

For Kicks *Team USA Competes in Trinidad*

by Tracy Schindel

Karate World Ratings - Team USA, based out of Hagerstown, MD with a branch office in Chambersburg, PA, was recently invited to compete in an International Karate Championship held in Trinidad. Twenty competitors from the team took part in the tournament, bringing home 38 gold medals overall. Team USA is comprised of martial artists of all skill levels, ranging in age from 7 to 39, from throughout the tri-state area. "We had such an impact on people there," says Tracy Schindel, an adult white belt and volunteer with the team. For nearly two hours following the tournament, she says, team members signed autographs and posed for photographs for the Trinidad audience. "We were really heroes for the week. It was such an incredible experience." The following is Schindel's account of this experience.

On June 28th and 29th, Karate World Ratings - "Team USA" competed in an International Karate Championship located in Trinidad. Team USA is coached by three competent and highly experienced martial artists; Wayman Beavers, Kevin Jackson, and Willie "Bam" Johnson. Prior to leaving for the South-

ern Caribbean, the three coaches prepared the team for international competition by training hard and orchestrating a well-rounded team composed of martial artists from a combination of styles and disciplines. The team was cognizant that plenty of focus would be put on the presence of the Americans in the Caribbean competition.

The team arrived on Wednesday and took two days to get prepared for the competition, which began on Friday evening, opening with the black belt divisions. The anticipation to compete was felt by all and the environment challenging to adapt to. The tournament was held in an outside covered arena and temperatures soared to ninety degrees.

The forms division got off to a late start, but Jessie Anderson, Marco Johnson and Willie "Bam" Johnson took early gold medals home. Johnson had not competed in over seven years, but could not refuse the excitement of the international competition. He had not told anyone that he might compete, so when he appeared in his uniform, the team was duly surprised!

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Team USA began a winning streak in the forms division, which carried throughout the tournament. Following the success of the first three gold medalists in forms, other team members rallied to reach the podium. Wayman Beavers and Kevin McMurty received the silver and bronze medals in black belt traditional Japanese forms competition. Eleven-year-old Darryl Alford fought the high humidity and ninety degree heat to take the gold medal in forms for his age group. Rick Barney and Tim Dodge faced stiff competition in the Korean black belt forms division, with Barney taking home the bronze medal in that class.

After the forms competition ended, the weapons divisions began. The team had developed momentum and was steadfast to continue their pursuit in the weapons division as well. A great sense of spirit and national loyalty was developed between the team members and their coaches. As the first weapons competitors began to perform, the chant of "*USA, USA, USA*" was heard throughout the arena. The team had begun the chant in an effort to support the members and to show national loyalty. Again, as they had done in the forms divisions, Jessie Anderson and Marco Johnson took home the gold in weapons. Kevin Jackson

and Tim Dodge also received gold medals in the black belt weapons divisions. Darryl Alford gave it his best effort and returned to the podium this time, as a silver medalist.

Only one mission was left for the evening: team fights. Team USA had two three-man teams, and it seemed as though at times the opposing teams did not want team USA in the fighting competition. The local Trinis, as they sometimes refer to themselves, were on their feet early on in the fights. The Trinis took an early lead in points but Team USA fought back hard to be on top. With one fight left in the match, there was only a one point differential between the two teams. The tension was building for the final match, and spectators had poured onto the floor and were circling the ring. To the amazement of Team USA, the local Trinis began to root for us. Spectators were standing on their feet in support. The fever erupted and catapulted Team USA to win the gold in the three-man team

fighting competition.

Team USA had entered a second three-man team composed of Dodge, Brian Gates, and Garry Holman. Again, to the surprise of the team, Holman appeared with a uniform on and ready to fight. According to Holman, "The international competition and the presence of such strong team unity motivated me to a level to compete. A sense of nationalism and pride in the team's efforts and its coaches bought me back to the competition floor."

On the second day of the competition, new challenges faced team USA. There was a fair deal of controversy over judging in the under belt divisions, and the sweltering heat was hard to adapt to. Team USA put all this aside, and moved forward to dominate day two. All teams marched into the stadium in typical Olympic fashion, as the national anthem was played. Team USA was grateful to have Tari Jo Grubb present to sing the national anthem that day. The sense of pride and national enthusiasm in her voice motivated the team members to a higher level of competition.

Seven-year-old Austin Petrucci led the way in forms and fighting, and marched to the podium to receive gold medals in both events. Austin had been fighting the flu since he arrived in Trinidad, but rose to the occasion and competed on behalf of the team. Ben Schindel was also successful in his forms and fighting divisions and bought home the gold medal in both.

Team USA also has a number of talented female competitors. Angela Ravenscroft won the silver medal in fighting and Courtney Shatzer won a silver in forms and a gold in fighting. A number of other competitors had great success on day two of the event as well. Tracy Schindel, Kerrie Taylor, David Fiegle, and Bruce Shatzer all of took home two gold medals apiece.

Also on the second day of the competition, Brian Gates put on an amazing demonstration for the

competitors and spectators. Two sharpened bicycle spokes were pushed through his forearms by an assistant, while at the same time he proceeded to stand on a pile of broken glass with a child on each shoulder, and then walked across the glass shards. He finished the demonstration by fastening two large buckets of water on the bicycle spokes and again walking on the broken glass. All those present were truly amazed by his ability to focus and endure such a feat.

As the heat elevated and the competition progressed, the team began to realize just how special each competitor was. Friendships were developed at this international event that will last a lifetime. The team needed to stay focused, but that was difficult due to the fact that the locals were swarming us for attention. Team USA had attracted quite a bit of attention from the local people of Trinidad. Individual black belt fighting, grand champions' forms and weapons competitions were yet to be completed. Team USA had built confidence throughout the event and believed they would be successful in the remaining divisions.

Again, excellence was obtained by the efforts of Wayman Beavers, Kevin Jackson, Marco Johnson, Brian Gates and Tim Dodge, all of whom took gold medals in their respective weight classes. The tournament promoter made some changes and decided to run the grand championships for forms and weapons before the grand for fighting, which caused some confusion. Jessie Anderson and

Marco Johnson performed to the best of their ability one more time, with Anderson bringing home the grand championship cup in forms. There was a narrow margin of error in the grand championship weapons class for the person that would win it all. Kevin Jackson, from Team USA, rose to the occasion and bought home the weapons grand championship award. According to Jackson,

"Tradition and focus is what allowed me to win the weapons

grand championship today."

At times in the competition, it was difficult to rejoice over the many successes of Team USA, as the number of competition delays put stress on the competitors. Grand champion fighting and special team fights were the last divisions to be run. The fighting brackets were reconfigured several times and Team USA was more anxious than ever to take the third and final grand champion cup. Several fights into the bracket the team realized the challenge would be more difficult than originally anticipated by the team members. Team USA had come this far with such great success and was determined not to come up short at this last and very important event. Willie "Bam" Johnson stepped up and gave Kevin Jackson some last second pointers to overcome the final competitor for the win. Amazingly again, the stadium spectators erupted in support of the win by Team USA.

The last and final challenge was team fights, and Team USA was running out of steam. They had fought the heat and humidity and the typical tournament confusion that sometimes occurs and were now fatigued. The coaches gave the members the option to go home and not fight the final fights. The team responded with an absolute, "No way, coach."

Team USA was not stated as the favorite in the five-man team, but continued to show its depth and diversity by coming through one last time with yet another gold performance. Team members Tim Dodge, Kevin Jackson, Wayman Beavers, Marco Johnson, Garry Holman, Brian Gates and Kevin McMurry pulled off the final team success. The team had compiled total medal counts in the two days of competition of thirty-eight gold, two silver and one bronze.

As the team started to pack their bags and leave the stadium, it soon found out their day was far from over. In just two short days, Team USA had attracted a great deal of attention. The team members posed for several hun-

dred pictures, while sometimes wondering just why we were being asked to do so. At times, large groups of children formed circles around the team, asking for autographs from its members. Never had we been greeted with such great warmth! Collecting addresses proved to be a difficult task, and of course everyone wanted pictures with the team members, as well as T-shirts and autographs sent to them. Two hours later, to the disappointment of the locals, Team USA had to leave for its next destination. With promises to return, the local Trinis reluctantly allowed us to leave. In one last gesture of support, the locals swarmed around the bus and attempted to get one last picture or autograph. The remainder of the trip, the team found itself relaxing on the beach and having fun as a group. The mission of the team had been accomplished, and the team had achieved levels of success far beyond their expectations. Additionally, bonds were formed among members that will surely last for many years. The medals were a great accomplishment for Team USA but the greatest satisfaction came from touching the lives of so many people.

One thing the team is sure of, the trip will long be remembered in our minds and in the minds of those we came in contact with.

For more information about Karate World Ratings - Team USA, call Garry Holman at 301-766-0830 or Tracy Schindel at 301-739-7200. Visit www.kwrating.com. Karate World Ratings, 16401 National Pike, Hagerstown, MD 21140; Chambersburg Branch: P.O. Box 349, Chambersburg, PA 17202.

Team USA gold medalists will be competing in the Pennsylvania State Championships at The Karate World Hall of Fame, 285 East Queen Street in Chambersburg, PA on July 19 at 6 p.m. and July 20 at 9 a.m. General admission is \$5. For more information, call 717-264-0410 or 301-766-0830.