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The Journal of the International Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Association



Tai Chi Chuan

Number 15 • Winter 2005

Ready for a Thing Called "Ranking"?

Letter from Hong Kong

Latin America!! Present!!

THE SWORD FORM:
*Flying through Myth
and Legend*

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Master Yang Jun. It was a full schedule, as Italian lunches usually last a couple of hours, and then dinner takes a few more. For many of us who teach many classes a day in multiple locations it was a pure joy to sit at the table with such wonderful food and company for so many hours a day.

We discussed exciting developments in the Association, most importantly the evolving programs to train certified teachers that are on going in Brazil and Italy. Our mission to promote Traditional Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan depends on qualified instructors and gradually we are producing a model program that will be implemented world wide. Master Yang Jun spoke passionately about the membership and our need to expand and improve services. Our major challenge is to secure and enlarge the membership base. This Journal plays a large part in that effort and we will continue to work hard to provide an informative and educational forum for members to improve their skills. We will continue to expand our scope, focusing on articles that illuminate the many facets of our practice. As Editor, I am encouraging anyone to send in any questions you may have, any clarifications you may need, as Yang Jun has graciously agreed to answer any and all questions in a new section: "Ask the Master!"

Rome was not built in a day." Our Association is patiently moving forward, expanding our services to the public, organizing and implementing programs to help people improve their quality of life through the study and practice of Tai Chi Chuan. We would like to thank you, gentle reader, for your support and hope to serve you for many years to come. ☯

"Grazie Mille"
Dave Barrett

"All roads lead to Rome." In November many of the Association's Directors converged on the Eternal City for our annual meeting and seminar. We came from Brazil, Argentina, Canada, The U.S., France, Sweden, Germany and Italy for a week of master classes and meetings. For two days we toured the sights of Roma, spent a long day walking through the central district visiting the Colloseo, Fori Imperiali, Monte Palatino, and too many basilicas to mention by name. As the late afternoon sun burnished the amazing colors of the old city we entered the Pantheon, one of Roma's oldest structures and stared up in wonder at the Oculus at the crown of the dome. This large open circle of light seemed to lift our spirits straight up, and we all experienced, "an insubstantial energy rising to the crown of the head: light, lively, pushing upright."

The following day we traveled to a lovely lodging in the hill country of Umbria, an old olive oil mill surrounded by olive groves where we had six hours of push hands classes a day with

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Ranking is an important development within our Association and is of great importance to the larger community of Taiji enthusiasts. For many years as Taiji has developed outside of China there has been a natural diffusion of traditional elements; some may say a weakening of the art has been the result. Others point to a progressive impetus to hybridize Taijiquan with other fitness regimens in order to make the art more accessible. There can be no doubt that the wide array of Yang Style versions attests to the popularity of the exercises, however it has been the primary mission of Masters Yang Zhen duo and Yang Jun to share their family's legacy of high standards and attention to detail. The ranking process offers a special opportunity to focus on these standards and work intensively with the details that distinguish Traditional Yang Family Style Taijiquan. In our last issue Robert Wagg shared his experience of preparing for the tests and here we have the other side of the story from his teacher.



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ARE YOU READY FOR A THING *Called* RANKING?

By Pat Rice



Pat Rice is Director of the Winchester Virginia Yang Chengfu Center, the Shenandoah Taijiquan Center, and Director of A Taste of China and the U.S.A. All-Taijiquan Championships.

Are You Ready?

If you participate consistently in a taiji class for a number of years, and you practice on your own, are you ready to take a ranking test? Although it would be gratifying to both teacher and student to assume that you would be fully prepared to take—and pass—a ranking test, the more realistic view is that some additional training can be very helpful. You'll feel more confident if you have prepared specifically for both the performance test and the written exam.

Moreover, the benefits of such special training reach beyond that immediate goal. The process of preparing for the ranking test includes working for clearly improved physical skills, and also acquiring a more thorough understanding of taijiquan, a better

grasp of taiji's history, a deeper understanding of taiji theory, and increased ability to integrate theory with practice. And last but not least, both the preparation and the testing process engender a stronger relationship between students and their Center and the Association.

It's A Test, Arrrrgh!!!

For most of you, including teachers and experienced competitors, I don't need to talk about the terrors of solo public performance. It's even harder when it's a test and you have the pressure of ultimate pass or fail. Add to this, you're being scrutinized by a member of the Yang family and by other Association officials.

What can be done to make the testing less stressful and to improve your chances of passing? We're

happy to share the method used at the Winchester (Virginia) Center for preparing a group of students for their ranking test. This summer, five of our students tested and passed the examination for Level Four; all are long-time taijiquan students and are teaching assistants at the Center. In addition, one student traveled from Seattle and one from Buffalo for the ranking test, and these two also achieved the rank of Copper Tiger.

A Special Course

I designed a series of twelve training sessions held over six months. Each class was an hour and half, sometimes running a little longer. Since this was essentially an "advanced course" and amounted to a series of semi-private lessons, I established a fee for it. (They attended this course in addition to their regular program of studies at the Center, which covered the 103-bare hand, straight sword, and push-hands.) I provided handouts, conducted each session, supervised training, gave corrections collectively and individually in all routines, led discussions, made study assignments, and suggested individual homework. I tracked participation, completion of assignments, and general progress. I made notes on each candidate's strengths and weaknesses. I advised them in filling out the application, explained testing protocols, and gave advice on what to wear and what equipment to buy.

After each session, I compiled a summary and revised the agenda for the next one, which were distributed to them. At the end of the course, I pronounced them "ready" as a group, and also consulted personally with each one to assure each that he was indeed ready.

Course Contents

The contents of the test determined the material to be covered in the course. In our case, we investigated the information provided by the Association about the requirements for Level Four, the

first of the Intermediate levels. Although a ranking level represents a range of skill and ability, not an exact placement, clearly it was important to ensure that the students' skills and knowledge would be sufficient to achieve Level Four scores in both performance and written tests. This meant that the students' forms must be standard, that they understood taijiquan principles, that they could express the principles in their movements, and that they exhibited the proper characteristics of Yang family style bare hand, saber, and sword. Training in these areas would prepare them to score well in the performance sections. To prepare for the written exam, they studied history and theory.

All Aboard

It was important that as a group we would proceed in agreement about what we were doing and why. As foundation, we read material published by the Association and referred to last newsletter's article by Bill Walsh ("What Is This Thing Called Ranking"). We started with a round-table review of the purpose and goals of ranking in general and discussed advantages and disadvantages of going for a rank. We talked about the potential values for each participant, the Center and myself as Director, and for the Association. Each individual discussed his motivations, and I explained my viewpoints.

Lesson Plans

In each session we covered some aspect of hand form, saber, or straight sword. We also studied the history of taijiquan, Yang family in particular, and taiji theory as preserved in the taiji classics and in the Yang family traditions.

We started with the 49-form, since three of them needed to learn this routine, and corrections applied also to the traditional 103-form routine. Because all of them had been studying the 103-form for many years and they were training to test at Level Four, our focus was

on advanced technical improvements, achieving a higher degree of standardization for the forms, and integrating principles into movement. Individual training included correcting postures to standard, clarifying difficult transitions, feeling more strongly rooted, stricter adherence to principles, and how to show power and express spirit. In saber and sword, we emphasized the importance of familiarity with the weapon's characteristics and the standards of the routine, corrected technical errors, and worked to express the specific qualities for each weapon. We practiced occasionally with Yang spear training method to learn about extending energy to the tip of a weapon. We also took the opportunity to learn a few Chinese words and phrases.

Practice for the Performance Exam

We used an exercise in which each candidate performed solo in front of the others, who observed, evaluated, and gave feedback. The observers were supposed to make one commendation (you need to know what you do well so that you continue to experience and reinforce that area) and one suggestion for improvement (you need to know what areas need more attention). The performers got experience in being watched closely, and began to gain confidence with the approval of their peers. The observers gained experience in evaluation and giving feedback. They also performed in pairs to gain a different type of performance skill. This exercise of round-robin performances/ feedback was one of the key elements in establishing the sense of camaraderie as they became training partners engrossed in not only their own learning and progress but in supporting and helping the others get ready for the testing.

Later they were asked to perform for regular classes of students. Again, they were learning to feel more comfortable in the spotlight.

Other students, sometimes even beginning level students, had helpful feedback for their teachers, and as a bonus, the whole school was introduced to ranking. This mutual assistance among students of all levels is included in the concept of “wude” or “martial virtue” that is specified as a requirement for advancement in rank.

Preparation for the Written Exam

I provided a Study Guide for the students, outlining the things they would need to learn and the areas in which they would be tested on the written examination. To avoid a breach of ethics, the Level Four exam questions were not published or read aloud, but it became very clear as to what the students were responsible for knowing, and I recommended resources where they could obtain this information. Knowing what they needed to study, they did their research and shared information. By exam time, they knew the material.

Applications and Resumes

They filled out the Association's standard application. Then, because each of these students had considerable background in taijiquan—including years of study within the Center, with the Yang family, and with other instructors—and some had studied other Chinese internal arts and other martial arts, I required them to write their “Resume of Martial Arts Training and Experience.” This assignment allowed them to look back over their development of skills and focus of interests and brought them deeper understanding of how current studies fit into a progression. The Resume became part of their application, outlining their “Practice Experience.” We discovered that compiling a resume can help formulate and set new directions and goals.

Personal Training Regimens

The students' job was to practice, practice, practice, and study, study, study. This they did. They faithfully

attended the regular classes and the special training course. They did their research, completed their assignments, compiled their resumes, and generally put in the work and time required to rise to a new level of gongfu. I could see them make progress—obvious improvements and refinements—as individuals and as a group. So could they. More importantly, they began to experience the inner reality of their own changes and advancements.

Handling Success and Failure

Addressing the possibility of both success and failure—by one of them or all of them—was important. What would it mean if they passed the test? How would they be affected by failure? How would the results reflect upon the student, the Director, the Center? I explained that as Director of the Center, I felt the same way that as I did about my own children during their school years with regard to their report cards: that in case of success I would not take all the credit and in case of failure I would not take all the blame. I would congratulate or commiserate, but the result belonged essentially to them. They shared ways to find their own acceptance of results, however it might turn out.

The Big Day and Good Results

All the candidates in this testing were successful; that is, they passed the test and were awarded the rank of Level Four/Copper Tiger. Beyond passing the test, the effects have been notable in several areas, some of which I mentioned at the beginning of this article. Also in the process, they not only became better practitioners, they also became better teachers.

Postscript and Preview

About a month after the test, we held a Summary and Celebration meeting. We reviewed the factors that they believed contributed to their success:

- Good foundation in the regular classes

- Strong base with Yang family since 1990
- Extra preparation in the special course
- Individual and personal corrections
- More diligent practice
- Getting accustomed to being observed and evaluated
- Group study and discussion
- Group support of each other

As our own enthusiasm for having gone through the ranking process remains high, we are planning to encourage other students at our Center to test for a rank. The Level Four teaching assistants have been assigned the task of making a plan for special training to prepare other students to test for Level One. We examined the meaning of what they had achieved, and how the entire process has affected their practice, their teaching, and their relationship to the Center and the other students. (This topic is better expressed by their own words so we hope they will write about that subject for the newsletter.) We also began to assess the ways in which the introduction of Ranking might affect our school's curriculum and even our approach to teaching.

Then we were off to celebrate their achievements with a special Chinese lunch, an extra benefit. ☯

**HANDOUTS

Yang Ranking Program, article from Association Newsletter Vol. 1 No. 1, plus additional information as published by the Association

Application Form for Ranking

Ranking Committee Scoring Method and Standards (how they are evaluated by the judges)

Lists of movements (English and pinyin) for 103-move barehand form, 49-move barehand form, saber form, and straight sword form

Tai Chi Information, a handout provided by Yang Jun

**RESOURCES

Yang Style Taijiquan by *Yang Zhen-duo* for Yang style specific information (book)

The Dao of Taijiquan by *Jou Tsung-hwa* for history and theory, classics (book)

“Traditional Yang Family Style Taijiquan” video by *Yang Zhen-duo with Yang Jun*, for standards, details, general information

“49-form” video by *Yang Jun*, for training in this routine and for refinements in movements that are also needed for 103-barehand

Association newsletters with practice photos and instructional narratives

LETTER FROM HONG KONG



By Jeremy Blodgett

I've just returned from spending the weekend at the annual International Traditional Yang Style Invitational, held in Hong Kong on November 13th and 14th. Master Yang Zhenduo and over 80 (!) of his students and disciples came all the way from Shanxi for the big event. Master Yang Jun even came from Italy, flying in after the Directors' Seminar there, and his brother, Yang Bin, came down from Taiyuan as well. The competition was part of a 6-day package tour for the Shanxi group, with stops in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Zhuhai and Macau. For most of the group, it was their first time leaving Mainland China.

The weekend was also a historical reunion for the Yang family. For the first time, Yang Jun and Yang Bin met the three daughters of their great-uncle Yang Shaozhong (Yang Zhenduo's older brother) that live in Hong Kong. Yang Shaozhong came to Hong Kong early on, spreading Yang family Tai Chi here until his death in 1985. His best-known disciple, Master Ip, passed away in Hong Kong earlier this year. Tai Chi is popular in Hong Kong and I've just started a class at work, teaching my coworkers speaking in

Mandarin, and have also found a big group of excellent push hands players to study with in the park.

On the first day group demonstrations were held with teams from throughout Shanxi dressed in their trademark light-blue silks. When they were not on the floor, they wore sporty lightweight red and white warm-up suits, looking like a pro team. The gymnasium was divided into four rings, with Shanxi players concentrated in two of them. Because there were so many participants, up to 6 people a time would demonstrate in one ring. It was a pleasure to watch all the different kinds Traditional Yang Style Tai Chi. Everyone was charmed by the youngest player - a six-year old boy!

Participants were divided only into groups of men and women. All received a score from the judges, but these were only used for awarding either a silver or gold medal to everyone. About half of the Shanxi group demonstrated, with many being noticeably nervous. These days, most of them are teachers and judges, and it has been a long time since they got out and demonstrated for all to see.



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KONGING



They said they normally didn't get nervous at the Shanxi competitions because they knew everyone, but here they were far from home.

On Saturday evening I took the long ride back to the hotel with the group and caught up with news from back 'home' in Taiyuan. Typical for being on a tour, they didn't have enough time to rest and were happy to be going back to a four-star hotel. A small group of us had dinner and they shared news of the new Shanxi Association newsletter started this year, and their annual all-Shanxi competition held in Fen Yang, south of Taiyuan, a few months ago.

The Masters' demonstrations were held on the afternoon of the last day, and Master Yang Jun was a crowd favorite, performing both the 49-form and the sword form. Other impressive displays were the vibrating staff demonstrations. After the masters

finished, the usual frenzy of group pictures and autographs went on until everyone had to leave. As usual, the time together with Masters Yang Zhenduo and Yang Jun was too short.

Next year's competition is set for May 21-23 in Xian, just a ten-hour train ride south of Taiyuan. Even though this was an International Competition, there were only a handful of foreigners, coming from Thailand and North America. In the same way that all the practitioners were checking out each others' Tai Chi, the Shanxi group was also checking out how other organizations run a large competition. After the weekend, it was apparent just how precisely the Shanxi players perform Tai Chi and organize competitions. The friendship demonstration in Taiyuan next July to celebrate Master Yang Zhenduo's 80th Birthday should be another great event!

LATIN AMERICA!! PRESENT!!

By Angela Soci



Angela Soci is Director of the São Paulo Brasil Yang Chengfu Center and she take care of the Department of South American Affairs for the Association

Here we go with some news from this side of the world where besides all the difficulties we have faced; the challenge to spread the Traditional Yang Style of Tai Chi Chuan is becoming more and more interesting and a motive of joy and pride.

From the São Paulo Yang Cheng Fu Center, opened in 1999, we have excellent instructors coming along, already giving classes in this big and noisy city. Most of them are working in different places going and coming by busses and cars, reaching their students in clubs, in social and commercial associations, in industries, in governmental enterprises, in schools, universities, in business places, in home buildings leisure areas and also in parks. Everywhere they meet, the students are very interested in receiving the special traditional Yang Style.

This experience is wonderful because they meet different people everywhere: house holders, business men, elders from different classes, teenagers, stressed people in commercial associations, stressed people in governmental



enterprises, tired teachers in schools and universities, and can prove that Yang Style Tai Chi fits for all and can fulfill different expectations. Some are searching for an excellent physical health system, others are searching for some stress free activity, others are searching for the most special martial art to practice and others are searching for a new way of life style!! We have 10 instructors in São Paulo City, 6 in small towns and 4 in other states, who are all working with Tai Chi and making their living from the classes.

These teachers are graduates of the Instructor's Tai Chi course given by the Yang Chengfu São Paulo Center and now are improving their training to get their International Certification from the Association. Some even are already of the 3rd level rank. For example, Jefferson Duarte says: "Well, Tai Chi has changed my entire life, and I want to help other people giving classes and spreading the benefits of this

great art! I have students of all ages, and many of them are already interested about the ranking system. They are very well connected with the Center and willing to improve their abilities". Neide Silva, another instructor from São Paulo who is now having her second baby, has been giving classes until the last month of pregnancy, says: "I became so energetic during my pregnancy giving Tai Chi classes all the time, I didn't have any problem. Actually I felt very good and want to go back to work as soon as the baby may come with me. I'm also interested in teaching the Traditional Yang Style for pregnant women. My students are all waiting already!!" The instructor Valéria Sanchez already has a place of her own in a neighborhood quite far from the São Paulo Center and says: "It was a challenge at first, having my own place to teach, being one sub center, but my decision was strong and now, I'm having more and more students! My satisfaction in running my own place is increasing. I hope Master Yang Jun can come one day for a visit!"



In Rio de Janeiro, that famous city with beautiful landscapes and warm-hearted people has another reason to feel proud. In 2002, the couple Edson Marcio and Carla Machado Costa opened a Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Center there. Both say their team chose the Traditional Yang Style because they "decided to follow a lineage with worldwide recognition", and that the students realize the difference between the Traditional form and its deviations by their professionalism.

"The learning process of the students has been great", they say. "The style is well defined and the method of instruction helps a lot". Carla has, of course, some challenges on the way: "It's still hard to get the students to sign the membership! And we feel that the students find more pleasure in outdoor practices than inside the school, something that makes a little harder to learn the movement names. The students would rather learn them all in Portuguese, not in Chinese, even when told about the importance of the original names in the practice." Teaching classes nearby the beaches, is something very special!"



In Southeastern Brazil, at Ribeirão Preto, Fernando De Lazzari founded last year the R.P. Yang Cheng Fu Center. "My teachers, Professors Roque Serverino and Ângela Soci (who are also the directors of the Yang Cheng Fu Center in São Paulo), have taught me a lot about Tai Chi Chuan and Oriental culture as a whole. I wanted to work with them on the development of Tai Chi Chuan in Brazil, so I decided to establish this center at Ribeirão Preto, which would provide me better means to spread the teachings of the Yang Family".

Fernando emphasizes the benefits of having his own center: "As a director I have better conditions to work with the International Association and other

Yang Cheng Fu centers around the world, helping people to improve their health and quality of life"

According to him, people that become familiar with Traditional Yang Style have demonstrated great satisfaction, and they feel safe with the most valuable tradition of Yang Family. Fortunately, the Yang Cheng Fu Center at Ribeirão Preto grows stronger each day and the number of students affiliated with the Association increases.

Some amazing stories are also unfolding there: "A 70 year old student was able to quit the use of a blood pressure regulation drug due to her Tai Chi Chuan practice. As she practiced, her doctor would decrease the dose of such medication until the day he said she didn't need it anymore." Now her arterial pressure is just fine, and her teacher can't quit smiling. "Many other students had this kind of physical and mental healing through the learning of Tai Chi Chuan. I have taught since 1998 and I have seen through these years more and more people interested in the art, its benefits and amazing philosophy. Many people understand now the need for a better quality of life, fitness, improvement of their attitude towards problems, and they want to develop healthy and centered thoughts and feelings. In this sense, Tai Chi Chuan is a powerful system of exercise, teaching people to find their equilibrium in every part of their lives, so they can live in peace with themselves, with other beings and the environment."

Fernando's only complaint is about the Seminars with the Masters: "Because the Ribeirão Preto center was established recently, we haven't have the honor of hosting a Seminar with the Masters yet. However, as soon as the Master can come to our town, we will organize a wonderful Seminar for sure! I and the students at Ribeirão Preto will be waiting for this opportunity." They certainly will be pleased, as we have Carla's comment on the two Seminars she hosted in Rio: "We had one in 2001 (103 movements) and one in 2003 (sword form). Being close to the

Master is amazing, even though we couldn't sleep well during his stay – why waste time closing your eyes if the Master is right beside you?", she laughs. "The main lesson of these seminars was the simplicity and directness of teaching the right way."

In another corner of Brazil we have the Porto Alegre Yang Cheng Fu Center where Master Yang has also gone for three Seminars already and where the Brazilian/Argentine border makes easier the meeting between practitioners from both countries. Actually there is also a Yang Cheng Fu Center in Buenos Aires – Argentina – whose director Claudio Palacios is very proud to say that "besides the great problems faced by the country, more and more people are interested in knowing and practicing Yang Traditional Style". And he goes on there, already with two different places where he teaches, reaching people in the countryside area and also in Buenos Aires, the federal capital where the most stressed people are, in real need of relaxing in a Tai Chi class.

We have also news from Mendoza – Argentina – where Mr. Luis Roux, a student of Sergio Arione of the Canadian Center, has a group of practitioners who are eager to come to Brazil for the next International Seminar of Master Yang Jun!! Luis is practicing hard to become a Certified Instructor.

From Venezuela, Chile and Colombia, we have received some emails from practitioners also interested in coming for the next International Seminar in Brazil in April 2005.

We invite everyone and hope to meet you all soon!!

And so, here we are, working hard, but receiving great benefits in return. Our presence in Latin America will grow in the next few years and we are certain that Traditional Yang Style will be spread widely. Our hope is to have at least one Center for each country and also in Brazil, one Center in each state. That's why we are working hard on the training of new instructors of high quality to be certified by the International Association. ☯



RANKING RESULTS

LEVEL 1

Fabio Marcelloni	Rome
Luca Barteri	Rome
Andrea Conforti	Rome
Giulia Santangeli	Rome
Vittorio Di Giovanni	Rome
Giovanni Laperchia	Rome
Claudio Panzetti	Rome

LEVEL 2

Remo Galli	Rome
Claudio Beelli	Rome
Laura Piombo	Rome
Lara Hutter	Rome
Silvio Baratta	Rome
Pietro Di Biagio	Rome
Franco Di Sciuolo	Rome

LEVEL 3

Davide De Santis	Rome
Luca Mastini	Rome
Sonia Ostrica	Rome
Teresa Zuniga	Rome
Anna Siniscalco	Rome
Roberto Carchio	Rome
Maurizio Battistoni	Rome
Peter Land	Association

LEVEL 4

Paolo Barontini	Rome
Corrado De Vite	Rome
Giorgio Balducci	Rome

LEVEL 5

Giuseppe Turturo	Milan
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2004 DIRECTOR'S SEMINAR ITALY

The Directors are eternally grateful to Claudio Mingarini and Giuseppi Turturo for their boundless hospitality and tireless work in organizing the 2004 Directors Seminar in Italy



Visiting the Vatican Museum



Jason Yang toasts the Directors (with coca cola)



Push hands class at the Osteria Antico Frantoio Sangemini



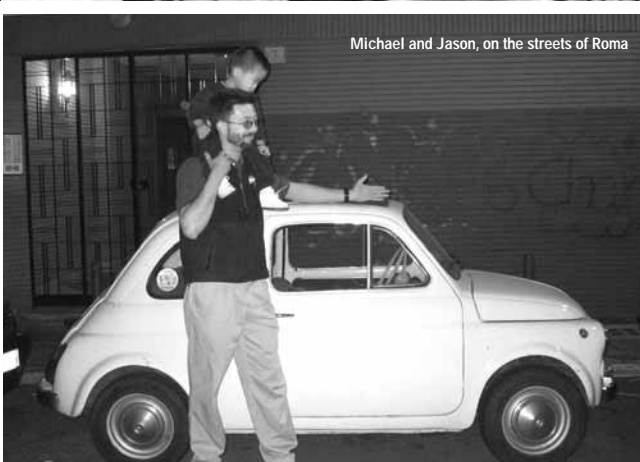
At the Piazza San Pietro



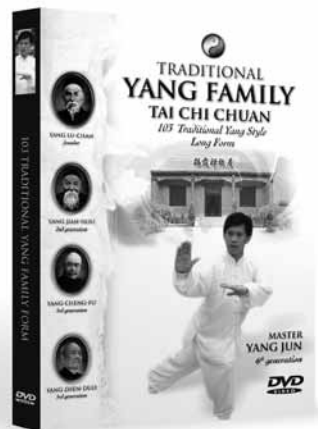
At the Coloseo, a gladiator checks his voice mail!



Preparing another great meal



Michael and Jason, on the streets of Roma



NEW HAND FORM DVD FOR 2005 RELEASE!!

By Dave Barrett

The Association is pleased to announce the completion and upcoming release of the new Tai Chi Chuan Hand Form instructional DVD set. This DVD runs around three hours and includes the Long Form in performance, a lecture on the 10 Essentials, hand work and footwork requirements. Speaking in English, Master Yang Jun conducts 15 classroom sections which introduce the forms in sequence along with the applications of offensive and defensive techniques contained in the motions. This is the first time the applications of Traditional Yang Family Tai Chi Chuan have been demonstrated and explained in such a comprehensive manner.

In describing his concept for this DVD, Master Yang Jun says that the addition of the application elements is very important for students at every level. In China, the applications are introduced at the beginning of the curriculum, not to teach the student to fight, but to create an understanding of why the movements have specific shapes and execution. To see the form and understand the function of the motions trains the mind to focus. By focusing the mind and concentrating on the intent of the

motions, the internal energy is mobilized and coordinated with the external activity. When the mind and the internal energy harmonize with the movement, a refined and specialized energy is developed. The traditional formula for this is: Yi (mind) and Qi (energy) combine together to create Jing (refined energy). As Master Yang told me, "Yi arrives, Qi arrives, Jing arrives. This coordination is vital for the expression of the true spirit of the motions."



The Long Form performance was taken on location at Montreal's Chinese Garden using multiple cameras and is edited to provide a clear view of the entire sequence. The pattern of tiles on the ground makes it very easy to read the foot work positions (a difficulty with many Tai Chi videos) and there is lovely classical Chinese music in the background. The classroom sections were shot in studio and are well organized and easy to access from the main menu.

An early 2005 release is planned, with the cost to members at \$80. Details to be forthcoming on the website!

太极拳



FROM HIGH PAT HORSE



Slightly bent right arm and sit right palm, right arm is around 45° to the right. Curve left arm. Left elbow is directly above left knee. Left fingers are pointing at the middle of the right forearm.



Step out left foot to the left corner with toes pointing at less than 45°, keep both legs at shoulder width apart.



Shift weight forward to form bow stance. Open both arms on the right side of your body.



Shift weight to the right and turn body to the right. Following waist turning, circle right arm to the right on top and circle left arm to the left below. Gradually lift up left leg.

Continue to circle both arms with right arm circling from right to left and left arm circling from left to right. After left foot touches down, cross both arms in front of the body.



TRANSITION FROM RIGHT KICK, OPPOSITE VIEW

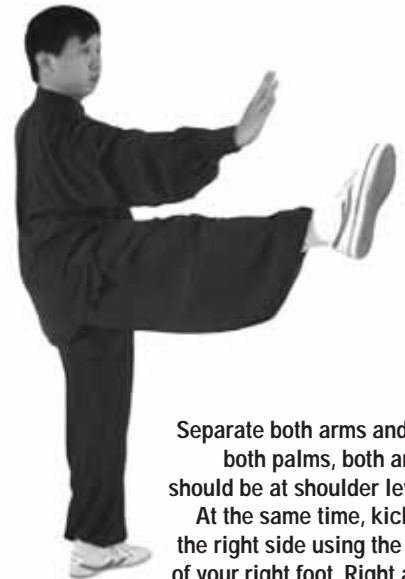
Bring in right leg. At the same time, turn right palm upwards and stand up left palm. Right arm and right leg are pointing at the same direction.

Sink down on left leg, lower right leg, right leg is pointing to the right at less than 45°. Keep both legs at shoulder width apart.





Shift weight forward, centering on the left foot straighten left leg. Lift up right leg, right knee should be raised up so that right thigh is almost level, draw in right lower leg, right foot points downward with ward-off shape. Naturally straight left leg.



Separate both arms and sit both palms, both arms should be at shoulder level. At the same time, kick to the right side using the top of your right foot. Right arm and right leg are facing in the same direction.

Turn body to the left and close both arms in front of the body, right hand outside. Torso and left leg are facing in the same direction.



Shift weight forward, left arm circles to right, and right arm circles to left, cross both arms in front of body.



FRONT VIEW

太极拳



Shift weight forward and form bow stance, open both arms on the left side of your body. Left arm slightly bent, sit left palm on the right side by around 45°. Curve the right arm. Right elbow is directly above right knee. Right fingers are pointing at the middle of the left forearm.

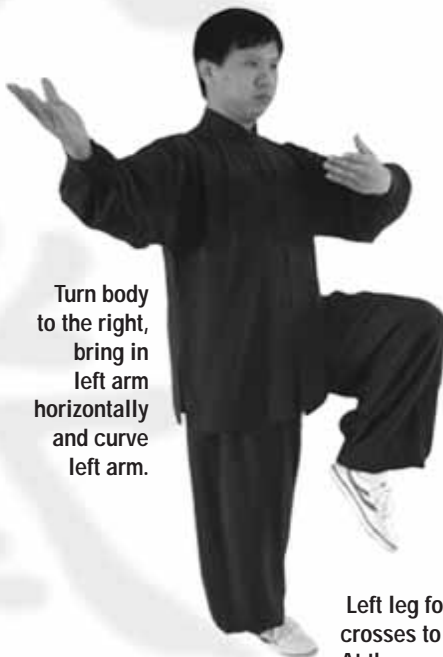


Turn body to the right, close both arms in front of body, left hand outside. Torso and right leg are facing in the same direction.



Shift weight forward, centering on the right foot, straighten right leg.

Lift up left leg, left knee should be raised up so that the left thigh is almost level, draw in left lower leg, left foot points downward with ward-off shape. Naturally straight right leg.



Turn body to the right, bring in left arm horizontally and curve left arm.

Left leg follows body turn and crosses to right side of the body. At the same time, turn over right arm until right palm faces upward.



Extend left leg to the right side at around 45°.

Eyes keep looking forward

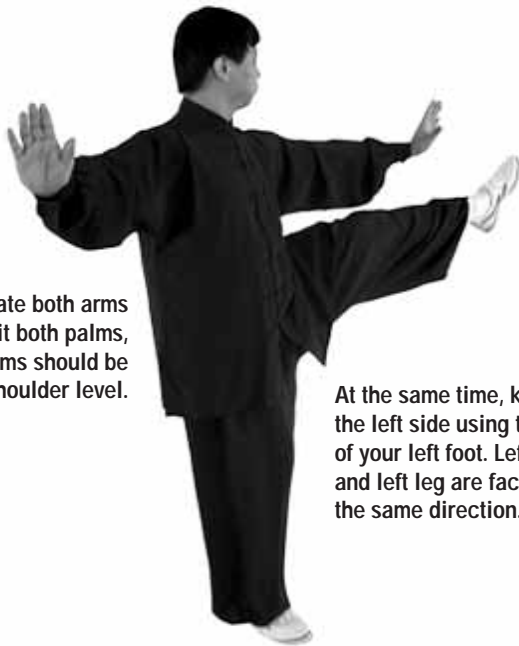
Turn body to the left and left leg follows waist turn. After left leg turns all the way backward, lift up left leg and stand on right leg. At the same time, close both arms with left arm on the outside.



During the turning, use right heel as axle and turn right toes.

After the turn, right toes should point to the corner at 45°. Right leg remains naturally straight.

Separate both arms
and sit both palms,
both arms should be
at shoulder level.

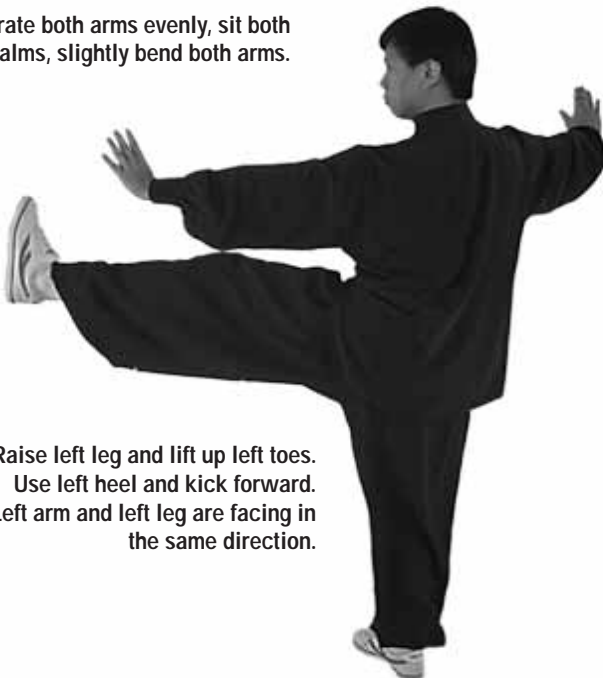


At the same time, kick to
the left side using the top
of your left foot. Left arm
and left leg are facing in
the same direction.



Bring in left leg, left toes
point downward with
ward-off shape. Left arm
and left leg are facing in
the same direction.
Both arms stay open.

Separate both arms evenly, sit both
palms, slightly bend both arms.



Raise left leg and lift up left toes.
Use left heel and kick forward.
Left arm and left leg are facing in
the same direction.



Bring in left leg with left toes
pointing downward with
ward-off shape.
Both arms stay open.

THE SWORD FORM:



Each of the Yang Family forms embodies the core principles of Taijiquan, yet each has a different flavor. In practicing the Sword Form, or Taijijian, we are told to show light and flowing movement.

The need for such lightness can be seen in the distinct nature of the names of the postures. Of the 67 named postures, more than 40 of them refer to flying creatures, wind, or sky. While the hand form calls for measured steps and sharp distinctions between empty and full, the Sword Form invites us to fly and flow more with our outward movements. Judging by the names of the sword form postures, we must wield our sword as if following the movements of wasps, swallows, geese, and falling leaves. At other times, we must "Embrace the Moon" or chase it like a shooting star or comet.

In order to enrich our practice, we must engage body, mind and spirit. Giving thought to the images the posture names can help guide our movements in the proper way. Many of the names are easy to understand, but others are not so familiar to those with limited familiarity with Chinese culture. The purpose of this article is to explore some of these images and their possible relevance to our practice.

STARS

Early in the Sword Form, we meet two star postures, Da Kui Xing and Xiao Kui Xing. For want of precise equivalents, these can be translated as the Big and Little Dipper. It turns out that "Kui Xing" can be seen as a reference to the four stars that form the bowl of the Big Dipper and particularly to the star at its tip. "Kui Xing" could also be understood literally to mean the "Chief Star."

This "Chief Star" is associated with the God of Literature, who is often depicted as standing on one leg, waiving a brush over his head with one hand and holding an inkwell before his body with the

other.

The reason he stands on one leg is unclear, but it could be because his persona has merged with that of a legendary one-legged mountain monster of old. This monster's name is spelled with a different character, but has the same pronunciation, "kui." In this meaning, the sounds of the name "Kui Xing" would evoke the sense of the "the Star of the One-Legged Monster."

One tale about Kui Xing is as follows. One year, a scholar came in first during the civil service exams that were the road to fame, fortune, and respect for the elite in traditional China's imperial society. Unfortunately, this scholar was so ugly that the emperor shied away and failed to accord him the customary honors. Humiliated, the scholar tried to drown himself in a river, but was saved by a sea beast that carried him up into the heavens. There, he became the god of the star at the tip of the big dipper and the patron god of literature and scholarship.

The next time you perform these postures, make sure to copy Kui Xing's pose and show enough spirit to scare off an emperor.

DRAGONS

One flying animal that is named again and again among the postures is the dragon, but the Chinese dragon is not quite like the dragons described in European tradition. Dragons in the west are often conceived of as evil dinosaurs with bat-like wings. They breathe fire as they fly around, devastating the countryside. The Chinese Dragon, however, is usually considered an auspicious being. Most types do not have wings, but often fly by virtue of their magic power. This power is sometimes represented by a pearl that the dragon clutches in its claws. Unlike the Dragons sometimes depicted in the west, Chinese dragons have snake-like bodies and use coiling motions

familiar to anyone that has witnessed a dragon-dance performed for the Chinese New Year.

After the posture Casting the Fishing Rod or Waiting for the Fish (Deng Yu Shi), there is a posture that has two alternate names. One is Poking the Grass to Seek the Snake, and the other could be translated as Dragon Walk Posture. While the first name seems self explanatory, "dragon walk" might seem to present a puzzle. The answer becomes clear if we remember the zigzagging coiling motion of the dragon dance. Rather than advance head-on against our opponent and violate the principles of Taijiquan, we advance with a sinuous motion, alternately flowing right and left as we parry and thrust with the sword.

Later in the form, we meet some specific dragons of myth and legend. First there is the "Black Dragon [that] Sways its Tail." Later on, a "Black Dragon Twists Around the Pole/Pillar."

BLACK DRAGON

Chinese Dragons come in the five primary colors of Chinese tradition: black, white, green/blue, yellow, and red. One creation story relates that the water god Gong Gong lost a battle with the fire god Zhu Rong. In disgust at the defeat, Gong Gong smashed one of the mountain pillars that held up heaven, causing the sky to tilt amid devastating floods. Nü Gua (or Nü Wa), the legendary creator of humans, mended the sky by melting the colored stones of the rainbow. She propped it up with the legs of a giant turtle and slew a black dragon that was threatening the land of Qi.

Dragons were strongly associated with water, an important element in



Flying through MYTH *and* LEGEND

By Audi Peal



agricultural China. They were also thought to cause rain with their play and battle through the skies. In the creation story, we see the black dragon as a coiling symbol of power, perhaps wrapping around the pillars that hold up heaven. In the two movements of the form that mention the black dragon, we need to show powerful coiling motions.

GREEN DRAGON

After Nü Gua mended the heavens, she set four creatures to guard the four directions. In the east, she put the Green Dragon (sometimes translated as the Blue, Azure, or Cerulean Dragon) that we also meet in the postures Green Dragon Gets Out of the Water and Green Dragon Show its Claws. According to some, the Green Dragon King would sleep in the sea during the winter and then shoot up on a column of water into the eastern sky to mark the beginning of spring. As we perform Green Dragon Gets Out of the Water, we can visualize this annual emergence, as the sword blade leaps from low to high like a submarine-launched missile.

In the traditional Chinese belief system called Fengshui (Wind and Water), sometimes called

Geomancy, there is a special concern for one's relationship to the environment. Wind was seen as scattering Qi, and water was seen as concentrating it. Proper balance and appropriate positioning were seen as having great importance.

In the beliefs of Fengshui, the Green Dragon is seen as the guardian of the left and as a symbol of Yang energy and pointed heights. Again, one can see the connections as we thrust the sword from low to high and from right to left during the form.

Dragons were seen as the ancestors of the Chinese race and eventually as the particular symbol of the emperor and his majesty. To match this, the empress also acquired her own symbol, the legendary phoenix.

PHOENIX



The Chinese phoenix was seen as one of the embodiments of Yin and Yang together. The Chinese name for it, "fenghuang" is sometimes understood as an amalgam of a male and a female bird: the "feng" and the "huang." Together with the dragon, the phoenix can also be seen as a symbol of marital harmony and happiness, the perfect union of Yin and Yang. Along with four other mythical beings, its appearance was seen as an indication of peace and prosperity under wise rulers. Confucius was said to lament the decay in his times when he bemoaned the fact that the phoenix was seen no more.

The phoenix of Greek legend seems to share different origins from the Chinese phoenix, but they do share certain attributes in common. Both were often connected with fire and the south. Only one Greek phoenix lived at any point in time. Although it lived forever, it had to renew itself from time to time by plunging into a nest of flame and emerging rejuvenated. The Chinese phoenix was also thought of as a solitary bird. With their dual nature, one phoenix never appeared with another.

The phoenix was seen as the chief of birds, perfect in its beauty and song. Its voice controlled the five tones, and its feathers displayed the five colors. In the

sword form, the phoenix is mentioned in four postures: Phoenix Lifts its Head, Phoenix Open its Right Wing, Phoenix Open its Left Wing, and Phoenix Opens Both Wings. We thus have to show off all our wonderful "feathers," sometimes lifting our "head" high, sometimes showing off one "wing," and sometimes showing off both.

While the perfection of the phoenix may be hard to match in our practice, we can surely strive to emulate its variety and elegance.

WHITE TIGER

One surprising addition to this pantheon of sky creatures is the White Tiger that Sways or Swishes its Tail. When Nü Gua propped up the heavens and set the Green Dragon to guard the East, she set the White Tiger to guard the West. In traditional Chinese astronomy, the White Tiger is the name given to the western sky and can be thought of as a mega-constellation. In contrast, the Green Dragon, discussed above, names the stars in the eastern sky. The White Tiger is associated with autumn and the element metal, whereas the Green Dragon is associated with spring and the element wood.

Since the White Tiger can refer to stars, we must make sure not to imitate the movements of a sleepy tiger swishing its tail on a lazy afternoon. Instead, when we swing the sword out to the right, turn our head, and thrust out the sword fingers of the left hand, we should remember that we are acting as guardians of the western heavens, helping ensure that Gong Gong cannot return and knock the sky off its pillars.

In Fengshui, the White Tiger is seen as the guardian of the right, matching the Green Dragon as the guardian of the left. The White Tiger represents Yin energy and complements the Yang energy of the Green Dragon. Again, we can see the connections in the form movement, where the sword performs a low circle to guard the right of the body.

Heavenly Steed

There is one "flying" animal in the form that seems to have some clear historical basis. This is mentioned in the posture whose Chinese name can be interpreted as the Heavenly Steed (or Horse) that Flies Over the

Waterfall. It is the posture that precedes Lifting the Curtain.

In the second century BCE, the nomadic Huns were a continual threat to the Han Dynasty of China. Several centuries later, the Huns under Attila were also able to ransack wide areas of the Roman Empire. As a wide-ranging, nomadic people, the Huns were skilled in mobile warfare on horseback. The Chinese, as a sedentary agricultural people, had trouble matching their skills. They lacked adequate breeds of horses to form good cavalry. After diplomatic and military forays into the west near the same mountain ranges where the monster Gong Gong was said to have knocked the heavens off their support, word was brought back of a breed of "Blood Sweating Horses" or "Heavenly Horses" that were faster and stronger than the horses available in China. With the aid of these horses, China was able to build up its defenses and survive the attacks of the Huns.

From the Han Dynasty cavalry, the image of the swift and powerful Heavenly Steeds moved into poetry, becoming a popular reference in Tang Dynasty poems.

In the sword form, the posture Heavenly Steed Flies over the Waterfall comes right after a movement that could be interpreted as the Meteor Chases the Moon. Thus, after we have the sword blade chop to the right to "chase the moon," we then must split down to the left with the swiftness, power, and elegance of a "Heavenly Steed" flying down the face of a waterfall.

Great Roc

The Roc or Great Roc is mentioned in the 41st posture, Roc Extends its Wings. The term "roc" will be familiar to those who have read *A Thousand and One Nights*. In that tale and in Arab lore, the "roc" was a bird large enough to fly off with an elephant in its talons. It may be the origin of the chess piece that is called a "rook."

The Chinese Roc was even bigger than the roc of Arab legend. If ever we needed a reminder to keep our movements large and extended, the mythical size and movements of these rocs can serve us quite well.

Below is an excerpt from a famous passage written by Zhuangzi, an early Daoist who lived in the third and fourth centuries BCE. In this passage, he describes some attributes of the Roc.

"In the northern depths, there is a fish called the Kun. It is countless leagues in size. This fish changes into a bird whose name is the Roc. Its back is countless leagues in breadth. When it rouses in flight, its wings are like clouds draping down over the heavens. The sea begins to move, as this bird is about to migrate to the southern depths, the Pool of Heaven.

"Qi Xie recorded strange phenomena, saying: 'When the Roc migrates to the southern depths, the water is roiled for a 3000 leagues as the Roc spirals up 90,000 leagues in a whirlwind, blowing for a six-month journey.' For dust devils, dust motes, or living things blowing their breath against each other, is the azure blue of the sky its original color? Is it simply its unreachable distance? The Roc's view looking down is just the same.

"When water is not gathered up deep enough, it cannot bear the weight of a large boat. Water from an overturned cup poured into a dimple in the ground can suffice for a mustard seed to float like a boat. But if you try to put the cup onto it, it will stick fast, because the water is too shallow, and the "boat" is too large. When wind is not gathered up high enough, it cannot bear the weight of large wings. Therefore, at a height of 90,000 leagues, the wind lies beneath the Roc, and only then can it be banked up to assist. With the blue sky at its back and nothing

to bar its way, only then does the Roc seek the south.

"A cicada and a young turtledove laughed at the Roc, saying: 'When we set out to fly, we head for the Elm and Sapanwood Tree. Sometimes we don't make it all the way and simply fall back to the earth. How can anyone go 90,000 leagues all the way to the south?' (To go camping in a field, with three meals, you can return with your belly as full as always. To go a hundred leagues, you must spend the night grinding your grain for provisions. To go a thousand leagues, you must spend three months gathering your provisions. But what do these two worms know?)"

There are many ways to interpret this passage. One of its themes is that of transformation: from fish to bird, from north to south, from the depths of the sea to the towering heights of heaven. In the form, we move from a posture where the sword is relatively low, Swallow Carries Pieces of Earth in its Beak, to a posture where the sword is held relatively high, Roc Extends its Wings. We spiral up from the ground like a whirlwind to raise the sword tip level with our head.

Another theme of the passage is appropriateness. Water can float a mustard seed or a large vessel, but the puddle that can float a mustard seed is not enough even for a cup. A long flight for a cicada or a turtledove cannot be compared with the flight of the Roc. In the hand form, deliberate measured steps are appropriate for Diagonal Flying; however, for Roc Extends its Wings, we must show more flow. Paradoxically, the slow movement

of Diagonal Flying is outwardly more difficult than the flowing movement of Roc Extends its Wings. The Roc can fly 90,000 leagues to the south, whereas the cicada and dove cannot even make it up into an elm tree.

One last theme of Zhuangzi is universality. What we, as dust motes, see as blue vastness looking up at the sky from below, the Roc also sees as blue vastness looking down from the sky above. All journeys require preparation and provisions. All flight requires effort. The principles of Taijiquan are all the same. Sometimes they are more apparent in the dust motes kicked up by the swirling wind of a hot summer's day. Sometimes they are more apparent in the wings of the Roc spiraling upward to cover the sky. The Ten Essentials apply equally to the hand form and the sword form, even when outward form may differ somewhat.

When we practice the sword form for a few minutes of exercise, we can be secure that we can experience the full range of what Taijiquan has to offer, even if we know nothing of Chinese legends, dragons, or Zhuangzi; however, if we do have some knowledge of the posture names and their cultural associations, we can enrich our practice. Instead of seeing ourselves as hacking and slashing our way through the form, we can see ourselves as guardians of the stars, flying through the heavens to protect all creation against chaos. The movements of the sword should be light and flowing, but still have power in their elegance. The principles of Taijiquan are simple, but their application is vast and deep. ☯

DIRECTOR'S PRACTICE

26 - 27 FEBRUARY 2005

After the successful Director's seminar in Italy, all directors of Yang Chang-Fu Tai Chi AChuan Center are welcome to the first Director's practice organized in Canada. Director Sergio Arionne invite you to his center for 2 days of tui-shou practice based on the teachings of Master Yang Jun.

Please contact Sergio Arionne for Details : sergio@yangfamilytaichi.com (514) 684-9584 or Marco Gagnon : marco@yangfamilytaichi.com (450) 347-6111.



2005 SEMINAR

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Jan 15-16 Hand Form
Jan 17 Saber Form

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Feb 19-20 49 Hand Form

Contact: Andy Lee
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MANCHESTER, NH USA

March 12-13 49 Hand Form

Contact: Michael Coulon
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CANCUN MEXICO

March 25-26 Hand Form

March 27 Saber Form

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MONTREAL CANADA

April 8 Saber Form
April 9-10 Hand Form

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