

JOANE

Champion Mindset Inside
and Outside of the Dojo

ORBON

“It is such magic inside my dojo,” says Sensei Joane Orbon about her United Bay Area Karate Club (UBAKC), located in South San Jose. UBAKC was established in August 2021, and the dojo’s burgeoning popularity belies the short time it has been open. Driving by, you’ll see lines of eager students ready for the next class, trainings going into the evening, and a collective enthusiasm spilling out the front doors. This “magic” Joane speaks of is the result of her journey and the hard lessons she learned along the way.

Joane is a third-degree black belt in the school of Goju-Ryu Karate. Goju-Ryu karate was named from a poem entitled “Hakku Kenpo,” (Eight Laws of the Fist). The third law of the poem translates to, “everything in the universe inhales soft and exhales hard.” Goju-Ryu, therefore, means hard-soft style, made up of both closed-fist, linear attacks (*gō*, hard) and open-hand techniques with circular movements (*jū*, soft).

It was a serendipitous moment when Joane’s dad opened the yellow pages to find an activity for her, embarking her on her martial arts journey at the age of seven. It’s difficult not to believe that in some way, martial arts, and more specifically Goju-Ryu Karate, was something she was destined for.

While Joane exhibited a natural talent for martial arts, getting to where she is now has been “no Cinderella story.” The passion and grit it took to achieve her dreams is a big part of what defines Joane and are values she passes down to her students. The drive to succeed was modeled by her parents who worked hard to make ends meet after they came from the Philippines, started a family, and moved to Stockton, California. The world of karate immediately took over her life. Winning her first gold championship in San Jose at the age of eight, Joane knew she wanted this to be her life and that she wanted “to be a world champion.”

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Joane accomplished all this while attending school, where she also excelled as a straight-A student. She continued to get better, and as she approached her teens, it was time to take her momentum to the next level. She made the National Junior Team, but this meant traveling to the Continental Championships in Santiago, Chile, which she had to pay for. Her family, however, was starting to feel the effects of the 2008 economic recession. Joane had to “breathe in” for the first time.

As the great Sensei Seikichi Toguchi said, the philosophy of Goju helps one “deal effectively with the fluctuations of life.” At the age of 12, Joane utilized her open-handed techniques outside of training, and got a taste of entrepreneurship. With the support of her family, she hustled. She started selling candy at school. Her mom sold lunch boxes to her co-workers. The family rolled lumpia to sell. It paid off, and she won her first North/South America Continental Championship. Oh, and she was still a straight-A student.

Between the ages of 12 and 18 she dominated the USA Championships and was mentally ready for the world stage. At 17, she started to incorporate CrossFit and strength conditioning to prepare her body for joining the Senior National Team. When she finally joined the Senior team, however, it was a whole new reality she wasn’t prepared for. She explains, “Between North and South America I was fine, but now I was stepping into the realm of Europe, Asia, and Africa. A completely different game.”

Time to breathe in again.

At 21, Joane moved to Indonesia and then to Kazakhstan to train full-time for nearly three years. Then in 2016, the Olympics announced karate would officially be part of the games for 2020. Joane reached out to her network and started a GoFundMe to fund her training while also competing independently around the world to rank and qualify.

Exhale.

She became ranked #6 in the world and joined the Philippine National Team, winning bronze for the team in the 2019 Southeast Asian Games. When COVID hit, things got interrupted. Joane moved to San Jose, to join her family who had moved from Stockton. With competing at a standstill, Joane's good friend and entrepreneur, Mike Lee, pushed her to do something during this time. So, she started teaching outdoor classes.

She started passing out flyers, making cold calls, connecting with other entrepreneurs, and taking a deep dive into social media for the first time. It paid off and soon she had a loyal following. Though this was happening during COVID, her outside classes were just what kids, and parents, needed at this time. As she explains, "Everything worked out the way it did. COVID gave me time to build my building out." The success of her outside classes allowed her to get her business license and eventually sign a lease for a proper dojo.

UBAKC represents a lot to Joane on many levels. It represents the success of her entrepreneurship and the chance for other little girls to see what is possible. It represents the Filipino community and the respect of her family's journey. "I am representing a lot of people. I am representing underrepresented people and communities all over. I am just a little girl from Stockton who just happened to make it out," she says.

She wants her students to earn and fight for their goals while instilling in them values she sees missing: commitment, perseverance, respect, and dedication. She tells her students, "I am going to mold you to treat everything you do with a champion mindset." Don't let Joane's toughness fool you, though. She has a big heart and will do anything to support her students, from finding financial support to reaching out to other contacts to help with training.

Her combination of high expectations and dedication to each student is why she recently was made head coach of the USX Team, an expeditionary developmental team that prepares young athletes around the country to qualify for the USA National Karate Team.

Joane has come full circle and is now giving back and lifting others in her community, especially the little girls in her dojo that look up to her.

She tells her students, "You always train hard. You don't take anything personally, especially when challenged to do better. Be willing to push friends up when they're down. And always support everyone. The hardest you'll be hit is here in the dojo. That's my dojo culture." 

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Joane is wearing **Evoro Italia**, www.evaro.it

Red jacket: Vima silk jacket dress, Italian silk with Swarovski crystal buttons, \$920.

Black jumpsuit: Monica lace deep-V jumpsuit, taffeta and Italian lace with sequin belt, \$820.

