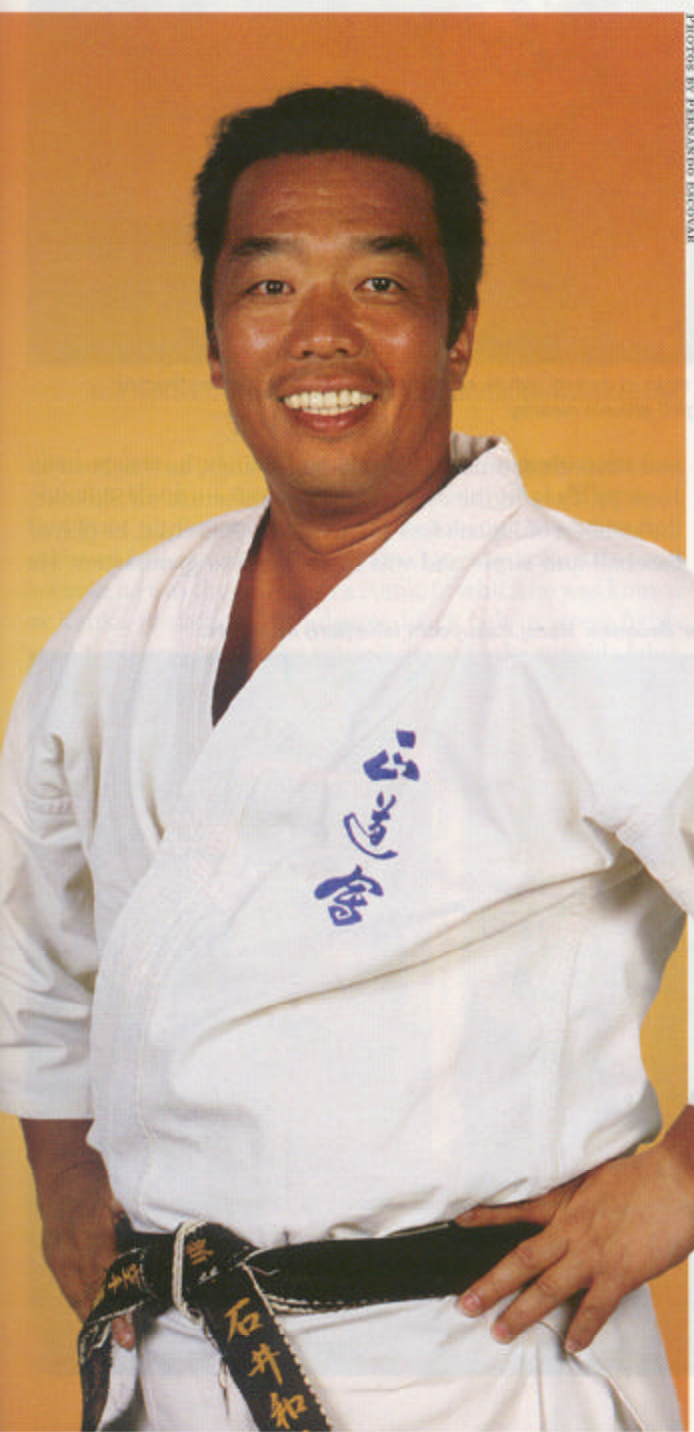


21st CENTURY SHOGUN



PHOTOS BY PIERVANINO FERRARI

**K-1 Founder
Kazuyoshi Ishii
Is Striving to
Unify the Martial Arts—
First in Japan and Then
Around the World!**

by Arne Soldwedel

Kazuyoshi Ishii is perhaps the single most important figure in the martial arts today. In Japan, his sell-out K-1 events have not only repopularized the fighting arts but also elevated them to the level of World Cup soccer. But he has not been content simply to develop K-1, a contest that features the world's best stand-up fighters as they vie for six-figure purses in front of crowds that number up to 100,000. He is also dedicated to promoting his forays into the world of mixed martial arts. His "King Midas" formula has landed overseas and is energizing martial arts communities around the globe.

Humble Beginnings

In many ways, the Kazuyoshi Ishii story parallels that of one of Japan's most intriguing historical figures: Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Hideyoshi was, in effect, the first real unifier of Japan. Arising from humble beginnings, he was not a samurai, but an *ashigaru* foot soldier. However, he was an exceptional commander. Hideyoshi's military prowess and leadership ability were noticed by his lord, the legendary Oda Nobunaga. Nobunaga bestowed increasingly greater responsibilities upon Hideyoshi, who eventu-