

The Road To

Remaking *The Karate Kid*



On June 11, 2010, the remake of the popular 1980s film, *The Karate Kid*, will be released in theaters everywhere. Starring Jackie Chan and Jaden Smith, the film has garnered excitement from fans of the original as well as a new generation of martial arts enthusiasts. Learn more about the making of the film and Jaden's martial arts training from the cast and crew.

By Ashley Perkins



Jaden Smith and the XMA Connection

When prominent husband-and-wife actors Will Smith and Jada Pinkett-Smith decided to embark on a project to remake the legendary 80s hit movie, *The Karate Kid*, starring their son Jaden Smith, they looked to Xtreme Martial Arts (XMA) founder Mike Chat for special training.

"In June of 2008," Chat explains, "The Smiths began researching options to train their son, Jaden, and their daughter, Willow. They found us [XMA] online and discussed with me the focus of Jaden's instruction — his upcoming role in the planned remake of *The Karate Kid*."

Chat's stunning North Hollywood XMA headquarters puts him in a position to regularly see plenty of Hollywood names and faces. In fact, he's trained many entertainment celebs.

However, the meeting with the Smiths, according to Chat, occurred much like any initial meeting with a parent, with Mrs. Smith requesting an assessment of her son's prior martial arts training.

"I was impressed with how warm and friendly Will and Jada Pinkett are," Chat says. "They are so down to earth and friendly. We were just beside ourselves the first time they came in."

Chat's goal was to focus on Jaden's skill development while keeping him motivated toward consistent training during the long preproduction period.

"We knew we had eight to twelve months before the film went into production," he says. "The game plan was to lay a solid foundation and build his mental focus, discipline, and technique over time."

Chat found Jaden to be a charming, mature, and focused student.

"Clearly, his focus for such a young individual makes him stand out," Chat says. "Jaden has an incredible ability to control his professional and casual sides. He is very much a normal, fun, playful kid with a great personality which allows him to blend in. However, when it's time to flip the switch, he does it on command and has a good time doing it."

"We planted the seeds early on and discussed often what it would be like working with Jackie Chan and his team, so Jaden had a clear vision of the expectation levels he would encounter," Chat says.

All the while, Jaden's famous parents continued pushing the movie into production. The movie itself had several different titles. Up until very late in the cycle, it was still being referred to as *The Kung Fu Kid*. After signing on Jackie Chan to reprise the role of Mr. Miyagi (made famous by actor Pat

Morita who passed away in 1985), the script began developing.

But Chat was still uncertain of the specifics of Jaden's character or the martial arts style he would be showcasing.

"Without knowing the specifics of the script, casting of key roles, and the martial arts focus, we worked toward transitioning Jaden to adapt to all areas and to prepare him for whatever the script could entail," Chat explains. That included X-treme Martial Arts, acrobatics and choreography.

"Our goal was always to over-prepare. I had my top capoeira specialist and Ringling Brothers circus acrobat, Professor Axe, and a world-class Groovaloo break dancer, Bboy Spee-d, assist me to diversify his training."

Production Moves to China

As the script developed and the cast solidified, the Smiths moved Jaden to China for further martial arts study and initial filming. The new movie, which borrows elements of the original plot, wherein a bullied youth learns to stand up for himself with the help of an eccentric mentor, might be considered more of a re-telling than a remake.

In the remake, the quiet, reclusive Mr. Han (Chan) saves Dre (Smith) from a beating at the hands of a gang of young kung-fu hotshots. Han turns out to be a kung-fu wizard himself and agrees to train the boy for a tournament showdown with his tormentors.

Ken Stovitz, the film's producer, explains, "When we decided to open up the movie and go to China, one change that became necessary was the fighting style that Dre [Jaden's character in the movie] would learn. He would learn a Chinese fighting style rather than karate, which originates from Okinawa and Japan."

So, the karate kid would learn kung-fu.

"We thought it would be a fun twist, a knowing wink to the audience," Stovitz added. "We kept the title as homage, a nod to the original film. But now, not only would Dre be mocked by the bullies for being a kid, but also for trying karate in the land of kung-fu."

Jaden Learns Wushu

In *The Karate Kid*, Dre learns a specific fighting style of kung-fu: the modernized, flamboyant wushu, a physically demanding, active kung-fu sport taught and practiced in China. While in China, Jaden was trained by Wu Gang, the stunt coordinator for the renowned Jackie Chan stunt team, which is responsible for the stunts in the films that Chan directs. He also worked many, many hours with Chan personally.

Chan commented publicly about his training with Jaden.

"I have seen many young children learn martial arts, but I have never met anyone like him," the superstar says of Jaden. "He learned many Chinese phrases for the different movements of kung-fu. When Wu Gang asked Jaden to show me, he barked out his orders in Mandarin. Jaden immediately understood what was asked of him and performed it. When he was thirsty, he gave the traditional hand gesture, putting one fist into the palm of the other, bowed and asked permission to drink some water."

Master Wu, as Jaden came to call Wu Gang, trained Smith throughout the production.

"When I first met Jaden, he was just a kid," says Wu. "I knew he was from a rich and famous family, and I wasn't sure what he'd be like. But he surprised me; he is very talented, and he worked so hard. A few months later, he was at the same level as kids that have been training for five or six years. He was focused, very talented and never complained. I'm very proud of him."

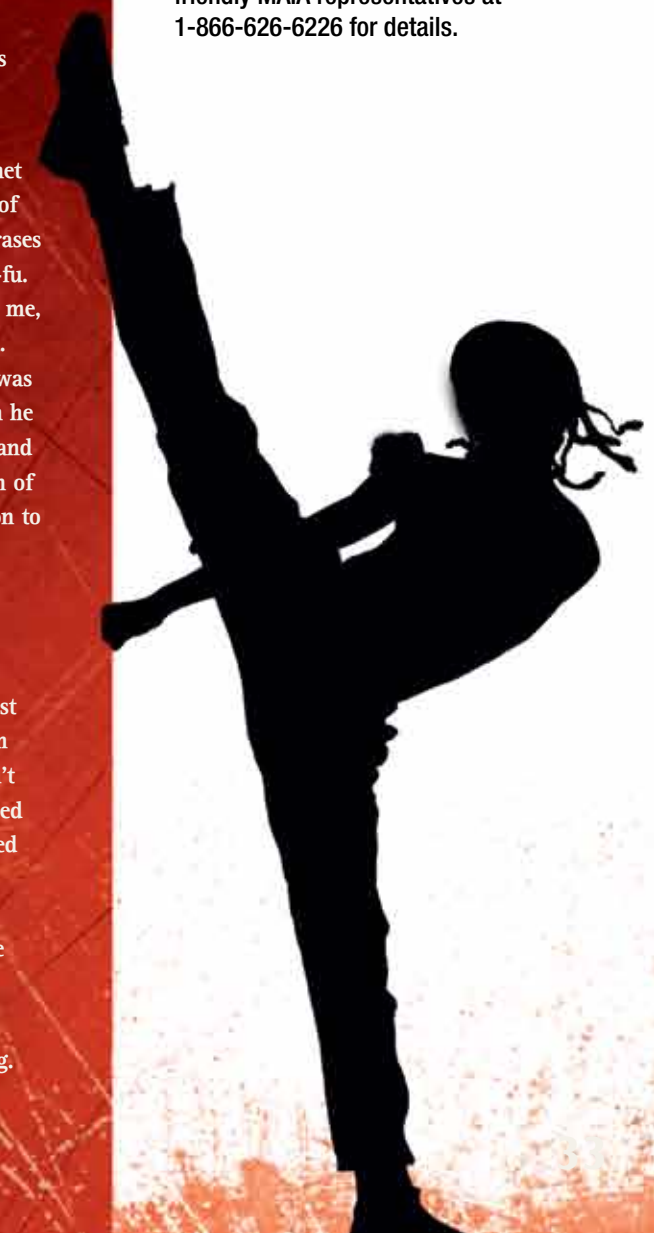
They were starting at the beginning.

How Can You Get Involved With *The Karate Kid*?

As this magazine was going to press, the promotions team at Sony Studios was working with the Martial Arts Industry Association (MAIA) leadership to solidify a cross-promotional marketing campaign of *The Karate Kid* designed to generate more students in martial arts schools.

In recent weeks, the elements of this movie tie-in campaign and how your school can participate will be delivered exclusively to MAIA members via email and traditional mail.

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"Whenever I teach anyone kung-fu, but especially a kid, the first thing I teach them is respect for other people. Kung-fu isn't about fighting, but about helping people," says Wu.

The All-Important Fight Scenes

Despite the fact that they were making a movie, Wu says that the filmmakers were never tempted to rely on moviemaking tricks to make Smith look like he could do something he couldn't.

"No matter what, he had to learn how to move, how to fight — the basic training. There was a serious need for real kung-fu, wushu learning," Wu says.

Of course, Smith and all of the other kung-fu kids in the movie were also taught how to fight for the camera in a choreographed match and look good doing it on the big screen.

"None of the kids in the movie had movie fighting experience," Wu notes. "It's not easy to get the timing, the rhythm, and the reaction when you get hit. Also, the drama and the acting in the fight are just as important as the action. The kids needed to tell the dramatic story of the fight with their faces and bodies. It's very challenging. But the big difference with this movie is that the movements are real."

Did Smith enjoy his training? "He asked me to continue training him after the movie wrapped," says Wu. "I was honored."

Mike Chat seems to concur with Wu

regarding Jaden's future with the martial arts.

"Jaden is an actor by trade and Xtreme Martial Arts is one of the many skills he'll have under his belt. I am honored to have had the opportunity to work with Jaden and his sister Willow and look forward to having him back at the XMA headquarters for his next project."

Finding Happiness in Fitness

Rising child-star Jaden, 12, made his feature film debut opposite his father in

Xtreme Martial Arts founder Mike Chat (center) provided Jaden Smith's (right) preliminary martial arts training for his starring role as *The Karate Kid*. He also taught Jaden's sister, Willow (left).

The Original *Karate Kid* — Revisited

By *masUCCESS* Managing Editor John Corcoran

It was a martial arts phenomenon that marked the beginning of a new era. Unlike the typical bone-breaking, blood-spattering quests for revenge common to the early genre, 1984's *The Karate Kid* was that rare film that portrayed the martial arts as a vehicle for self-discovery. The power and the potential of the martial arts was finally showcased through compelling characters, human virtues and wholesome traditional martial arts values.

The genius behind it all was Robert Mark Kamen, the original *Karate Kid* screenwriter, who is credited for also writing the basic story for the upcoming 2010 remake. Kamen is a black belt in Okinawan goju-ryu and had studied the art in both the U.S. and Okinawa. It was Kamen's brainchild that started it all. And the public showed its appreciation by making it a mega-hit.

In a 1989 interview for *Fighter International* magazine, Kamen expressed his lifelong passion for the martial arts.

"For me," he explained, "the film's success was doubly satisfying because I knew I had a big commercial movie on my hands which would establish me as a major screenwriter. And on top of that, it was about Okinawan goju, the subject closest to my heart." In self-evaluation he added, "I think of myself as a martial artist first and a screenwriter second."

Kamen began his karate training in 1964, with isshinryu stylist Ed McGrath. In the late 1960s, while attending college in Philadelphia, he started training with U.S. shotokan karate pioneer Teruyuki Okazaki. In the early '70s, Kamen met Toshio Tamano, who introduced him to Okinawan goju. He became so immersed in goju that he traveled to Okinawa, karate's homeland, where he trained briefly in that style. He returned to New York and continued his training with Kao Ahn, another Okinawan goju master.

Kamen's script for the original *Karate Kid* was full of inventive devices: The quiet Asian with a secret past; Miyagi's miraculous ability to fix everything from bicycles to broken bones by the simple touching it; the novel training sequences; and the mysterious crane kick. He's also

responsible for the oft-repeated words that have now become part of the American language: "Wax on, wax off."

Most of all, like all great films, the movie is about relationships — between a master and his art, and between an older wise man and a brash young kid thirsting for friendship and needing leadership. The remake maintains this special relationship.

The Mr. Miyagi character, renamed Mr. Han and played by Jackie Chan in the remake, has climbed to mythical pop-culture status, thanks to the quintessential acting infused into the role by the late Pat Morita. Morita wasn't a martial arts practitioner. Master Fumio Demura, the iconic shito-ryu karate pioneer, doubled for Morita in the fight scenes. Kamen's model for Mr. Miyagi was, he said, "a composite of several of my instructors. I named the character after Chojun Miyagi, the man who invented goju-ryu."

The Karate Kid and its first sequel became box-office blockbusters, grossing over \$100 million each. Two more sequels, unfortunately, progressively weaker, followed.

Kamen, 62, a native New Yorker who today owns his own winery, Kamen Estate Wines, in Sonoma Valley, California, still pens movie scripts and has had many hits throughout his illustrious writing career. And he's probably written more martial arts action scenes than any other screenwriter in the entertainment business.

Among his many credits, Kamen has written or co-written such hits as the hyper-action *Transporter* film trilogy (2002-2008) starring Jason Statham; Jet Li's *Kiss of the Dragon* (2001); the blockbusters *Lethal Weapon 3* (1992) starring Mel Gibson, *The Fifth Element* (1997) starring Bruce Willis and last year's *Taken* starring Liam Neeson; 1989's *The Punisher* (1989), starring former heavyweight kyokushinkai champion Dolph Lundgren; and the short-lived 2003 TV series *Black Sash*.

Although *The Karate Kid* film series trailed off in box-office popularity in its third and fourth stanzas, it nevertheless



left an extraordinary long-term legacy for the martial arts industry.

Prior to the first film's release, adult males principally populated martial arts schools. In 1984, however, that changed dramatically. As soon as the original *Karate Kid* hit theaters, kids started pouring into martial arts schools everywhere and continue to do so today. Thanks largely to *The Karate Kid*'s influence, children have represented our biggest customer demographic for over 25 years. What's more, today, parents who trained in karate back in the 1980s and '90s because of *The Karate Kid* are now enrolling their kids in martial arts classes. It's become a multi-generational trend.

The original movie still plays on television today, furthering its influence on the current generation of kids.

We're all crossing our fingers that the magic of the original film will find its way into the new *Karate Kid*. If it does, be prepared for another enrollment boom. Maybe we can all thank Robert Kamen, the traditional karate black belt whose brilliant work has brought untold numbers of new students to martial arts schools all over the world.

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The Pursuit Of Happyness and went on to co-star in the remake of *The Day The Earth Stood Still*.

As for Jaden's next project, the family is considering taking Jaden's passion for the martial arts and combining it with their passion for fitness. Will Smith, who had to get in great shape for a number of film roles, including *I Am Legend* and *Ali*, the Muhammad Ali biopic, thinks a healthy body equals a healthy mind. The family is working with First Lady Michelle Obama to promote after-school activities, including the martial arts.

The elder Smith responded to an interviewer, "I feel like everything in my life depends on physical conditioning. I love eating sweets and everything, but I think the quality of my parenting, the quality of my relationship with my wife, it is all based on being in great physical condition.

"I believe it's the beginning of finding true happiness."

On a final note, not only did Jaden Smith's newfound talents in martial arts

discipline and obedience help him on screen, but they've apparently translated to his off-screen life as well. His intense training for the film has already taught him to be more respectful and well-behaved away from the set.

"His dad told me that Jaden had changed," Chan told *People* magazine during the film's production. "When he takes his shoes off, he doesn't throw them in the corner, but puts them away neatly!"

Wax on, wax off lives!

Ashley Perkins, Vice President of Marketing for Century Martial Arts, is a 21-year veteran in the marketing and public-relations fields. She joined Century in October 2009 after an executive position with SBC and ATT in charge of marketing and external affairs. Perkins is currently working with Sony Pictures to develop additional benefits for the MAIA membership as it relates to continued movie-promotion opportunities. She can be reached at aperkins@centurymartialarts.com.

The Karate Kid's Awards Keep On Coming!

On March 23, 2010 in Las Vegas, Jaden Smith was named ShoWest's "Breakthrough Male Star of the Year" for his role in the new version of *The Karate Kid*. ShoWest is the annual trade show for movie-theater owners. Robert Sunshine, managing director of ShoWest, said, "Jaden Smith is an exceptional young actor who has delivered a true breakout performance with his portrayal of Dre Parker in *The Karate Kid*."

The original movie won its actors many awards including the Academy Award for the Best Supporting Actor to Pat Morita. Morita became the first Asian-American actor to be nominated for an acting Oscar, scoring a best supporting actor nod at the 1985 Academy Awards. He was also nominated for a Golden Globe in the same category.

The movie also won two major Golden Globes in 1985: Best Family Motion Picture Award and Best Supporting Actress Award (Elisabeth Shue). Plus, the pic nabbed a Golden Globe nomination for the Best Young Supporting Actor (William Zebka).

Matching the award-laden original will be quite a challenge for the latest version. One thing is becoming evident, however. Wherever *The Karate Kid* goes, awards seem to follow.



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MAIA Success Seminar
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Price: \$99 for one attendee and guest (price includes lunch)

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