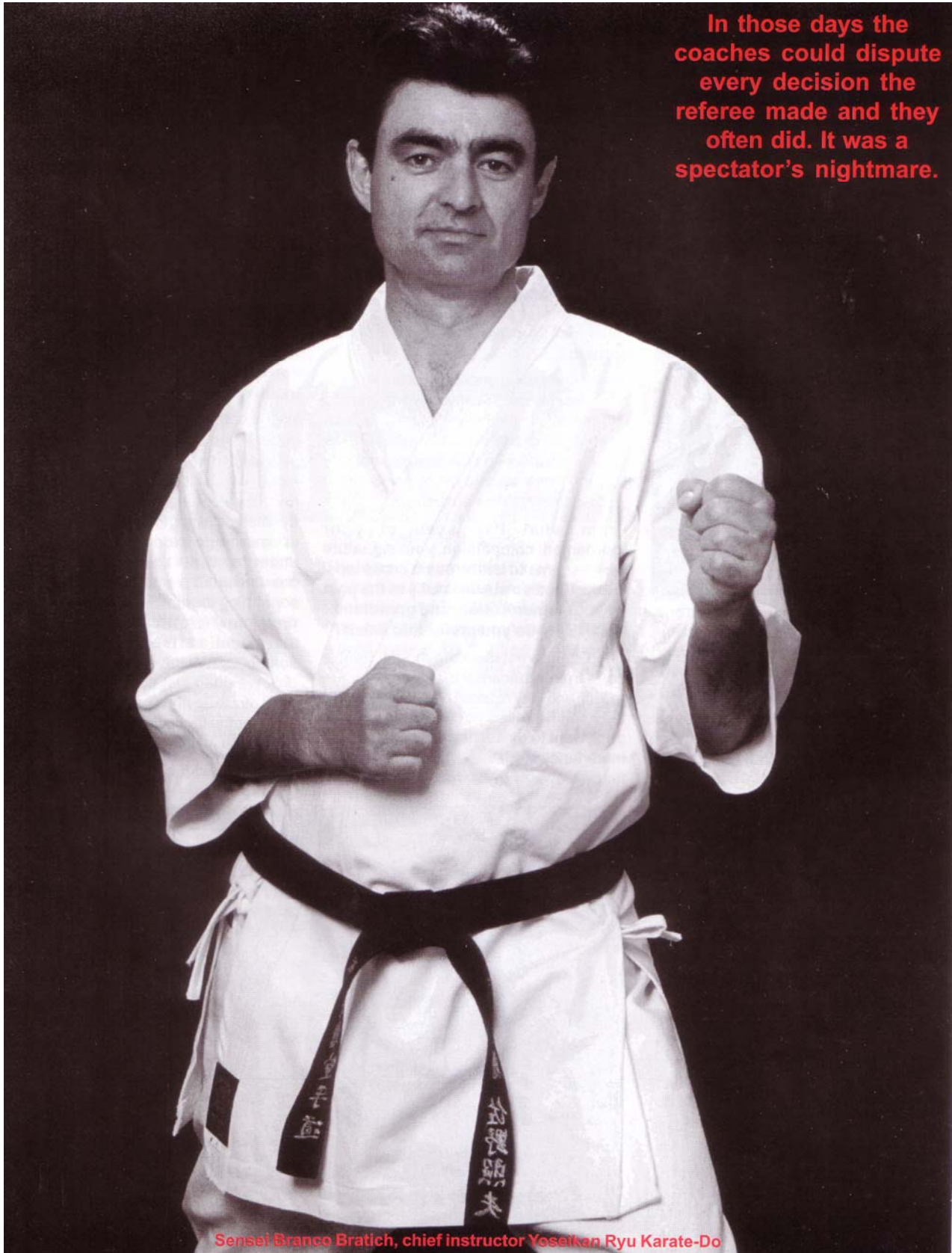
**Branco** taught and trained at the new dojo six days a week from **1975** to **1978**. He also held a full time job. On reflection it is amazing that Branco's wife, Nives, stayed with him.

It was also in **1975** when he went as a spectator to his first Australian Karate Federation

National Championship. There was only one division, the open division. In those days the coaches could dispute every decision the referee made and they often did. It was a spectator's nightmare. It was surprising that this did not put **Branco** off tournaments for life.

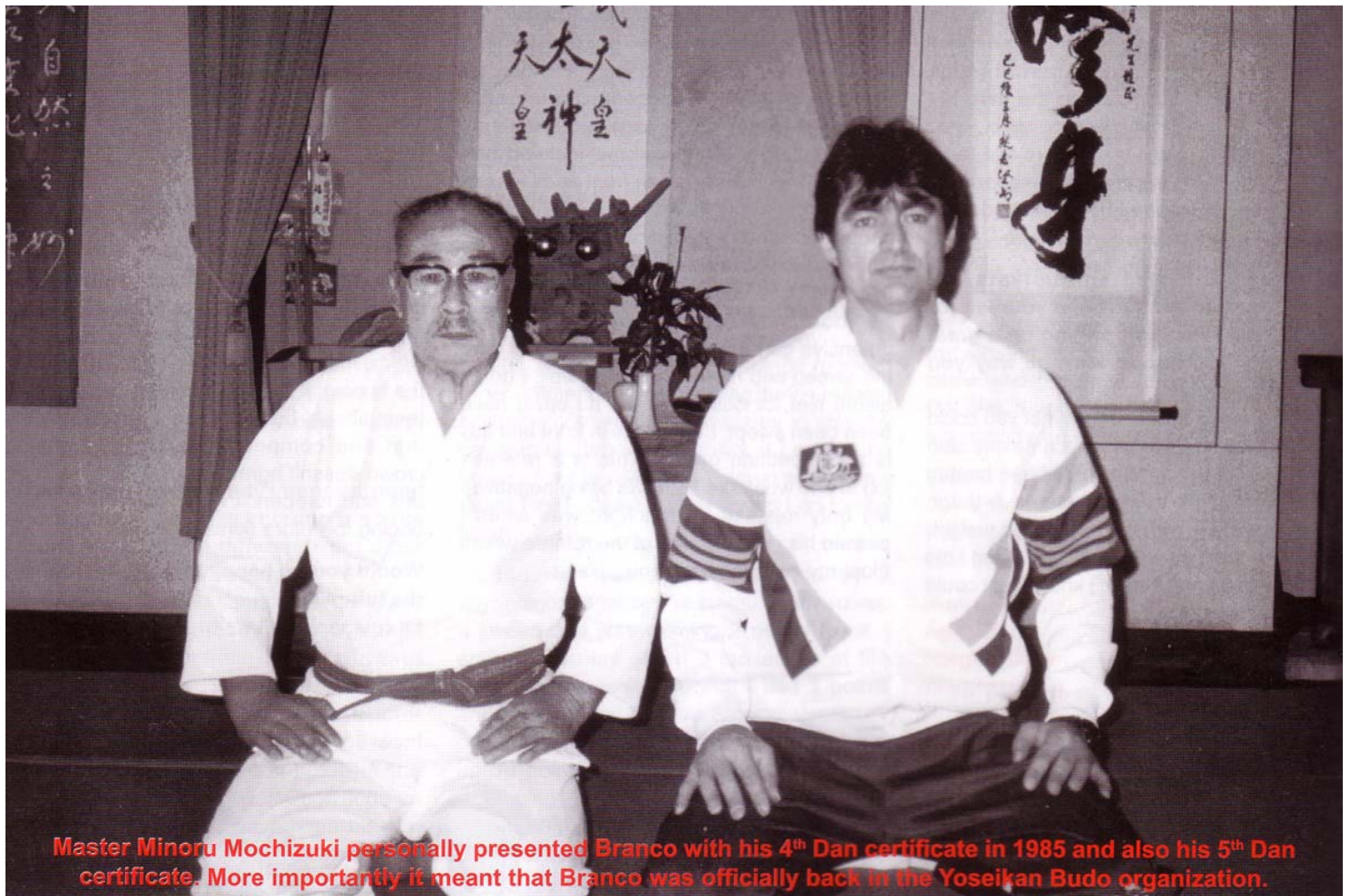
In **1977** when he was twenty-eight years old **Branco** entered his first tournament at the invitation of **Sensei Kyoshin Kayo**, Chief

Instructor of Shobukan. To this day **Branco** rates this as the most violent tournament he has ever entered. Competitors were not safety conscious in those days. Generally mouth guards were considered a sign of weakness. Losing teeth was not uncommon. Competitors lost teeth, were knocked unconscious or ended up needing stitches. It was also in **1977** that Branco was graded to 2<sup>nd</sup> Dan.



In those days the coaches could dispute every decision the referee made and they often did. It was a spectator's nightmare.

Sensei Branco Bratich, chief instructor Yoseikan Ryu Karate-Do



Master Minoru Mochizuki personally presented Branco with his 4<sup>th</sup> Dan certificate in 1985 and also his 5<sup>th</sup> Dan certificate. More importantly it meant that Branco was officially back in the Yoseikan Budo organization.

In May 1978 **Branco** opened his first dojo in Girrawheen a state housing suburb in Perth. Many families in this area had only one parent. It was at this time that **Branco** decided that he would develop **Yoseikan-Ryu Karate** into an organization based on loyalty, respect and trust. He also realised that if he was going to achieve what he wanted he would have to lead by example. He believed that respect has to be earned and felt that some of the schools of the time appeared to be caught up in the prestige of the instructor rather than showing genuine concern for the welfare of the student. That or just making money! The student was expected to respect the instructor even if they did not deserve it. What he had read in karate books about the philosophy of karate was not always practised in real life.

**Branco's** first nights training at Girrawheen attracted two adults and six children and the club remained small for several years. It was during this period that **Branco** discovered he had a flare for teaching children. In fact even to this day it is obvious to all that **Branco** enjoys teaching kids probably as much as the kids enjoy **Branco's** teaching. In those day's karate was supposed to be very strict in line with Japanese culture. **Branco** however, never really adapted to this type of training and consciously decided to develop his own style of teaching. He did not like the concept of everyone being regimented. He asked himself "How can the student learn how to relax if they are trained to be rigid?"

In his "dojo" **Branco** motivated children by fusing enjoyment and discipline. He believed that if the

students liked and respected the teacher they would try much harder and they would therefore enjoy coming to karate. Each training session should be a positive experience. After all, how many adults would continue doing karate if they didn't enjoy it? Time has proven that **Branco's** teaching philosophy is correct.

It was 1978 when **Unno Sensei** affiliated **Yoseikan Budo** to the **AKF**. Shortly after **Branco** became involved in the administration of the **WA AKF** when he was elected the State Secretary. A position he held for eleven years. He was elected **Vice President** in 1989 when **Eric Ho** was elected **president** and still holds this position today. 1978 was also the year that **Adam Camuglia** and **Tony Smith** joined. **Adam** has risen to the rank of 3<sup>rd</sup> Dan. He also is a **State Kumite Coach** for the **WA**

**AKF. Tony Smith** is Yoseikan-Ryu's most experienced instructor and **Branco's** second in charge. He is currently a 5<sup>th</sup> Dan and a **World Karate Federation Referee**.

**Branco's** "dojo" grew steadily and by the early eighties the Girrawheen club had five simultaneous classes with over 150 students.

However, **Branco's** personal competitive career did not appear to be going anywhere. Each tournament he entered he lost the first fight. In those days competitors always blamed the referees. Some of the blame was justified, but not always. It was a controversial time on the Australian tournament scene. Another problem experienced by competitors was the lack of tournaments. You entered the state championship. If you won 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> in the state championship you qualified for the nationals. If you won 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the Nationals you went to the Asian Pacific or World Championships depending on the year. In later years **Branco** solved this problem by introducing Novice and Open tournaments in WA.

By **1981 Branco's** "dojo" dominated the State Championships. The main reasons for this were that **Branco** was not obsessed with winning and was also keen to adopt new training methods. "Evolution of training" has been another one of the cornerstones of Branco's training philosophy. This open-minded approach was the key to **Yoseikan-Ryu's** continual improvement of its instructors and students. **Branco** can be described as an instructor with modern teaching strategies based upon traditional values. He has always stated that he is not interested in the public display of respect, but more interested in the intrinsic respect between the student and teacher that has been earned.

**Branco's** own luck changed in 1982 when he won the state and national heavyweight divisions, his first significant first step in his personal development. This win typified **Branco's** belief that you have to believe in yourself before you can inspire other people to do the same.

**Branco's** view of competition was at variance with many others. Most traditionalists only viewed tournaments on a superficial level and did not see the more subtle benefits. "Tournaments can be used to develop good character just like traditional karate" according to **Branco**. He believes that tournaments expose competitors to a variety of situations that do not occur in the dojo including success and failure. Accepting responsibility for your own actions and daring challenge yourself. Accepting situations you have no control over with dignity and grace. In the dojo there is usually a pecking order that does not change. Where is the challenge? There are certain students who need a challenge. Tournaments cater to this group.

In the ring there is always something different happening. A good instructor can use all these situations to develop their student. **Branco** maintains that competition karate is not about beating your opponent, but about beating yourself. It's a bit like doing kata in public. It is only when you do the kata for yourself and not concern yourself with variables beyond your control that you can get into the real essence of karate and its hidden benefits.

In **1983 Branco** participated in his first **Asian Pacific Championship** in **Nagoya**. He was the fittest he had ever been. Unfortunately two days prior to the event **Branco** was sparring the then National Coach and sustained a major bruise to his thigh. Two hours later he had difficulty walking. Not the person

to give up easily **Branco** won 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the open. It was also at this tournament that **Heather Healy (Cumming)**, who is still training with **Branco** today, won the middleweight division. This was **Australia's first female Asian Pacific Championship**. **Branco** recognised in **Heather** the indomitable quality of a warrior. She was losing 4-1 in the final against a Japanese opponent. She came back to win.

It was also in **1983** that Branco made his first visit to the **Yoseikan-Budo Hombu dojo** in Japan. This was a memorable experience. He met the living legend **Master Minoru Mochizuki**. He would have been about 75 years old at the time and according to Branco, even at 75 years of age, he was a compact and extremely powerful man. It was impossible not to be impressed by the presence of the man. Branco also managed to take many photographs of **Master Minoru Mochizuki**. These are some of his most cherished possessions.

**1983** was also the year that **Chuck Norris** came to Perth to promote his movie Lone Wolf McQuade. **Nives Bratich** proved the sceptics wrong; **Branco** was one of them, by arranging **Chuck Norris** to visit the **Yoseikan Budo Dojo** in Perth. This was an



Yoseikan hombu before closing

experience for all the students of the time. **Chuck Norris** was a gentleman and a credit to the Martial Arts fraternity.

By **1984 Branco** and **Unno Sensei** decided to part company. **Branco** was a 3<sup>rd</sup> Dan at the time. He was unsure of his future and advised his students that it was probably better if they stayed with **Unno Sensei**. **Branco** was warmly surprised when most of them decided to stay with him.

**Unno Sensei** invited **Teruo Sano Sensei** to visit Perth in **1985** and **Branco** was invited to rejoin **Yoseikan Budo** for the visit. **Branco** decided to give it another try. It was during this visit that **Branco** developed a close relationship with **Sano Sensei**. **Branco** saw in **Sano Sensei** a quality that he was looking for in a teacher – superior martial arts knowledge without an infatuated self-ego.

Unable to resolve their differences after **Sano Sensei's** returned to **Japan Branco** and **Unno Sensei** parted company. Within a few months **Branco** named his new organization **Yoseikan-Ryu Karate** and joined the **AKF** in his own right.

The dilemmas **Branco** faced included deciding upon the pathway that his newly formed organization should take, as well as his own martial arts education without changing his style or philosophy. However he felt that he was not knowledgeable enough to stay on his own being only a 3<sup>rd</sup> Dan. He felt that was no organization in Australia that would satisfy his expectations.

During this period he kept in touch with **Sano Sensei**.

In **1989** The Asian Pacific Union of Karate-do Organizations introduced junior competition. **Branco** applied for the National Junior Coaching position detailing his qualifications. At the time

**John Newman**, now deceased, was the president of the **AKF**. John read the application and asked why **Branco** was not the senior coach. **Branco** explained that he was only interested in coaching the juniors. He felt that he would take one step at a time.

His first international coaching job was to take the team to the first junior Asian Pacific Championship in Fukuoka, Japan. Even though the team did not win any divisions, the team won a surprising number of medals. It was at this tournament that **John Newman** recognised the ability of **Branco's** students.

After the tournament **Branco** had arranged to take his students to the **Yoseikan Budo hombu dojo in Shizuoka**. **Master Minoru Mochizuki** was impressed with the calibre of **Branco's** students. In fact he made **Branco** show him how he trained them. This was a great compliment for **Branco**. From **Branco's** perspective he respected **Master Minoru Mochizuki** even more. The man was still interested in learning. It did not concern him if he was a lower ranked exponent.

**Branco** was required to teach at all the **Yoseikan Budo dojos** in **Shizuoka**. He found it amusing that he was teaching Japanese students karate. One of **Branco's** students **Donald James** passed the comment that he had come all the way to Japan to train under the **Yoseikan** instructors, yet he found himself back where he started.

At the end of the trip **Master Minoru Mochizuki** personally presented **Branco** with his 4<sup>th</sup> Dan certificate from **1985** and also his 5<sup>th</sup> Dan certificate. More importantly it meant that **Branco** was officially back in the **Yoseikan Budo** organization.

**1990** was an important year for the **AKF**. **Branco** coached the

Australian Team to victory at the Asian Pacific Karate Championships, Indonesia. Australia won the coveted team event, defeating the mighty Japanese Team in the first round. Australia also won two individual gold and two silver medals. **Branco's** student, **Mark Golding**, won the Junior Asian Pacific title at this event. **Mark's** team selection was controversial because he did not win the selection tournament. **Mark's** victory vindicated **Branco's** selection.

**Branco** also invited **Sano Sensei** to visit Australia in **1991** during the Nationals Championships in Perth. This was an amazing experience for all the **Yoseikan-Ryu** karate students in Perth.

We also see that **Branco's** devotion to people and respect supported by his family. **Jessica Bratich** commenced her karate training in **1991** closely followed by **Brian Bratich** in **1993**. They have become ideal role models for the other children. **Jessica** once stated that she started competing because she was sick of seeing her father off at the airport. **Jessica** and **Brian** have both achieved international success.

In **1992 Branco** was temporarily appointed National Senior Coach. Once again he coached a history making team. Australia won two individual gold medals at the World Championships in Spain, another first for Australia. In this period **Branco's** success stemmed from another of his cornerstone beliefs that when athletes arrive at their destination training should be tapered off. It is more important how they feel about themselves than making last minute corrections, which only has the effect of undermining the athlete's confidence. They must arrive at the competition prepared. It is not the coach's job to train them overseas four days prior to the event.

It was after this event that **John Newman** insisted that **Branco** become the senior coach. **Branco** agreed on the condition that he could still coach the juniors. He rightly believed that eventually today's juniors would be tomorrow's seniors.

Over the years **Yoseikan-Ryu Karate** has had many applications from other senior students and organizations about affiliating. **Branco** is selective as to whom he lets join. **Branco** has stated many times that he is not interested in organizations affiliating to him. **Yoseikan-Ryu** is structured like a family; everyone knows where they fit in. If it accepts instructors outside the organization this may cause disharmony.

In **1993**, 18 year old, **Hani Zahra** asked **Branco** if he could join **Yoseikan-Ryu Karate**. **Branco** had known **Hani** since he was 14 years old and had no hesitation in accepting him. He did make **Hani** test for his **Yoseikan-Ryu** black belt. **Branco** knew that for **Hani** to be accepted by the black belts he would have to prove himself. **Hani** convincingly proved that he deserved to be called a black belt in **Yoseikan-Ryu Karate**.

**Branco** realised that **Hani** had the qualities that would be beneficial to **Yoseikan-Ryu Karate**. He realised that his initial knowledge of karate was limited, but he was keen to learn. He is now a respected 3<sup>rd</sup> Dan member of **Yoseikan-Ryu Karate**.

**Todd Usher** was accepted into **Yoseikan-Ryu Karate** in **1997**. **Todd** like **Hani Zahra** was expected to re-test for his black belt grading. It is common knowledge that a **Yoseikan-Ryu Karate** black belt grading takes about eight hours to complete. The finale is where the student being tested is required to do 10 consecutive three-minute bouts. It is a **Yoseikan-Ryu Karate** tradition

that **Branco** fights at senior black belt grading.

The ultimate success of **Yoseikan-Ryu Karate** can be measured by how many students are still loyal after 15, 20 and even 25 years training. **Yoseikan-Ryu Karate's** long term members include, **Tony Smith, Adam Camuglia, Heather Healy, Justin Dowell, Duncan Scott, Iona Camuglia, Rebecca Bartlett, Kellie Shimmings, Jessica Bratich, Brian Bratich, Debbie Gorman, Nicole Bridgeman, James Fernandez** and **Steven Lee**. It is also a club where whole families develop lasting relationships seeing great applicability of **Branco's** techniques and philosophy for their children in their school and social lives.

**July 1994** was another outstanding year for **Branco Bratich** and the National Junior Team. Australia won 14 gold, 10 silver and 7 bronze medals at the Junior World Cup in Perth. **Yoseikan-Ryu Karate** students **Duncan Scott, Cameron Waters, Margaret Berezowski** and **Hani Zahra** won gold medals at these championships. The **1994** senior World Championships in Malaysia produced more excellent results. The Australian team won 1 silver medal and 3 bronze medals.

In the same year **Branco** was invited by the Kuwait Karate Federation to coach the Kuwait and Malaysian national teams in Malaysia. He was offered highly lucrative coaching positions by Kuwait and Taiwan. In fact he also successfully recommended **Brian Peakall**, Australia's 1992 World Heavyweight Champion, for the Taiwan position.

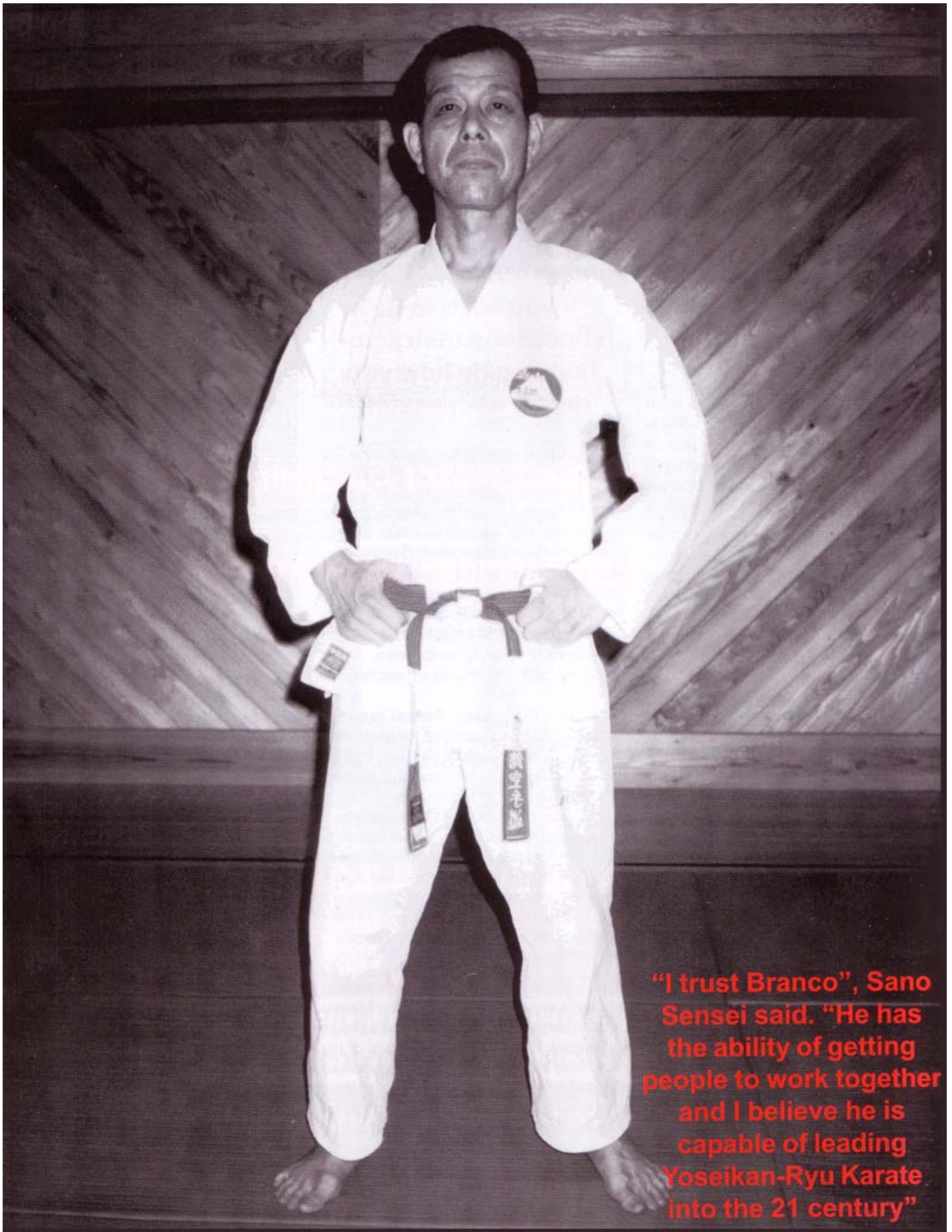
In **1995** **Branco** took a junior team to the World Club Championships in Hungary. This was a tough tournament. The Australian boys and girls teams won the team events. There were 68 boys teams competing and 28

girls teams. This was the tournament where student **Duncan Scott** won a gold in the individual and the team event. There were 250 competitors in his individual division. He fought 14 bouts during the competition. **Duncan** proved beyond any doubt that he was one of the coolest competitors on the mat. Nothing put him off his game. In the final of the team event his opponent scored on him with a hook kick, **Duncan** returned the favour. **Branco** felt that **Duncan** was a product of the **Yoseikan-Ryu's** positive environment.

In **1996** **Branco** coached another successful junior team at the Junior World Championships in South Africa. Australia won the girls team event and two individual gold medals. One of these medals went to **Yoseikan-Ryu** student **Kellie Shimmings**. **Kellie**, along with fellow club member **Jessica Bratich** also won gold medals in the team event.

In the same year **Branco** coached the National Senior Team at the World Championships in South Africa. The team won a bronze medal in the women's team event and the women's under 53kgs. **Yoseikan-Ryu** student **Mark Golding** won a silver medal in the men's 60-65kgs division. This was a devastating experience for **Mark Golding**. **Branco** had been coaching **Mark** for 16 years for this moment. The match went to **encho**. **Mark Golding** had never lost in **encho**.

In March **1998** **Sano Sensei** made a surprise visit to Australia. **Branco** was advised by **Sano Sensei 9th Dan**, that he had been chosen as his successor. He also presented **Branco** with his 7<sup>th</sup> Dan certificate. This was a surprise and also a great honour for **Branco**. "I trust **Branco**", **Sano Sensei** said. "He has the ability of getting people to work together and I believe he is capable of leading **Yoseikan-Ryu**



**Karate** into the 21 century". At over 70 years of age I have some concerns about my health".

This year was a sad year for Yoseikan students around the world. **Master Minoru Mochizuki** passed away at 96

years of age in France. He was under the care of his son **Hiroo Mochizuki**. The living legend had passed into history as many had



before him. It was only the year before that the Hombu Dojo in Shizuoka, Japan had closed its doors. This was considered the Mecca for Yoseikan students. **Master Minoru Mochizuki's** passing was the final chapter in a life that has influenced so many martial artists around the world.

After all the years of involvement in coaching and teaching at all levels **Branco's** advice is as usual straight to the point. If you wish to be a successful instructor first decide how you define successful. If it is only money you are after then it may not be a lasting legacy you leave behind. It is possible to keep ethical principles and survive as a full time instructor. If you want respect you must give respect first. If you want to be trusted you must be prepared to trust first. If you impart a caring and genuine attitude, that's what you will receive. If one or two students disappoint you, so what!

Judge everyone individually. A real karate teacher does not hold grudges.

In line with **Branco's** philosophy of building lasting relationships **Branco** has been married for 27 years. **Nives** is one of Branco's staunchest supporters. She is fiercely loyal to her family. She can always be seen in the background making sure everything is running efficiently.

**Branco** suggests that if you have aspirations of becoming a National Coach then take it slowly. There is a natural progression on the path to becoming a successful National Coach. Start by producing State Champions. Once you have achieved this level the next step is to produce National Champions. The final step on the path to producing an elite competitor may take years to achieve. One of the drawbacks that former competitors have is recognising

the fact that just because they have been successful competitors they assume they will be successful coaches. Being a champion is mostly about ones self. Being a successful coach is completely the opposite.

**Yoseikan-Ryu Karate** has been evolving with society. Karate has become more mobile than it was before. This is because just about everyone person you meet has had some experience with martial arts. It is not possible to stand in a classical stance and defend yourself. Change is not something that should not be feared. Change can be a positive experience. Martial arts have constantly been evolving over the centuries adapting to the society of the times. Karate cannot be applied exactly as it was 100 years ago. What is called modern karate today will be called traditional karate in 100 years.

