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presents a feature article from Blitz martial arts magazine Vol 25 No 01 (January 2011):

Steve Miranda – Professor

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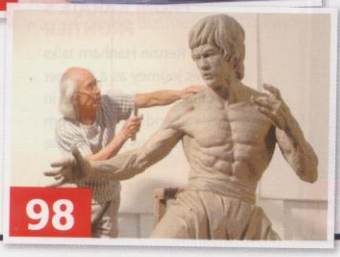

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The Test of Time

Each month in this segment, martial arts instructors throw down their opinions on issues concerning martial arts training, teaching, fighting and philosophy. This issue, we ask the question: Should Dan-grades be awarded purely on skill tests or time spent in service of the art, or both?

Steve Miranda
Chief instructor, National Karate Academies

The founder and Chief Instructor of the National Karate Academies – Miranda Kai system, Professor Steven Miranda is an experienced instructor in many different styles of martial arts. He has trained and holds Black-belts in judo, silat, taekwondo, kung fu and several styles of jujitsu and karate, including a 4th Dan in Bob Jones' Zen Do Kai system. He considers himself a true freestylist with a traditional background. Having trained in the martial arts for over 40 years – since starting judo at the age of six – Professor Miranda was graded to 8th Degree Black-belt in 2008 by the Australian Martial Arts Association.

Dan-grades must be a combination of time, knowledge, skill and experience.

Lower Dan-levels must have a high level of physical skill with time between Dans, for example, two years between 1st and 2nd Dan, three years between 2nd and 3rd Dan, etc., including a level of maturity – remember, these are adult ranks.

Anybody graded to 6th Dan and above is at a master's level – this is not to be given out just because you have been training for a long time. You to need have skill, knowledge, experience and, of course, we do not hide behind our belt.

At the high Dan-levels, real credibility is a must; without credibility the grade means nothing, the certificate or diploma is only for your records and for you to hang on your wall. At the end of the day, it's only paper. The true grade is within you and what other people have witnessed and acknowledged that you have done, in contribution to your style, as well as knowledge, ability/skill, dedication, years spent training, years teaching in the martial arts at a high level... The key word is 'performance'.

Why performance? Were you graded through coloured belts on ability, time etc. or are you graded on time only? Your Black-belt – was it graded on performance and time? Well, with higher Dans that doesn't change, just the criteria does. How can you have a hand-out rank over a cup of coffee at, say, 8th Dan, and be graded at coloured-belt level and lower Black-belt levels? It doesn't make sense. All higher Dan-levels need to be graded on performance, including a physical grading, or a demonstration for the head instructors to their own students and instructors, as well as developing and building their own system/styles.

The grade should have more creditability than a coloured belt, shouldn't it? Thus, time on its own does not give you a high Dan-level.

For head instructors, your Black-belt instructors should be pushing you up, rather than you joining an association to gain a Dan and say 'I have an association rank' – your style should be grading you. How can anyone grade you if they don't teach your system and have never been graded in it? The martial arts associations are there to witness your efforts, not to be abused for hand-out ranks. Remember, rank only shows where you are in your system and is irrelevant outside of this.

If you have been teaching and training for 40 years, why do you need to be at a high Dan level teaching coloured belts? Even the 1st and 2nd Dans do not require an 8th Degree Black-belt to teach them, so why get some title that is not a result of proper testing and thus means nothing? You would be better off staying a 4th Dan with credibility than becoming an 8th Dan with no credibility.

Miranda believes the skill set must match the rank

SOMA can provide training, tournaments, gradings (after a qualifying period and assessment) and a whole host of other benefits. For more information about how you or your martial arts organisation can join the **Society of Martial Arts** please contact admin@societyofmartialarts.com