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NOVEMBER 1993

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for L.A. Dodgers' Jim Gott*

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HAPKIDO'S MASTER OF THE MOUND

Los Angeles Dodgers Pitcher Jim Gott Reveals What It's Like to be a Martial Artist

They call him "The Mayor" because he is so congenial and friendly to everyone. But the kind of clout Los Angeles Dodgers relief pitcher Jim Gott possesses is not political. As a second-degree black belt in hapkido, Gott has an array of self-defense techniques to go with his pitching arsenal should a batter be foolish enough to charge the mound. Gott's the first person his teammates want at their sides when a brawl breaks out on the field.

Now in his 12th season and with his fourth team in the big leagues, Gott credits his martial arts training with saving his pitching career. When a ruptured medial collateral ligament in his right elbow threatened to sideline him permanently in 1989, Gott turned to hapkido to regain his confidence and rebuild his damaged body. After saving a career-high 34 games for the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1988, the Southern California native was picked up by the Dodgers in December of '89 and given another chance. He has made the most of it, and had a team-leading 20 saves to go with a 2.14 earned run average at this writing.

At six-foot-four and 230 pounds, Gott is an imposing figure on the mound and has twice had to use his martial arts training on the ballfield, once in the minor leagues and once this season during a melee with the Colorado Rockies. Although he handled himself with aplomb in each case, Gott was disappointed he had to resort to martial arts at all. His training has taught him to never use his fighting skills unless absolutely necessary.

In the following Black Belt exclusive, Gott describes both incidents and relates what it is like to be a martial artist in the major leagues. He explains how martial arts training has given him the confidence to pitch batters inside, and he discusses the role hapkido played in his successful comeback from two major arm surgeries. As Gott himself will tell you, the biggest save of his career was credited to the martial arts. —Ed.



THE MOUND

Artist in the Major Leagues

Interview by Jim Coleman

BLACK BELT: How does the Los Angeles Dodgers' top brass view your *hapkido* training? Do they think it's a good way for you to stay in shape in the offseason, or do they frown upon it for fear that you may injure yourself?

JIM GOTT: They're happy that I do it by myself, and they're *not* happy that I teach the other guys on the team. Their only fear is somebody getting hurt. I would say almost everybody on the team has learned a couple of *hapkido* techniques. I've even shown techniques to the clubhouse guys and some of the trainers. They're always asking me, "What do you do in this situation?" and, "How does this work?" I'll be sitting down with my back to everybody else and my face in my locker, getting dressed, and somebody will walk over and do a new move on me. So it's a fun thing.

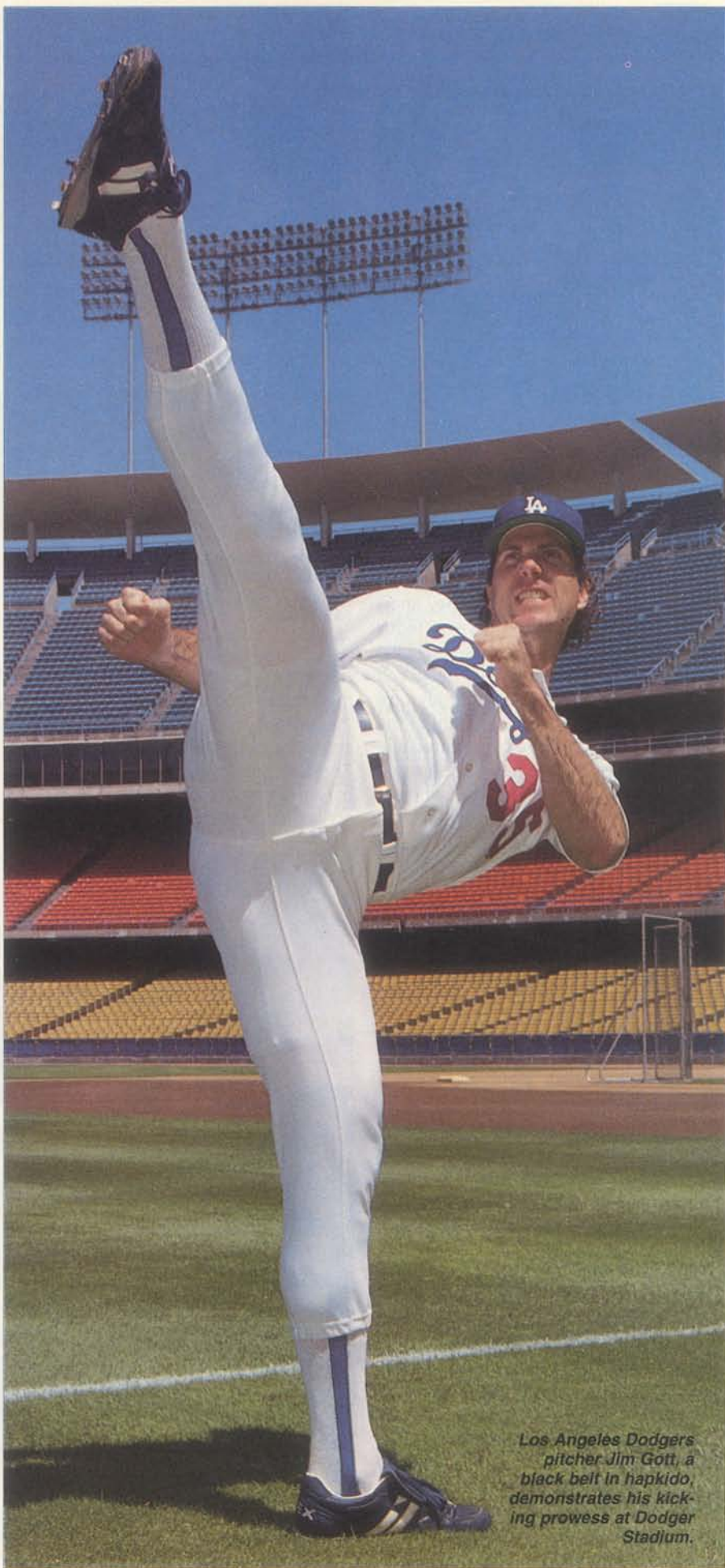
BB: What do the other players think about you being a martial artist?

GOTT: They've got a lot of respect for it, they really do.

BB: Do any of your teammates train seriously in the martial arts as well?

GOTT: [Pitcher] Kevin Gross really does. Kevin's got a very strong background in the martial arts, but his *sil lum* kung fu is so much different than *hapkido* because *hapkido*'s angles are much straighter than *sil lum*'s. But it's amazing to see how quickly Kevin has been able to pick *hapkido* up. [Catcher] Mike Piazza studied martial arts while growing up in Philadelphia, and he has a little bit of background with boxing also. He just got the new [Wave] water-filled heavy bag [from Century Martial Arts Supply]. He just loves it. He's very into martial arts. We've shared techniques together. We just kind of talk about refining his style, and I'll show him some different *hapkido* techniques. But the biggest thing Mike and I really talk about is the philosophy of martial arts. He's read a lot of books and is really into the *chi* power and breathing.

BB: Do the players around the league know of your martial arts training? →



Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Jim Gott, a black belt in *hapkido*, demonstrates his kicking prowess at Dodger Stadium.



GOTT: Everybody knows. I've been around with so many different teams that I think most people know who I am. They know that I'm a real nice guy and just a big teddy bear, and would never ever use anything like that [to hurt anybody]. They know that I'm not out there to be a tough guy or a bully. Dave Justice and Ron Gant of the Atlanta Braves have also both started taking martial arts. Justice has started working with [karate instructor] Joe Corley in Atlanta for the last two or three offseasons, and he's really into it. So every time I get a chance to see him out at batting practice when the home and visiting teams are going out there, we'll get five or 10 minutes to talk about [martial arts] things. [San Francisco Giants outfielder] Barry Bonds is also very into martial arts. Barry has studied a lot and really enjoys it.

BB: Is it true that, while in the minor leagues, you were constantly being challenged by individuals who had heard you were a martial artist?

GOTT: There was only one specific time, and it's amazing how that just kind of stays with you. Even guys that I've never played with have heard the story. There was a pitcher that I played with when I was with the Cardinals' organization in Calgary, Canada, my very first year. It was rookie ball; that's the lowest level. That's where everybody who just signed [a contract] goes. One of the guys that I was playing with was kind of a hard-ass from the Northwest, and this guy continued to challenge me. He said, "Hey, I don't need [martial arts]. All I need to do is box and hit. This punch in the face is going to be able to do so much more than any of your stupid kicks." And I always backed up; that was the way my hapkido instructor, Master Chong S. Kim, always trained us. You



Dodger pitcher Jim Gott poses (1) with his hapkido instructor Chong S. Kim and works (2) with Kim on a throwing technique.

never show [your fighting skill], especially to someone who wants you to show it. As the season continued, he just kept on challenging me, and I always backed down. The last game of the season, we were playing in Idaho Falls, Idaho, and I was scheduled to pitch. This same guy came



Despite being six foot four inches tall and weighing 230 pounds, Jim Gott (right) is extremely agile and flexible and has no problem kicking to head height while in full uniform.

up to me right when I just had gotten my spikes on and I'm getting ready to go stretch and start the game. He said "Hey, this is our last chance. Are you going to show me what you're made of?" And he starts pushing me a little bit. Right when he starts pushing me, he takes a full swing at me. I kind of pulled away, and the punch just grazed my face. But I spun around and I threw a punch that moved him back a little bit. Then, with my left hand, I just popped him right in the nose. It was really fast, and it just exploded his nose. And I didn't hit him full bore. Here I hit this guy with a quarter or a half of my force, and his nose exploded. Blood's everywhere, all over his uniform. I was kind of ashamed of it, to tell you the truth. I should have just taken it, because another hour, and I didn't have to deal with this guy ever again. So his nose was broken, and I went out to pitch and I did my usual thing. I struck out the first six batters, and the second time into the lineup, I walked a couple of guys and ended up losing the game something like 3-2. I came out [of the game] in the sixth inning, I walked off, and here comes this guy. He'd just gotten back from the hospital, and all of a sudden here he comes at me with a bat! He's mad because his manhood was hurt, and he starts trying to take a swipe at me with the bat. I stepped in, so that the bat couldn't really hit me too hard, and I just said, "Listen, we've done this all year. We're both frustrated because we haven't played well. I'm sorry that this has happened." He was dumbfounded; he was expecting to have a confrontation. And he put the bat down and just walked away. I would much rather have that situation than a situation where I had to hit him.

BB: How much of your success this season do you credit to your martial arts training?

GOTT: I credit *all* of my success to my martial arts. I really do.

BB: Why?

GOTT: Because of the confidence-building factor of martial arts more than anything else. Understanding what my body is capable of doing, yet never, ever wanting to use it, I really believe has helped me out in my baseball career. I had a significant injury in 1989. My right elbow was reconstructed. My confidence was very low. My career basically was over. I had shoulder surgery back in '86 and was able to come back from that, and this was two or three times more severe than that. Most guys weren't coming back from injuries like this. But Master Kim always taught me to never give up. The [Pittsburgh] Pirates really didn't believe that I was going to be able to come back from that significant of an injury, and they basically gave up on me. But the Dodgers and Master Kim have been



significant in my comeback. The first thing I did when I moved to Los Angeles was to visit Master Kim and tell him I wanted to start training again. Master Kim saw that I was down. He didn't believe that my career was over with and, deep inside, I didn't either, but I had a lot of people around me just not believing in me. And Master Kim was one who really just stepped in and he got me ready for the season.

BB: What, specifically, did he do to help build your confidence?

Jim Gott (second from left) demonstrates his jump front kick with other hapkido students from Chong S. Kim's school in Alhambra, California.

GOTT: He got me down there training. Master Kim is not one to say, "Boy, you're a good kicker," or, "Boy, you can throw somebody well." You know that he has confidence in you by the amount of technique that he's teaching you. I think just the attention that he showed to me really

helped me gain a lot of confidence. After I passed my second-degree black belt test, he gave me a pat on the back and said he was proud of me. And that was the type of thing that I needed at that time.

BB: So the benefits you received from hapkido training were primarily of the mental variety, not physical?

GOTT: Much more mental than physical, no question. From the very beginning, that's what attracted me to the martial arts more than anything else. I had all the physical things that I wanted. I was more intrigued with the philosophical side, the discipline and the focus—those things were much more appealing to me than the physical side. I had the physical side from playing baseball and football and doing all the things I was doing when I was growing up.

BB: When you joined the Dodgers in 1989, it allowed you to train regularly at Kim's studio in Alhambra, California. You must have liked that after seven years of training wherever you could find instruction.

GOTT: It was really nice, because I was always going to different places in the different cities that I lived in. When I would come down and play the [California] Angels when I was in the American League, and then playing against the Dodgers when I was in the National League, I always made the effort to get down to say hello to Master Kim. And Master Kim always welcomed me like the prodigal son. We recently had a grand opening of Master Kim's fifth studio in the Southern California area, and I had eight guys from the Dodgers—including Brett Butler, Orel Hershiser and Todd Worrell—come to support it. They came down because they were really interested in seeing the art.

BB: How did you happen to turn to martial arts in the first place?

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Dodger reliever Jim Gott, throwing two hapkido students here, has used his martial arts skills twice in his professional baseball career.

GOTT: It all started because of the Bruce Lee movies and the *Kung Fu* television series. My brother and I both played baseball on every team possible, and I just wanted something different. I wanted another type of physical activity. I wanted to do something on my own, so that was really why I chose the martial arts. I ended up taking judo until I got my yellow belt, but I really wanted to get into one of the karate arts, and I started with *tae kwon do* in Pasadena [California] when I was in the eighth grade. Then I moved on with Master Kim in the summer before ninth grade. My dad didn't want me to get hurt, and he was kind of allowing me to do this on a whim. I took a couple of guitar lessons earlier that same year, and that only lasted a couple of weeks. When I decided to take up martial arts, he said "Is this going to be the same thing [as the guitar lessons]?" I said, "No," and I promised him I would honor the year contract that I had. It is something that has ended up being part of my life. So my dad and I kind of kid each other about that all the time. He thought that it was just a little whim.

BB: Do the Dodgers look to you as their leader when a brawl breaks out during a game?

GOTT: Well, we've got some pretty tough guys on our team. We've got Todd Worrell—we call him Paul Bunyan because he's as big as anybody can get. He'd be tough to deal with.

BB: So you don't feel any added pressure because of your martial arts training to be the first guy onto the field during a fight?

GOTT: Not at all.

BB: The Dodgers were involved in a bench-empting brawl with the expansion Colo-

rado Rockies earlier this season. What precipitated the fight, and what role did you play in the fracas?

GOTT: That was a lot of fun. I got a chance to try something. Here's what happened. There were a couple of confrontations in the game that night. [Dodger second baseman] Jody Reed ended up getting kicked and hyperextended his elbow. Charlie Hayes, one of their guys, was hit in the back on the next pitch, and he charged [Dodger pitcher] Ramon Martinez. There was a typical baseball fight, where the guy who was hit and the guy who hit him exchange pushes and a tackle, and that's basically what happened. Everybody was pretty mad about that, but that fight ended and nothing happened, just the typical things that you do in a baseball fight. Being in the bullpen, I'm 50 yards away [from the action] and I've got to sprint across the field. Everything's done by then and people are just being pulled off [each other]. Later on in the game, in the seventh inning, their pitcher, a guy named Keith Shepard, a young guy who throws hard and who is an ex-amateur boxer, just decided he wanted to show everybody how tough he was, and he ends up drilling [Dodger third baseman] Cory Snyder right in the back with a pitch. Cory did the right thing and stood there, but Shepard throws his glove down, throws his hat down, and invites the world to come and join him in a fight. Cory stayed there and the rest of our bench ran out. I ran out there and, by the time I got there, all the blows had been thrown. Somebody, [infielder] Lenny Harris I believe, had Shepard in a headlock and was giving him a couple of uppercuts. Right then I came in and, being the peacemaker Master Kim has

taught me to be, I put my hand on Shepard's shoulder, and I said, "Lenny, leave him alone." So Lenny let go of him, and right when he let go, Shepard came up and took a left-handed punch at whoever was right next to me. Before Shepard got the punch extended, I was able to grab his shirt right by his bicep and bring his arm right across his face. It basically just choked him out, and he couldn't go anywhere. The fight basically ended right at that point. The umpire, who had seen the whole thing, came over and said, "Thanks for getting this taken care of." Master Kim has always taught us that, if somebody's coming to attack you and take your life, you have to do what you have to do. But usually, you can calm the person down, control the situation, and go from there.

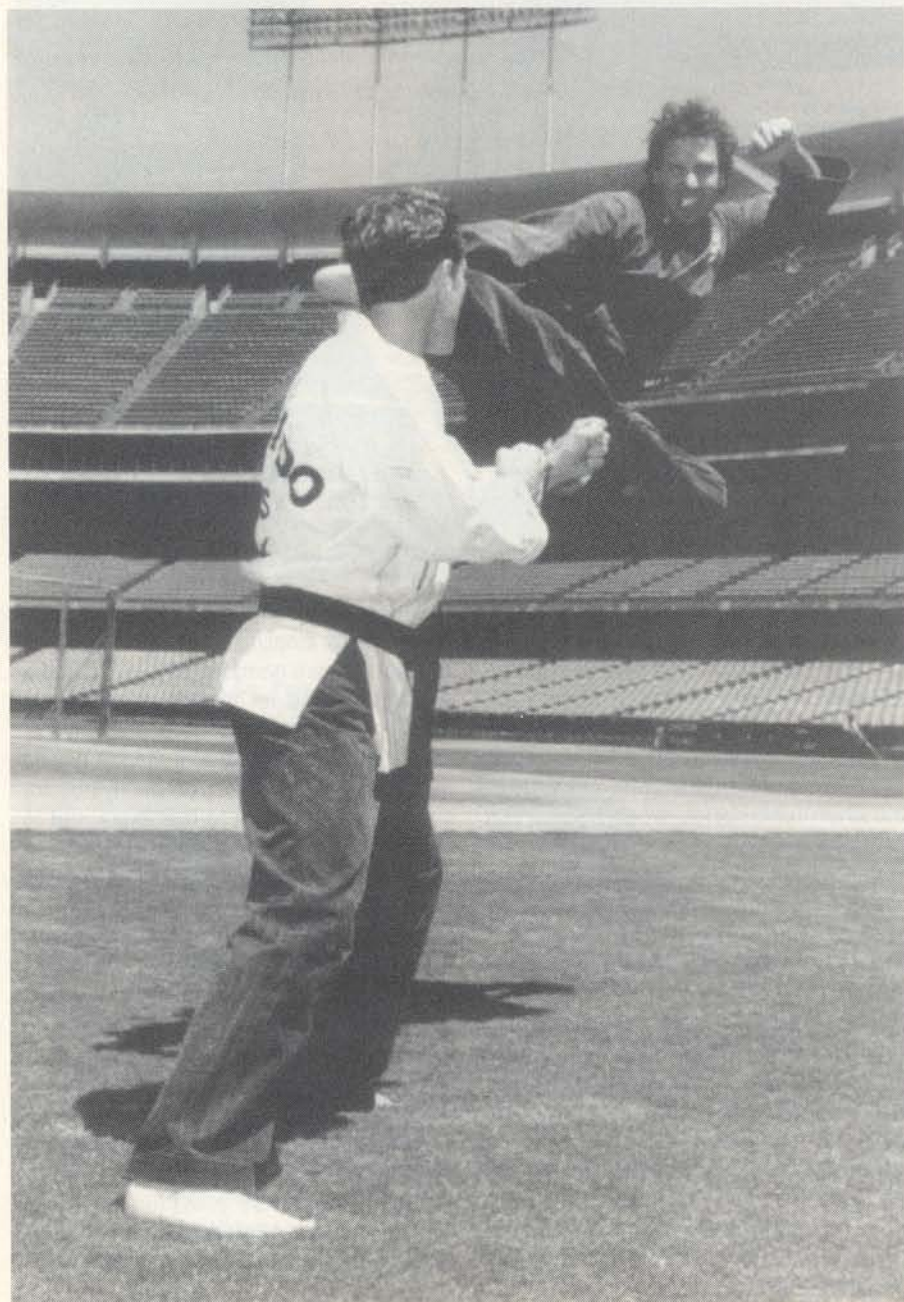
BB: Is it true that you called Kim from the bullpen afterward to tell him about the

fight?

GOTT: Yeah. My heart was pumping so fast because of the whole thing. I was just so excited that the self-defense technique had worked. The game had begun again, I was back in the bullpen, and we're all recounting the whole thing. And somebody said, "God, you had the guy like a pretzel. What happened?" So I told him. And I said, "I've got to call Master Kim." So I asked the bullpen coach if I could make the call. He wasn't real happy about it, but I went ahead and made a credit card call to Master Kim's studio from the bullpen. I just was so happy. And Master Kim dug it.

BB: There seems to be a recent trend in major league baseball toward bench-emptying brawls. What do you think is causing it, and what can be done about it?

GOTT: There are more fights this year than ever. I don't believe they have a place



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in baseball. But I do believe that the brush-back pitch definitely has a place in baseball. And the reason why I believe that is because I believe there's a certain etiquette that needs to be followed in baseball, just as there is an etiquette that needs to be followed in the martial arts studio. And when that's not followed, I believe that there needs to be a lesson taught or a point proven. When I have a big power hitter up at the plate, and he is "sitting" right on my slider on the outside part of the plate, I need to get him off the plate. You need to have that weapon.

BB: This year, however, the reaction by batters to "that weapon" has been pretty strong, resulting in a number of fights.

GOTT: Right, but usually the reactions have been in situations when somebody is retaliating for something else. The pitcher and the batter want that inside part of the plate. That cat-and-mouse game is part of baseball. The other part of the game is the retaliation. Jody Reed being taken out hard

at second base—there needs to be a point made. A guy stealing a base with a seven-run lead—there needs to be a point made. A guy swinging for the fence with a big lead—there needs to be a point made. We're always taught that if there's ever a retaliation to be made, you always go for somebody's ribs, not to hurt them, but to make the point. I have not been in a fight—other than the one in Colorado—where there has ever been a fist thrown. It's usually a tackle, and that's it. Then it's over with. It should last 10 seconds, and that's it.

BB: Does the physical training of hapkido translate well to baseball?

GOTT: Absolutely. I got an opportunity when I came to the Dodgers to go back to Master Kim's studio and really work on my body mechanics. And even though I was doing a 360-jump spin kick or a low round-house kick, I can take those type of movements into my baseball, because I need

Continued on page 122



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HAPKIDO'S MASTER OF THE MOUND

Continued from page 30

that type of balance. I'm using a lot of energy with my arm, and I can take a lot of that pressure off my arm by being very coordinated with my legs. Whether it's the stretch, the coiling motion, or when I stride to the plate, I really need a lot of strength in my body mechanics.

BB: Does your hapkido training give you a sense of power when you are on the mound?

GOTT: No question. The bottom line is that I can pitch somebody inside, and if he wants to challenge me, I feel very comfortable that I would be able to disarm him and send him back to the plate to finish up his at-bat. When I'm out there, guys are out for blood. They're either going to get the big hit off me, or I'm going to totally make them look bad.

BB: How do you like your role as the Dodgers' "stopper," the guy who comes out of the bullpen to shut down the opponent and preserve a victory?

GOTT: I love it. I really wish that I had never hurt my arm back in Pittsburgh, because I would have had some continuity in doing it since 1987. But I can look back now and be very proud. I've worked very hard to be



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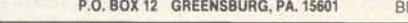
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able to come back from two major injuries that most people have not come back from, and been able to significantly contribute to my team. I truly believe that baseball is probably *the* most humbling sport. You have to walk that fine line. You have to be confident whenever you are in a situation that you would have to protect yourself, but you also have to be humble enough in that situation not to use your martial arts.

BB: Do you feel martial arts training is beneficial to youngsters?

GOTT: No question. I remember when I was in eighth grade and wished that I had done it a little bit sooner. I had seen kids who had done it sooner and had seen the discipline that they had. I just believe that, number one, the martial arts are wonderful. Number two, if you get a good instructor, you have an opportunity to gain a tremendous amount of confidence, not only for your schoolwork, but for any other endeavor that you want to go into. So I think it's wonderful for children. It's a wonderful discipline. It's a wonderful thing for children to find control of their own bodies, to have respect for other people, and also just to give them a tremendous amount of confidence. Which is really what it's given me.

BB: Who's your favorite martial arts film star?

GOTT: Steven Seagal, because his *aikido*

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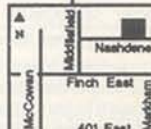
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is very similar to hapkido. And, boy, he's got some very good fight scenes in his movies. Jean-Claude Van Damme, his kicks are beautiful. I watch everything from the kickboxing movies to the bootleg films from Japan. The people at Panther Productions must love me, because I have a library of probably 100 to 150 martial arts cassettes. I watch those all the time. Believe me, if I got paid as much doing the martial arts as I got playing baseball, it would be a very, very tough decision. A very tough decision.

BB: Do you ever catch the television show *Kung Fu: The Legend Continues*?

GOTT: I love the new *Kung Fu* TV show. And I really loved the original *Kung Fu* series, which had some important lessons to be learned. And I've gotten a chance to meet Chuck Norris. Talk about a class act.

"My favorite martial art movie star is really Chuck Norris, because he personifies what I've been taught in the martial arts."

He really is a true martial artist. To back up a bit, my favorite martial art movie star is really Chuck Norris, because he personifies what I've been taught in the martial arts and what I think should still be alive.

BB: Which is?
GOTT: Honor and strong character. And also the ability to be able to do stuff that people only dream about.

BB: What are your plans after your baseball career is over?

GOTT: I would love to have made enough money to be able to support my family by running an affiliate of Master Kim's studios and teaching hapkido. Even more than that, I would love to have a bit part in a martial art movie at some point in time. Whether I'm the bad guy that Steven Seagal throws into the ocean, or one of his team, beating up the bad guys, I'd love to do it.

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