

COMPETITOR PROFILE - WILLIE "THE BAM" JOHNSON



By Nancy Musick

Willie "The BAM" Johnson first gained national prominence in 1983, when *Karate Illustrated* recognized him as one of the sport's best competitors. This subsequently led him to being ranked Number 1 in weapons and Number 2 in forms in the Mid-Atlantic Region, Region 10. A lack of financial backing prevented him from competing for national ranking but he placed first at such top national tournaments as the 1983 Empire State Nationals, the 1986 U.S. Open Internationals, the 1987 AKA Grand Nationals, the 1987 Bluegrass Nationals, the 1987 U.S. Capitol Classics, the 1988 Empire State Nationals, the 1988 Inner Harbor Budweiser Nationals, the 1988 F.H. World Kata Championship, as well as being chosen Forms Grand Champion at the Miller Lite Metropolitan Open.

Twenty-two years ago "The BAM" began his training in a karate system called Kang Duk Kwon where he received a 1st degree black belt. At age 16 he was ready to move on and in 1980, at the age of 17, he was taken under the wing of Dennis Brown, NASKA Region 12 representative, promoter of the prestigious U.S. Capitol Classics, and sponsor of the Dennis Brown Competition Team of which he is a member. Today "The BAM" instructs Wu Shu and Kung-Fu on a full-time basis to more than 200 students weekly at one of Dennis Brown's Academies.

He says, "Many of my fondest memories of karate come from my early years as a KI-ranked competitor. These were the days when everyone in the soft-style division was of national caliber. In this one division you would compete against champions such as Dennis Brown, Peter Moralis, Keith Hirabyashi, Cynthia Rothrock, and Roger Tung, to name a few. You had to be really good just to get 4th place. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that today's competitors are no good, just that it seems as though the warrior spirit is gone."

"The BAM" has been able to excel in the fighting ring also where other Wu Shu stylists fear to tread. And, as a result, he has earned a reputation as a strong, determined and skillful fighter.

"I know for a fact that the inner spirit that flows within and that is expressed in my form and weapons is now paying off in my fighting," says "The BAM". "I also feel as though this is going to give me the edge over my competitors. My ambition is to be the first Afro-American to be ranked No. 1 in Chinese forms and weapons."

A new dimension of "The BAM" has been added and that is his desire to keep his sport drug free. "I have experienced a lot in life and I have seen a lot in life", he says. "Thanks to my creator, God, I have founded a drug awareness program called the "Stronger than Drugs Service". What other sport is there that builds a strong foundation for its athletes with discipline, confidence, respect, and humility? I've been working really hard in this area, talking to kids from all walks of life about drugs, trying to help them develop into the beautiful people God intends them to be. I'm willing to travel anywhere, anytime, and talk to anyone for this cause," he says. "But in the meantime, I'll continue to do what I do best, Wu Shu - Kung-Fu, and strive to be No. 1."