

'Bam' Johnson Continues Career In Chinese Martial Arts

Last year, this newspaper featured Willie M. "Bam" Johnson and outlined his accomplishments in martial arts.

Since then, Mr. Johnson has been working to spread the martial arts system of Wu-Shu locally, as well as continuing his training in sport karate. One of his goals is to be featured in the movies.

Mr. Johnson's sponsors in his effort to achieve national and international recognition as a martial artist include, according to Mr. Johnson, the 7-11 stores; McDonald's; merchants of Old Town Mall; and the McKim Recreation Center.

When he was first getting started on the tournament circuit, he was "shown the ropes" by his instructor, Mfundu Dennis Brown. He is now on his own, with opportunities to talk to and learn from national champions in the sport. "A tournament, to me, is a place where a student can come and test his ability," says Mr. Johnson. He prefers this outlet for aggression to "having to go out in the streets and look for trouble."

Mr. Johnson, 19, is in his last year of high school, where his favorite subject is drama. He plans to go to college in a couple of years ("I'm figuring out what I want to do," he says.) One of his aspirations is to open a school for the martial arts here in the city.

He believes that younger children in the neighborhood where he lives, the Lafayette Projects, "are looking up to me as a hero."

The martial arts competitor has been in about 60 tournaments, both local and national. This year he placed in tournaments in Minneapolis; Grand Rapids, Michigan; New York state; and New York City.

"After studying [martial arts] for so long, you feel like you want to test your abilities, so tournaments are very good for this," says the athlete. "I don't go out there just wanting to win, but wanting to learn, entertain, and meet new faces. When I go out there [to compete], I get totally involved when I'm performing, just like Eddie Murray gets when playing baseball, because I really love to keep people happy.

"I also love to make people by teaching and spreading the knowledge of Wu-Shu in Baltimore," he says enthusiastically. "Wu Shu is a traditional Chinese sport, literally meaning 'martial arts'. It has been practiced by the Chinese people for thousands of years, and has a history as old as the Chinese culture.

"Through the generations, the Chinese people have practiced Wu-Shu to strengthen their bodies and minds, and to use in combat," he explained.

Mr. Johnson has established a Wu-Shu club at the McKim Recreation Center at 1120 East Baltimore Street. It is called the Shaolin Wu-Shu Club. He is assisted by Tyrone Johnson, another area resident who is proficient in the art.

Lisa Crum contributed much of the information for this article.



Local martial artist "Bam" Johnson is shown with Joe Lewis, a nationally known kick artist, at a recent martial arts event.