

## Welcome to Kaifukan Kendo Kailua Recreation Center



### Introduction

Kaifukan Dojo was established in April 2001 by 7th-dan Kunio Maeda Sensei, who moved to Hawaii from Japan in the summer of 1999, and is a member dojo of the Hawaii Kendo Federation.

### What is Kendo?

Kendo is the *way of the sword*, Japanese fencing. Kendo in a modern context means the form of Japanese fencing governed by the International Kendo Federation and the All Japan Kendo Federation. About 8 million people world-wide participate, 7 million of them in Japan where kendo is taught as part of the school physical education curriculum.

### The objective of kendo practice

The AJKF Charter reads, “Kendo is the way to discipline the human character through the application of the *katana* (Japanese sword).” You may gather that kendo is not merely the art of fighting with swords, but is rather more philosophical and spiritual than physical. A sword as a weapon is, indeed, obsolete in this day and age. The objective of kendo practice today is, at its depth, not becoming good and strong at sword fighting, but becoming physically fit through its rigorous exercises, and becoming more aware of self-esteem and cultivating respect for others.



*Kendoka* (kendo practitioners) wear armor (called *bogu* or *dogu*) protecting the head, throat, wrists and abdomen. The split-bamboo practice sword, called a *shinai*, is wielded two-handed, and the *kendoka* faces his opponent squarely.

*Kendoka* move using a peculiar gliding step refined for use on the smooth floors of the dojo. They generally practice as partners, although the basics of posture, movement, grip and swing are learned in supervised solo practice. Because of the protective equipment, *kendoka* can and do practice full speed and full power, including free-sparring. *Kendoka* also practice partner *kata* (formalized forms), in which two partners carry out a prescribed series of attacks with wooden swords, called *bokken* (also called *bokuto*).



### What equipment will I need?



The uniform top is called a *gi*. It is a heavy, quilted-cotton shirt with three-quarter-length sleeves. The bottom is called a *hakama*. It is a pleated, divided skirt (somewhat similar to modern culottes) generally made of cotton or cotton-polyester blend. The *gi* and *hakama* may be blue or white. Children’s *gi* have a diamond-shaped line pattern on them. Many students, both male and female, wear all blue.



The hakama and gi are robust versions of the formal samurai clothing of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. They are worn during sword practice to emphasize the formality of training. Kendo training is meant to be more than just physical practice, and the choice of clothes emphasizes this. Additionally, the clothes add grace and dignity to an already graceful and dignified art. From a practical standpoint, the hakama is cool and comfortable, allows easy movement, and disguises the feet from the opponent.

The primary weapon used in kendo is the *shinai*. It is constructed of four pieces of split bamboo. The tip of the shinai (*sakigawa*) is covered in leather; with the four staves held apart by a T-shaped piece of rubber. The staves are held together at the opposite end by a long round leather handle, or *tsuka*. A leather lace tied in a complicated knot (*nakayui*) about a third of the way from the tip keeps the staves from spreading too far apart. A string runs down one stave - it signifies the dull edge, or back of the sword. The split construction allows the staves to both flex and compress against each other, absorbing much of the energy of the blow. Thus, attacks which miss the armor can cause bruises; nothing more.

For *kata* (forms), kendoka use bokken, or wooden swords. Bokken are usually constructed of white Japanese oak, although they can be made of a variety of exotic hardwoods. They are curved and sized like a *katana* (Japanese steel sword), and the handle is a bit longer than a shinai's and is oval, rather than round.



Kendo armor protects the head, throat, wrists and abdomen; these are the only legal targets. The helmet is called a *men*. An oval steel cage protects the face; a throat guard extends down from the cage and provides the *tsuki* (throat) target - about 3" by 4". Padding for the top of the head, ears, and shoulders is attached to this steel cage. Traditionally the padding would be horse hair, but modern bogu uses a thick felt. The padding is covered with cotton fabric and compressed with close stitching. The whole assembly is tied on with long woven strings. The men target is the top of the head, from corner to corner. A cotton towel called a *tenugui* is worn under the men for comfort and to soak up the sweat. Tenugui are printed with a design, usually *Kanji*, and are often given as souvenirs.



The *tare*, also of felt and cloth construction, protects the hip and groin. There is no legal target on the tare. The tare will have the kendoka's name and dojo affiliation displayed (this is a requirement for tournament competition) on the main flap via an embroidered cover called a *zekken*.



Overlapping the tare is the chest protector, called the *do*. The do is constructed of from 48 to 64 bamboo staves, covered in leather and lacquered. Less expensive ones are constructed from pulp fiber or resin. The do protects the entire front of the chest, and extends around the sides to protect from the hip bone to the first couple of ribs. The abdominal portion of the do is the do target. The portion covering the heart (called the *mune*) becomes a legal tsuki target in certain positions.



The *kote* protect the hands and wrists. The backs of the hands and knuckles are covered in heavy padding with a leather exterior. The portion of the kote covering the wrists is constructed like the men padding. The palms are covered with a layer of leather. They look a bit like boxing gloves crossed with medieval gauntlets.



### **Okay, how much will all this cost me?**

As with most sporting equipment, for kendo gear, you will generally get what you pay for. Here is a list of kendo equipment that you will need to own, with costs shown based on April 2004 price lists:

Gi	\$50 - \$90
Youth gi	\$25 - \$50
Hakama	\$45 - \$210
Set of gi & hakama	\$140 - \$240
Bamboo shinai	\$25
Wooden bokken	\$30
Set of bogu	\$395 - \$595
Set of youth bogu	\$375
Zekken	\$35
Equipment bag	\$15 - \$85

The price ranges shown are for “basic” kendo equipment, with high-end bogu costing \$10,000 or more! Don’t worry: you won’t have to buy all of this at once, and Maeda-Sensei will tell you what is needed and when.

Other fees include: **TUITION:** \$30/month or less, depending what course you take. **KAIFUKAN Registration Fee:** \$30 for lifetime membership as long as student status is maintained. **HAWAII KENDO FEDERATION Registration Fee:** \$5/year.

For more details, please refer to the application form.

Kaifukan Dojo practice sessions are held three times a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 7:00 - 8:30 PM, and on Saturdays from 2:00 - 3:00 PM.

### **Is Kendo dangerous?**

Kendo has a lower rate of injury than other martial arts. Kendoka rarely incur injuries worse than a bruise, although there are exceptions, of course.

The common injuries in kendo are associated with the feet and ankles. The Achilles tendon can be torn, and it is also possible to tear the plantar fascia muscle (the tensioning muscle on the bottom of the foot). Both injuries can be prevented with a proper stretching program. Less serious but more common is a bruised heel.

Kendoka can trip over the hakama, which can cause the usual variety of injuries from falling on a hard

surface. Some kendoka can incur chronic wrist injuries, such as carpal-tunnel syndrome, from overuse. These can be further aggravated if the student also does some other wrist-aggravating activity, such as heavy typing or playing the piano.

### **Does a shinai blow hurt?**

A correct shinai blow which lands on target (that is, on the armor) doesn't hurt. You know you've been hit, but there is no pain. A heavy-handed hit driven by too much muscle (a typical beginner's stroke) can hurt a bit, more so if the armor is old and soft. The shinai itself is designed to flex and absorb the blow. A hit which misses the armor usually causes no worse than a bruise, although it certainly can hurt at the time.

### **How does the ranking work in kendo?**

Kendo is strongly organized, with most kendo clubs governed by a single federation in each country receiving direction from the International Kendo Federation. There is a fairly consistent 8-*dan* (black belt) system of ranking, with 6 *kyu* (brown belt). *Kyu* start at six and advance to first. Then *dan* start at first rank and advance to eight. No outward indication of rank is worn.

The rank of *shodan* (first-degree black belt) can be accomplished in one or two years for a persistent and reasonably-talented and -coordinated person.

### **How do I get started??**

Maeda-Sensei will not accept anyone who wants to try out kendo without having any idea about it and/or what he or she is going to be involved in. He requires all potential students to sit through and watch a complete 90-minute kendo practice session before applying to become a Kaifukan student. The minimum age for a student is eight years old, but this decision is at the sole discretion of Maeda-Sensei.

Kendo is a lot of fun, but it is very strenuous both physically and spiritually and, therefore, children need constant moral support from their parents. For this reason, Maeda-Sensei strongly recommends that children under 12 should join with their parent/guardian. There is no maximum age, but practitioners should be in reasonably good health with no mobility problems. If there are any health questions, please consult with your family doctor before applying.

Kaifukan students are expected to attend all practice sessions, and to notify Maeda-Sensei via phone or e-mail before a session if it must be missed. Students who are not serious about kendo study and practice may be placed on probation, or asked to leave.

### **Contact Information:**

Please contact Maeda-Sensei at [kaifukan@hawaii.rr.com](mailto:kaifukan@hawaii.rr.com) with any specific questions.

