

AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH TOKEY HILL

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**"FIGHT HARD!  
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SAYS MU TAU'S  
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**THOSE FANTASTIC  
BREAKING DEMOS:  
ARE THEY FOR REAL?**



**FULL COVERAGE OF THE TOURNAMENT AND  
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**MARTIAL ARTS MOVIE PREVIEW**





# THOSE FANTASTIC BREAKING DEMOS: ARE THEY FOR REAL?

BY BILL BOTTIGGI

**One of the more common trick demonstrations involves a watermelon or other piece of fruit which is placed on a "victim's" chest or throat, which is then sliced "samurai-style" without injuring the participant in any manner.**

*The martial artist strides confidently forward to the center of the spectator-filled auditorium. He pauses dramatically in front of the assembled stack of ice blocks piled three or four high, closing his eyes and breathing in deeply to summon up all of his ki power. Then in a split-second flash, done to the accompaniment of an ear-piercing "Kilaai," he executes a shuto strike which neatly, almost too neatly, splits the blocks directly down the middle.*

*He turns and bows in acknowledgement to the loud cheers and tremendous applause which his demonstrations has surely elicited from the audience. For the fact of the matter is that what it has just witnessed is indeed sensational. But, given its thrills, has what the audience seen been "real"?*

*"No way," says Master Teruyuki Higa, a sixth-degree black belt in Okinawan kenpo karate.*

Master Higa's desire to expose these phony demonstrations has brought him forward to speak out for two reasons. The first is that he hates to see the general public being duped and cheated, but secondly, and more importantly, he feels that they are giving the martial arts a bad image. These so-called demo masters are building phony reputations in order to increase student enrollment.

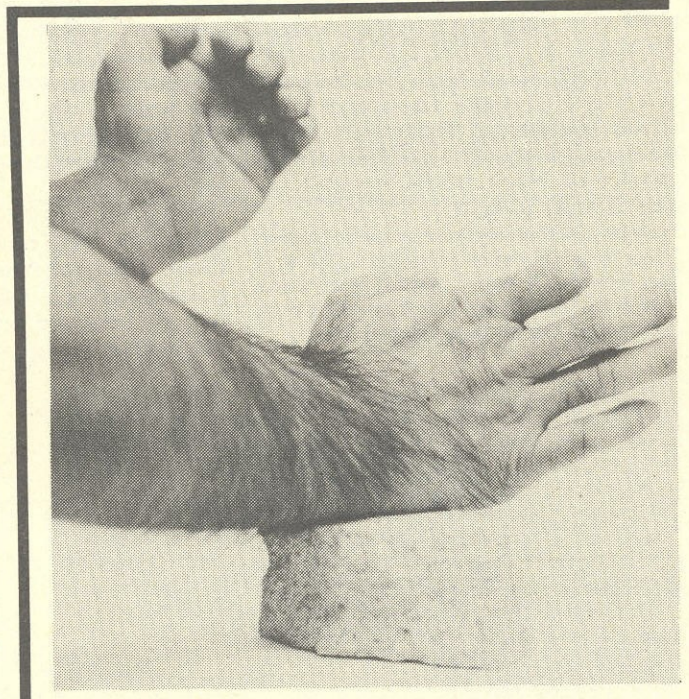
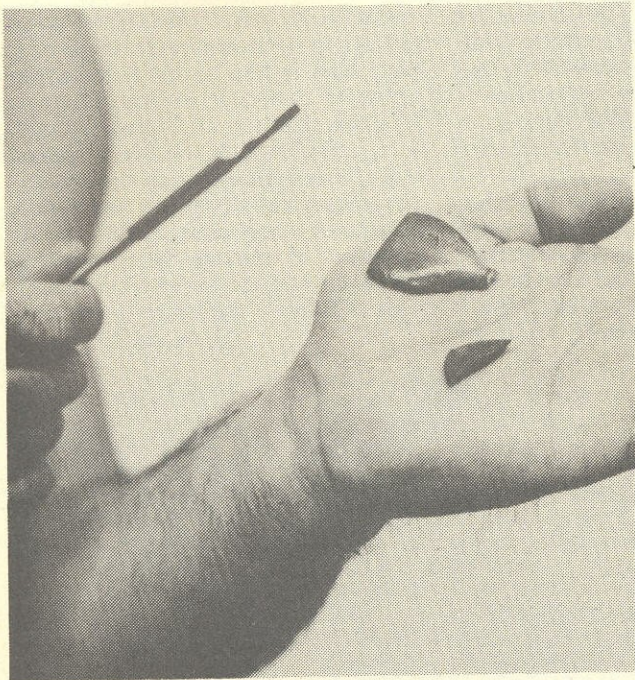
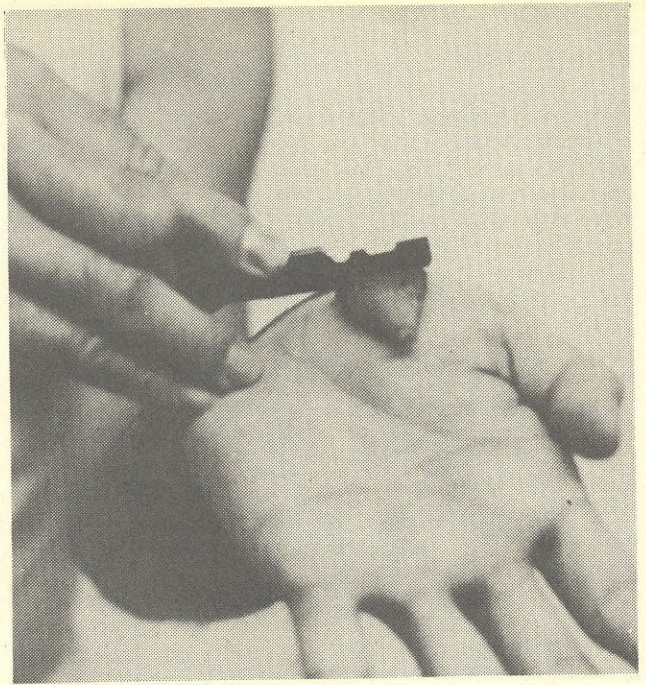
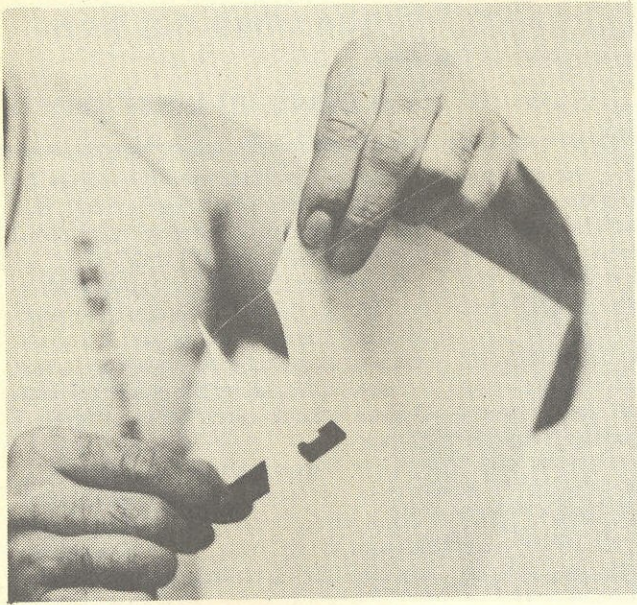
The problem, he feels, has gone on too long, and what is happening in the process is that the demos are becoming phonier because each one must become more spectacular to draw an audience. If "Master A" breaks ten boards, then "Master B" must break twelve, and so on. Higa backed up his claims with proof and explanations of how they are really done. Most of the demonstrations have sound physical laws of which all these phony masters are well aware.

One of the more common trick demonstrations involves a watermelon or other piece of fruit which is placed on a "victim's" chest or throat which is then sliced "samurai-style" without injuring the participant in any manner. The process begins with the demonstrator's first showing the audience how sharp a sword's edge is by cutting through a piece of paper or cloth. Master Higa used a razor blade, which of course is even sharper. The secret consists in the fact that when the swordsman strikes the piece of fruit, it splits neatly in half without drawing blood because he doesn't draw (pull) the sword through after he strikes. Without doing so, he can never cut the person, and there is absolutely no risk involved for the participant.

The same is true even for those who



Higa demonstrates the razor's sharpness by slicing through a sheet of paper, and then shows how injury is prevented when he strikes a leaf *without* drawing the razor afterwards.



If the stone rests flat against a surface, the breaking will be nearly impossible, but with physics on its side, it will break easily once elevated.



use a "blindfold" before they strike. Although the strips of cloth may be black and look opaque when not work over the eyes, once applied they are as transparent as a piece of clear plastic. Like the dramatic effect achieved by the deep meditation and concentration on energy forces within, the strip of cloth is nothing more than an accoutrement of showmanship and razzle-dazzle.

Referring to those who use ice in



their demos, Higa explained that, "The ice is chipped, or scored, before the demo begins. Then the ice is more easily breakable. Often the blocks of ice are separated by thin wooden boards. In those cases, it's a law of physics that explains the breaking. The weight of the top piece of ice will drive the gap between the blocks, which in turn will break the others. The more space that separates the blocks, the greater the momentum which will impact the bottom blocks." So in reality, it's only the top piece of ice that is legitimately broken, which is plausible. Higa claims that one foot of ice — possibly a maximum of fifteen inches — is the amount that a legitimate artist could break. He also added that if it were a legitimate break, the ice would shatter all over rather than break so neatly in half.

Like the blocks of ice, the bricks used in breaking demos are also pre-treated. You certainly wouldn't want to use those bricks to build yourself a home of any kind. In most cases, they are made of cheaper material and then baked so that all the water is extracted to make them dry and brittle. And again, like the ice, they are spaced so that it is the effect of the impact of brick upon brick that causes them to split.

**One tack will cause pain, but when they are arranged in a grid, nothing more than a slight discomfort will result when the palm of the hand is pressed against them.**

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## Although the strips of cloth may be black and look opaque when not worn over the eyes, once applied they are as transparent as a piece of clear plastic.

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The legendary Japanese master, Mas Oyama, was able to break a maximum of two bricks without spacing between them. Any more than two should be a clue to the spectator that what he is seeing is purely a canard.

In Japan, the general public is aware of the impossibility of performing certain feats, and the masters there couldn't cheat in their demos. In America, the public isn't yet aware of this trickery.

Regardless, certain breaking is beyond the human potential and capabilities. One might see a man break one or two boards with a technique such as a flying technique or a foot technique, but those are legitimate boards with nothing treated beforehand. The more boards that are broken, the more space that is required between them, and the more space between them, the easier they are to break.

Higa can break two boards with a fist strike, with no spacing between them. "I do ten, because the American public wouldn't be satisfied with only two. So I use the real material, but I put the spacing between them to

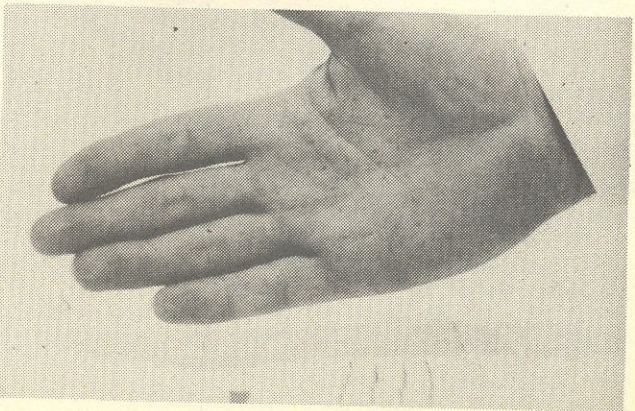
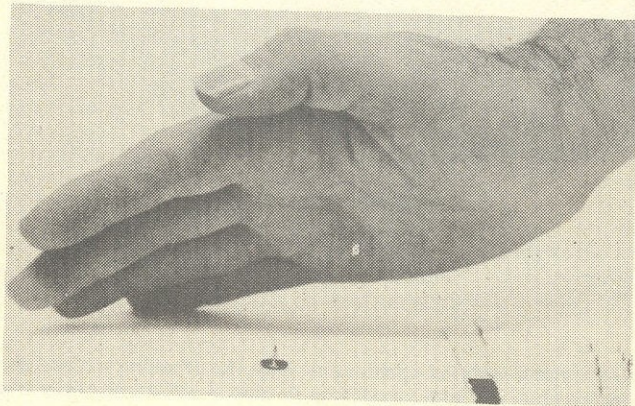
please the public. I would rather do less, with complete legitimacy, but the American audience wouldn't find it very sensational if I did."

Stone breaking also employs trickery. Even the world's strongest man couldn't really break or crack a stone without treating it in some way, and a reliable martial artist such as Mas Oyama would never attempt such a demo.

Higa claims that even the promoters are aware that these are only props which each breaking artist brings with him. The promoter wouldn't be in charge, say, of providing the bricks to be used in a demonstration.

Although not concerned with breaking demonstrations *per se*, Higa also talked about three other kinds of demonstrations. The one involves the use of flames in such acts, and although the fire is indeed real and can cause burns, the artist is aware again of a physical law which, in almost every case, prevents any infliction of damage. When passing either the body or a part of it through a jet of flames, the secret is to keep

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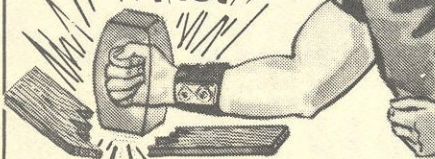
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## BREAKING DEMOS

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moving without even a single second of arrest. The speed of motion will break through the flames, and the fire will not stick to the body or prevent any damage.

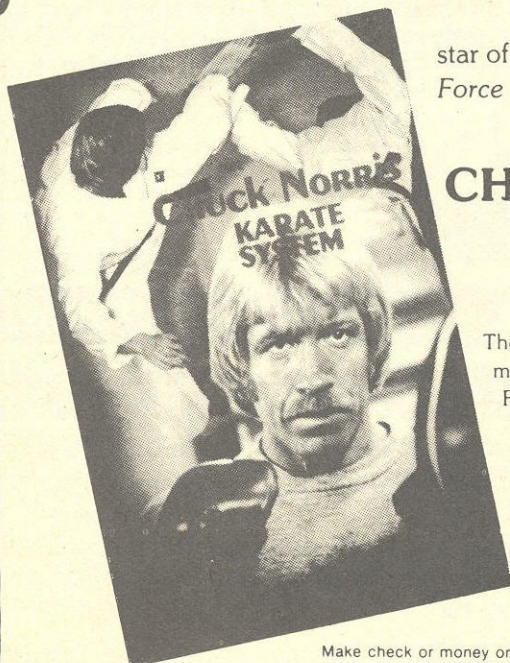
One act which is supposedly a demonstration of *ki* power occurs when an arrow is placed against the neck. Higa, demonstrating with a sharp-tipped pen, showed that there is a small bone in the throat against which the object is purposely pressed. Although it results in slight discomfort and may hurt, its pain is relatively minor and certainly makes for a thrilling demo.

The final demonstrations which Higa explained in detail were those involving the artist's lying on a bed of nails. For this explanation Higa used thumbtacks. When one tack is pressed against the palm of the hand there will be a sensation of sharp pain, but when rows of tacks are properly distributed and then pressed against the skin, they will not penetrate. Again as with the arrow, there may be some discomfort, but it is not unbearable. The same principle is true with nails, and those you see used in demos are *real* nails.

Higa concluded our interview with one more expression of dismay over the turn of events that these demos have taken. "Once someone started these phony demos and hoodwinked the audience, who of course believed in them and enjoyed them, they spread all over the country. Now it's escalated to such a ridiculous level that they really must be stopped.

"I object because the American public is being cheated. These people are making names for themselves by cheating. They're cheating themselves, but the worst part is that they're cheating their students, too. The students fall for these tricks and enroll in certain schools because the senseis can do these fabulous tricks. American students are deceived, and this bothers me. I'd like to see these phony demonstrations stopped. There are other kinds of demos that the public should see. They don't have to be sensational. Once it starts it spreads, until finally you have everyone imitating, which gives the martial arts a bad name — a black eye. There are too many things we should be showing the public and demonstrating for our students. They aren't necessary. There are very few breaking demos in Japan. People can learn to appreciate legitimate demonstrations by the martial arts masters if we'd only let them see these."

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