

COMPETITOR OF THE YEAR

John Fonseca

by Floyd Burk

John Fonseca has racked up an incredible list of awards and championships during his 19-year competitive career. Success for the Chicago-based *shotokan* stylist comes from having one of the most well-rounded fighting styles in sport karate. Combining Chuck Merriman's punching game and Bill Wallace's kicking style, and blending them with Tokey Hill's strategies and ring savvy, Fonseca has transformed himself into a formidable foe.

For Fonseca, 2000 was a banner year. In addition to winning gold at the Pan Am Games Karate Championships in Santiago, Chile, the 25-year-old also received Best Overall Competitor honors at the event. In addition, he won two championship titles at the United States of America-National Karate-do Federation National Championships and three titles in the Amateur Athletic Union National Karate Championships. During the previous season, he scored at the Paris Open World Karate Championship, where he was the first American to win gold and the second to ever win a medal at that event. He also won in Havana, Cuba, and Winnipeg, Canada.

Born on December 28, 1975 in Long Island, New York, Fonseca was just 6 years old when he first stepped into Falco's Shotokan Karate School and began training. He stayed there for three years, during which time he began competing. The youngster entered his first championship—the Golden Nationals in Tampa, Florida—when he was 7. He took the bronze in forms, but he didn't win in sparring. Says Fonseca: "When I started competing, I didn't do well in fighting because I would imitate what I saw in movies. I would be trying stuff that came straight out of *Enter the Dragon*. But it wasn't long before I got my head on straight and started winning at fighting."

At age 9, his training took a big turn when his parents relocated the family to Northbrook, Illinois. Fortunately, one of the best shotokan *dojo* in the Midwest was nearby, and Fonseca trained there with John DiPasquale for the next 11 years. While competing on the USA Karate Federation junior national team in the 1991 Mikulas Cup in Budapest, Hungary, the 15-year-old had an epiphany.



PHOTO BY FLOYD BURK

John Fonseca (right)

Going overseas for the first time and seeing the dedication of other competitors, he realized he needed to train more seriously if he wanted to win. Two years later, he decided to focus on fighting rather than forms. However, he credits *kata* practice for helping him become a more balanced *karateka*.

Contributing to Fonseca's success is the way his fighting style has evolved during his 10 years of international competition. He credits DiPasquale and Hill with helping him develop into an over-

powering counter-fighter. He has also acquired a more offensive fighting style so he can control the tempo of his matches with strategies, such as attacking his opponents off their movements and using blitzing techniques. His ability to avoid being scored on and his skill at nailing an opponent in the head or body with punches and kicks have also been a great help to him.

Fonseca was always a good kicker, but in 1998 he started training in *taekwondo* to improve his leg skills. The champ says it also helped him with angling, extension and fluidity.

"Nothing beats a balanced training regimen," he says. "I train four hours a day, which includes weights, sparring, plyometrics, running and other cardio exercises. I work on timing drills and practice countering techniques, going from left to right, right to left, circling, practicing them over and over until I'm ready to drop. But just as important is the mental training, which includes pre-visual (future scenarios) and re-visual (past scenarios) imagery exercises. The mental training is crucial to every top-level competitor."

From the day he committed himself to always being in top form at competitions, John Fonseca has beaten the best fighters in the world anyplace, any time and under any rules. The eight-time USA-NKF national champion is a one-man wrecking crew. *Black Belt* is proud to induct him into its Hall of Fame as the 2001 Competitor of the Year.

About the author: Floyd Burk is a free-lance writer and martial arts instructor based in San Diego.