

A Life Enriched by Karate

A smile spreads across Jaco Minnaar's face when he talks about karate. After 38 years in the sport, the soft-spoken Johannesburg native sees it as more than a martial art, recognizing its limitless potential for personal betterment and linking people together.

Minnaar took up karate as a boy after being awed by the skills of actors in a martial arts film. His parents supported his interest and enrolled him in a nearby karate dojo, where he trained in Gojukai karate, a form of the martial art that developed in Okinawa. "The image of karate in South Africa is very positive," explains Minnaar. "The martial art emphasizes the importance of discipline and pure effort." These aspects fueled his motivation over the decades: "Once you reach one point, there is always something beyond. You can never stop learning."

Gojukai karate is now based out of Tokyo and promoted globally by the International Karatedo Gojukai Association (IKGA); it is a branch of "Gojuryu," which originated in Okinawa early in the twentieth century based on a mixture of traditional Okinawan martial arts and the southern school of Chinese martial arts practiced in Fujian Province. Minnaar traveled to Tokyo for the first time in 1993 for the IKGA World Championships. He subsequently spent several years in the South African financial industry, but, as he explains, "When I first came to Japan in 1993, the taste of culture, the taste of Japan as a whole I experienced had a great impact on me. So I really wanted to come here and experience this country more deeply." In 2004, he took a job teaching English in Okayama Prefecture under the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme (see page 33). He then developed his recruiting skills through work at several financial institutions, and he is now vice president of recruiting for J.P. Morgan's Japanese operations.

Working with the IKGA global headquarters in Japan, Minnaar's activities include training and instructing at the headquarter dojo as well as at seminars and assisting groups from South Africa to visit and train in Japan. He will also be involved in promoting the association's Global Championships to be held in Tokyo 2021.

Minnaar also hopes to boost South Africans' interest in Japan by drawing their attention to the 2019 Japan Rugby World Cup and 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games through initiatives of the South African Embassy in collaboration with the South African Chamber of Commerce in Japan (SACCJ). Meanwhile, as chairperson of SACCJ, he is closely involved with the embassy in hosting events that raise Japanese awareness of South Africa's abundant investment opportunities, including such areas as tourism, mining, and wineries. He also highlights investment opportunities in Japan. "As an economic superpower," he enthuses, "Japan has much to offer the rest of the world."

Minnaar professes contentment with where his life is going, saying that his goals are to keep improving in the dojo and on the job, and to pass those values on to his two children. "Karate has given me so much. It is my life," he declares. "It brought me to Japan, and also has given me a family, a career and a new country to call home. I wish through karate and in other ways to give back where I can and encourage others to take a chance and follow their dreams."



Jaco Minnaar

Has trained in Gojukai karate for nearly four decades. His sustained efforts have earned him three all-Japan titles in the *jiyu-kumite* (free sparring) division, most recently in 2016. Now focuses on karate not for achieving higher rank but for training and introspection. Lives in western Tokyo and divides his time among family, work, training, and volunteer activities as chairperson of SACCJ.



1. Minnaar poses after winning the *jiyu-kumite* division title at the 2012 Gojukai All-Japan Championships. 2. With his wife following their Shinto-style wedding ceremony. 3. With colleagues at J.P. Morgan.