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Afurika Senshuken

*As the 2010 Karate South Africa Sports Woman of the Year and currently ranked 55th in the world, Coral Jacobs is a true Afurika Senshuken - an African Champion. **Matt Tennyson** managed to spend some time with her.*

There is no record of the name of the person who coined the phrase, "dynamite comes in small packages." Yet it is a phrase that could have been written specifically for Coral Jacobs.

At first glance Coral seems no different to any other 26 year old. She is petite, attractive and has a charming personality. When first meeting her most people would never guess that she is also one of South Africa's top karateka - or practitioner of the Japanese martial art of karate.

Karate is a martial art developed in the Ryukyu Islands in what is now Okinawa, Japan. The name is made up of two Japanese words, kara (empty) and te (hand). The full name of the art is actually karate-do, or "the way of the empty hand." Gichin Funakoshi, founder of Shotokan karate, is generally credited with having introduced and popularised karate on the main islands of Japan.

It should come as no surprise that Coral became involved in karate at a very young age. In 1987 her father (currently a 7th dan black belt) began teaching karate in Eersteriver, just outside of Cape Town.

At first her father wanted her to do ballet. He never wanted her to do karate. She was enrolled in a ballet school in Mitchell's Plain and soon displayed a natural talent for dance.

Yet she would often accompany her father when he went to put on demonstrations at other karate clubs. She would sit to one side and observe as her father went through various routines known as kata.

Kata means literally "shape" or "model." Kata is a formalised sequence of movements which represent various offensive and defensive postures. These postures are based on idealised combat applications. The longer kata require the karateka to learn many complex movements.

Coral would do a lot more than just observe the kata. As soon as she arrived home she would practice the movements over and over again, without the knowledge of her father.

One day Coral went with her mother and grandmother to attend a local karate tournament. Her father was not there that particular day. One of the young girls that was supposed to take part in the tournament was ill and was unable to compete. Coral's mother borrowed a gi, or karate uniform, from one of the other girls and told Coral to take the place of the girl that was ill. Coral ended up winning third place in the tournament. She was five years old at the time.

When her father arrived later to present the medals he was more than a little surprised and perturbed to find himself awarding the bronze medal to his own daughter.

Although her father still wouldn't allow her to take part in competitions, her mother still kept on entering her. Soon she was winning gold medal after gold medal until her father finally had to give in and say to her; "compete."

As Coral often says, "I didn't find karate, it found me."

Once she started competing there was no holding her back. Coral specialises in kata and she has been the Boland Province kata champion for more than 15 years.



CHAMPION: Coral Jacobs with some of her impressive array of trophies that she was won, including the 2010 Karate South Africa Sportswoman of the Year.

In 2000 she represented South Africa at the World Karate Championships in Hungary and took forth place in the kata section, a proud moment for both her and South Africa.

In 2007 Coral moved into the senior division and was ranked number one for kata in Boland. She also took part in the South African All-styles Championships, again taking the honours for kata.

During the same year she was selected for the South African Senior Team to take part in the All Africa Games held in Algeria. Her third-placed bronze medal saw her being the only member of the South African karate team to bring back a medal.

2008 saw Coral once again taking the title for senior kata at the South African All-styles Championships. She followed this up by taking part in the Africa

Karate Tournament in Benin where she earned a silver medal.

She also came forth at the Commonwealth Games in Scotland, as well as representing South Africa at the Karate World Championships in Japan. In 2009 it was business as usual as Coral took the gold medal for kata at the South African All-styles Championships.

South Africa was host to the 2009 Commonwealth Games and once again Coral did the country proud. At the Standard Bank Arena in Johannesburg, Coral won the silver medal in the senior kata division.

In 2010 the city of Cape Town, South Africa played host to the Union des Fédérations africaines de Karaté (UFAK) Championships. In front of her home crowd Coral earned a bronze medal in the senior kata division.

2011 saw Coral once again being selected to represent South Africa at both the Commonwealth Games in Australia and the All Africa Games in Maputo. Besides winning a bronze medal at the All Africa Games, she also went to India to take part in a tournament and took the silver medal. I was lucky enough to spend a few hours with Coral at her home in Eersterivier, just outside of Cape Town. She kindly agreed to an interview even though she was packing to leave for Rustenburg where she would be representing Western Cape at the Champion of Champions Karate Tournament.

I asked her to describe a normal week in her life. She works for Metrorail as a buyer in the supply chain department. Every morning she spends an hour on the train travelling to work. At 4.30pm she spends another hour travelling home; and then her day is only just starting.

From Monday to Thursday she teaches karate. Many of her students come from disadvantaged communities and cannot always afford to pay monthly fees. In order to save paying monthly fees to rent a hall, her father build a dojo (training hall) at their home. A second storey was added to their house and this entire floor is now the dojo.

In addition to running classes four days a week, Coral also trains with her instructor (her father) on Monday and Wednesday nights after her normal classes.

As if this wasn't enough, she is also a Karobics instructor and teaches classes after her karate classes on Tuesday and Thursday nights. Karobics is a fitness regime made up from taebo, aerobics and karate.

On Saturdays if she is not taking part in a tournament or giving a demonstration at a school fete or shopping mall, Coral teaches an extra class. Sundays are set aside to train and prepare for tournaments.

I point out that at least she has Friday nights free, or so I thought. It also appears that one of her many talents is Hip-Hop dancing and she's pretty good at it. So good, in fact, that she teaches classes on a Friday night.

Currently there are 209 countries registered with the World Karate Federation and an estimated 50 million karate practitioners worldwide. Coral is ranked 55th for female kata in the world.

I asked her what her goals are for 2012 and she said that she wants to represent South Africa at the World Karate Federation Championships in France as well as take part in the African Karate Championships, Budapest Open in Hungary and the Istanbul Open in Turkey.

Her long-term goals are to become a kata coach for the South African national team and to keep teaching others. She would also love to see karate introduced as an Olympic sport and then represent South Africa at the Olympics.

Another thing that Coral longs to see is that karate be given more recognition and sponsorship in South Africa.

I have a feeling that Coral will not only achieve the goals she has set for herself, but a lot more. She has passion, dedication and the drive to become the best at what she does. I also have a feeling that we'll be hearing a lot more about this remarkable young lady.

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