

The karate kidder

Incapacity claimant was martial arts instructor

By Jaya Narain

AFTER martial arts expert Kevin O'Connor injured his back, he claimed he could barely walk.

The 48-year-old claimed disability benefits, saying he had enormous difficulty walking even five yards and needed a walking stick at all times.

But his story was exposed as a sham when he was filmed going through strenuous moves as a martial arts instructor.

The pictures showed O'Connor running through his moves including kicking and punching while instructing junior members at a club.

Yesterday, he was facing up to six months in jail after he admitted wrongfully claiming more than £30,000 in incapacity benefit and disability living allowance over a two-year period while continuing to teach self-defence.

O'Connor was one of the most highly-regarded jujitsu and karate instructors in Britain in a career stretching back more than 30 years.

He acted as consultant to numerous TV shows and was an instructor to police study groups in the 1980s.

Various organisations would turn to O'Connor, whose wife Dawn is also a martial arts expert, for advice.

O'Connor, who holds a 7th dan in karate - one of the highest belts on offer - and a 6th dan in jujitsu, was also a technical adviser to the International Martial Arts Federation.

He even invented his own martial art, karate-jitsu, in which he holds the title of 7th dan.

But in 1994 he ruptured a disc in his back and two years later began claiming incapacity benefit, income support and disability living allowance.

Following a tip-off to the Department of Work and Pensions, investigators carried out undercover filming at a class in Stoke-on-Trent.

After O'Connor was arrested and charged with benefit fraud last October, he claimed: 'I have done some voluntary work since

my injury, but no money ever changed hands.

'I think there's been a misunderstanding. I'm going to plead not guilty and fight this all the way.'

But yesterday he appeared at Stoke-on-Trent Crown Court

'Tough line on fraudsters'

wearing a blazer bedecked in martial arts badges and admitted failing to notify the authorities of a change in circumstances while receiving incapacity benefit while working.

He also pleaded guilty to failing to notify a change in circumstances claiming disability living

allowance following a change of physical ability.

The case was adjourned for sentencing at a later date.

Outside the court O'Connor, from Stoke, said: 'I hope this city will still feel my advice is useful. We can move forward better with the plea.'

'It opens the door to my mitigation. It is not a clear-cut case.'

He said he had resigned as chairman of the Bushi Karate-Jitsu Association and that it had been a difficult decision.

Last night, James Plaskitt, the Government's anti-benefit fraud minister, said: 'We are taking a tough line on benefit fraudsters because they steal £1.5 billion a year - money that should be spent on schools and hospitals.'

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On top of his world: O'Connor was a leading expert on karate and jujitsu



All-action: O'Connor, left, taking a martial arts class