Getting a kick out of Karate
How osteopathy is supporting the national team

Supporting elite athletes at a national level in Karate, Jason Bianchi is an osteopath based in West London. He gives us insight into working in highly competitive sports environment and how he gives, and gets, that ‘good feeling’ from osteopathic practice...

How did you get into sports osteopathy, and how did this lead to the GB Karate National Team (GB KNT)?
The same year I graduated as an osteopath, I applied to the OSCA internship program, which was coordinated by Rosy Hyman, the student liaison for OSCA. Rosy was able to provide guidance on how to approach sport clubs and sports teams to offer osteopathic treatment. I interned with a known sprint coach at Lee Valley which allowed me to work with elite level athletes representing Great Britain and other international countries.

An opportunity came up to cover the British Karate Championships in Sheffield with the Chief Medical Officer and Head Osteopath for the British and England Karate squads, Dave Inman. He gave me guidance on treating Karate fighters mat-side (tatamis) as well as providing osteopathic treatment to the athletes pre/post and during competitions.

What do you enjoy most about working with GB KNT? Where has it taken you?
I enjoy the opportunity to be present at the events and seeing the Karate athletes in action. It enables me to understand more about movements within the sport and the biomechanics of the fighters and possible injuries that the athlete could incur from Karate competition. Working as part of a team of osteopaths and other medical professionals means that you are always learning from each other.

With Karate being represented in the Tokyo Olympics in 2020, it’s a really exciting time to be involved in Karate. It has led me to working with the top-level UK fighters as well as fighters that will be representing GB in future Olympics and championships.

The other aspect of the role I enjoy is being able to build experience and share knowledge within a team. Dave Inman has a very well-structured process which makes the competition’s medical support run very smoothly and osteopathy fits really well within sports. I am currently still involved with athletics working mainly with sprint, hurdlers and pole vaulters and there are also a few bobsleigh athletes.

What would your advice be to other osteopaths interested in getting into similar fields?
OSCA was a great way to get involved. It allowed you to use it as a platform to approach sports clubs and teams. Also, having fellow OSCA interns to bounce ideas off each other really helped. It means you can share ideas on treatment approaches, patient presentations and discuss athletes’ presentations and treatment protocols to optimize better treatment outcomes.

How much did people know about osteopathy at GB KNT?
Dave Inman has been training in Karate a long time and involved in treating the Karate fighters for over 15 years, so the athletes already understood a lot about osteopathy and osteopathic treatment through being treated by Dave. He has built the Karate medical team to the high it is now, so the competitions consist of a number of osteopaths, along with paramedics and the Red Cross, covering matt side first aid and treatment during competitions.

What injuries and conditions do you commonly see? Are these unique to karate / martial arts?
With Karate being a contact sport, there are a number of injuries we see, ranging from head injuries such as concussion, TMJ injuries, dislocations, fractures, broken noses and muscle tears, ligaments and on some occasions, we have seen spinal injuries. Anything goes and we have to be prepared to deal with whatever comes our way on the tatami mat. Also, we need to make sure we are able to provide safe and efficient treatment in order to help the fighter compete to their full potential on the day. Which sometimes means giving the the news that we don’t feel it is safe to continue with their fight. Our osteopathic training really helps to understand possible types of injuries and what body tissues are injured.

Do you participate in karate yourself? If so, does this give you an added insight?
I have been involved in martial arts from a young age. However, when covering mat side medical for the Karate, it helped to learn more about Karate, such as learning the rules and understand the referee’s signals, as this all plays an important part of dealing with the fighters and knowing when to be able to go onto the tatami. As well as dealing with the fighters, you have to liaise with the referees and the referee panel responsible for that fight. So, communication is paramount.