

Superfoot Seminar

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Lewis Prouse was recently given unwelcome advice by his doctor to help his aching shoulder. "Said I should rest," Prouse said. "Take it easy."

Having studied, practiced and taught martial arts for the past 25 years, he knew there was no way he was going to heed the doctor's advice, at least not yet, for there was a special date marked on his calendar. Traditionally, the summer is a time where famed instructors across the country and around the world come to local martial arts facilities to teach their craft and Aug. 30 at Warrior Spirit Karate in Grove City was a seminar that Prouse could not miss.

The day before, Prouse, his family and several of his students from Shinka Kaizen Martial Arts drove up from Charleston, W. Va and eagerly awaited for night to pass and the sun to rise so Prouse could see his idol, Bill "Superfoot" Wallace, in person.

"I knew as soon as it was announced that he would be here that I had to drive up and meet the man," he said.

Around 1 p.m. Prouse walked into the facility and spotted the martial arts icon who always seemed to be in constant motion. He was fluttering across the room, talking a mile a minute to parents, to the kids who were gearing up for their session, and to anyone who had a question or wanted an autograph.

Prouse almost couldn't believe it what he was seeing.

"The man is a legend."

Rob Jenkins, who drove up from Huntington, W. Va for the adult session in the later afternoon, had a similar look of awe.

"My father and I used to watch his fights on television," he said of Wallace, who went undefeated in his kickboxing career. "And we saw all of his movies, as well."

But before the adults, who seemed to be constantly streaming in, could get their one-on-one session, it was the kids turn. They seemed to be in just as in awe of Wallace as the grown-ups were.

They gathered around the mat and waited for the first words of wisdom the living legend would impart.

"I'm going to teach you about kicking because I like to kick people," he said to a delighted crowd of youngsters.

More jokes and laughter followed, but soon after he had them break into pairs and for over an hour he taught them proper kicking technique and doled out his own kickboxing etiquette.

"You have to kick hard, but if you kick too hard you have to say you're sorry," he explained. "You don't have to mean it, but you have to say it."

Wallace later said that while he loves traveling across the country and giving seminars, he is most passionate about interacting with children and teaching them about his love for martial arts.

"I tell them to stay involved in martial arts because it is something you can do your entire life," Wallace said. "I tell them that sports are fun, you know, soccer is fun, baseball is fun, basketball is fun, but someday karate might save your life."

It also might change your life.

Growing up in Portland, Ind., Wallace was an avid wrestler in high school. He later became involved in judo, but had to stop when he suffered a devastating right knee injury.

"My opponent fell right into my knee," he said while reenacting the event.

Wanting to stay active and wanting to keep participating in martial arts, he got involved in karate and then kickboxing. In the early 1970's, he started competing at kickboxing competitions and was given the nicknames "Billy the Kid" and "Bad Billy" for his quick and aggressive fighting style until his manager was inspired by a food of questionable content.

“At a concession stand at a Lakers games, he looked up and saw a sign advertising Super Foot-long Hotdogs,” he said with a grimace.

Thus, “Superfoot” was born.

“I didn’t like it at first,” Wallace admitted.

But it was fitting, said Ciro Grandini, a martial arts instructor from Mentor who, along with his friends, used to wear “Superfoot” patches on their left legs when they were younger and learning martial arts.

“His leg just comes out of nowhere,” Grandini said, who later studied under Wallace’s instruction. “He has such a fluidity of movement and he is a true master of the slide technique.”

That fluidity and quickness gave Wallace quite the reputation and he backed it up by amassing a record of 23-0 throughout his career in the Professional Karate Association. He retired in 1980 as an undefeated Middleweight Champion and said it wasn’t a hard decision leave the competitive sport.

“It stopped being fun,” said Wallace. “If what you’re doing is not fun, you won’t train as hard and you’ll go down the tubes.”

Shortly before his retirement, he got involved in films. Encouraged by his friend Chuck Norris, he signed onto “A Force of One” and a second career in the entertainment industry followed.

“I got typecast,” he said with a laugh. “I’ve been in about 15 films and I’ve been a bad guy in all of them. I die really well.”

Though he knows that so many view him as a legend, he said he is just a regular guy who lives for his family and dogs and teaching others about his undying love for martial arts.

Don Mathews, who is the owner of Warrior Spirit Karate and a personal friend of Wallace, said there is no other like him.

“He’s a martial arts icon and a really great person.”

Grandini agreed.

“There is a saying that some become champions, few become legends but both of those are true for Bill Wallace,” he said.