

2011 TKFI International Championship & Gasshuku Huge Success

Kicking off this year's championship and summer gasshuku, on August 12, were the informative and fun clinics taught by master Del Saito (Shito-ryu Seisan), master Tomohiro Arashiro (Ryuei ryu Kobudo, Katin no Kon) and Tony Mendonca Shihan (TKFI competition rules). Taking part were karate students from across the country, Catalonia, El Salvador and Japan.

The evening's Welcome Kick-Off Party was held at the Grants Pass Elk's Lodge with over a hundred guests attending. The delicious meal was prepared by Greg Bock and crew. Entertainment was provided by John and Anna Stevenson, also known as Side by Side. With John on guitar and Anna on the keyboard; mix in rich vocal harmony and keyboard sequencing, everyone had a great time listening and dancing. Jim Hamilton sensei was the hit of the night with his train whistle blowing.

The next two days were filled with competition at the Grants Pass Heater Newman gymnasium. Saturday's events included individual and team kata, and kobudo events. Kumite events were held on Sunday.

12 clubs and organizations took part in one of the most rewarding championships ever. Athletes ranging from 5 to 68 years of age competed for custom medals, beautiful trophies and glass sculptures made by the Glass Forge. Competition was fierce and many of the kata performances were just enjoyable to watch. Japan's Fumiya Yamazaki, Mizuki Takeda and Sara Hayashi's katas were flawless and a treat for everyone to watch. U.S. athletes Forence Bigsby, Nico Yargas, Quintyn Fazio and Renzo Marchini also looked very sharp in their performances as did Catalonia's Joan Gombau and El Salvador's Gio 'Wakate' Granados.

Some of the more exciting kumite competition came in the Junior team events. The crowd came alive during the match between the Grants Pass MATC team and Virginia's Ichiban team. MATC's Renzo Marchini and Ichiban's Karl Mellen were the lead off fighters. The beginning exchanges were pretty much a draw, but then Karl suddenly executed a beautiful sweep followed by a thrust for a three-point score that was enough to keep Renzo in check for the remainder of the bout. The next match was between Ichiban's Garrett Hall and MATC's Emmett Burstein. It was back and forth for awhile, then Emmett began to chip away and drew the win with a score of 18 to 12. The final and deciding match was between Connor McGlothlin and Nico Yargas. The more experienced Nico cleverly kept Connor away then capitalized on well placed hook kicks to help his team win by a 7 to 1 score. A well deserved applause for both teams echoed throughout the gymnasium.

Each tournament day concluded with a dinner party at the Grants Pass High School Commons, celebrated by over 150 attendees. Saturday evening's dinner was prepared by Lisa Fisher and staff and Sunday's Hawaiian cuisine was offered by the Orchid Grill. The delicious cakes at each gathering was arranged by Kimberly Marquez. Glenn Uemura and Bobby Costello, both from Hawaii, provided great Hawaiian music. A surprise hula number by Japan's Kikuyo Koike and Ida Manuel had many joining in on the beautiful undulating hips and delicate gestures of the arms and hands.

Of course, Soke's gatherings is not complete without karaoke, and thats when the real fun began. It's not about the quality of the singing, but about sharing in the laughter and fun with friends and family. Pat Haley sensei from Chico entertained everyone with his singing talents as did Margaret Sundin of Grants Pass, who has a great singing voice. The mixed bag of songs flowed through the nearby forest, either providing horrifically off-keyed renditions or an occasional unsuspected talent that even the racoons enjoyed. Many joined in with dancing and provided background support.

Over 60 TKFI family members and friends packed the blue 'Miss Grants Pass' jetboat early Monday morning, for a 3-hour, 36-mile round trip through Hellgate Canyon on the beautiful Rogue River. The interpreted tour provided views of gorgeous homes and wildlife, including bald eagles, ospreys, and deer. After reaching Hellgate Canyon and the beginning of the Rogue's restricted section, the return ride stopped at the OK Corral, a 12,000 sq. foot facility with carved log tables and chairs, for an all-you-can-eat country lunch which included delicious tossed green salad with homemade Honey-Mustard Dressing, BBQ Chicken, Potato Salad, homemade Cornbread and Biscuits and a tasty Blackberry Cobbler. To everyone's surprise Gio and Fumiya left bowls of chicken untouched, which under normal settings, would have been picked clean to the bones. Most walked, but a few opted for the wagon ride down to the river's edge. Soke's rock-breaking techniques were tried by a few brave souls and quite successful at that.

As soon as everyone reboarded, the boat charged back toward Grants Pass. The pilot, operating the hydro-jet engines which can glide just inches above the water's surface, warned those with cameras and cell phones to place them in a dry place, so the real fun could begin. Exhilarating 360° spins, quick stops and assistance from another boat, drenched Jim Hamilton, Gio Granados, Yoshifumi Iwama, Karl Mellen, Urgell Navines and Dwight Grover. Everyone was wet and the entire group had a great time and experienced a sense of togetherness since they were "all in the same boat".

Over 50 members took part in this year's gasshuku (training camp or more literally, "staying together"). Branch instructors are asked to invite their advanced students and those that have demonstrated great leadership to take part in this annual training camp. It is also an opportunity for participants to take their dan grading examination. The gasshuku is Soke's gift to all his loyal supporters and the training sessions are free, including breakfast and lunch.

The intense training and togetherness began on Tuesday morning at the honbu dojo. Eight to nine students were first placed in one of the six teams led by either one of the Shihan kai members or a designee. A brisk run followed by warm-ups and kihon training energized everyone and brought out the best in each team member. The katas chosen for this year's session were Rohai and Paiku and the review of Saitoshi Shodan, Nidan and Sandan. With the help of each committed member, teams were able to perform these katas without fear or reservations.

Gasshuku training strengthens relationships and requirements for each team member included singing songs and presenting a skit at the celebration dinner. This year's songs included 'Segadors' from Catalonia, 'America the Beautiful', 'Sukiyaki' from Japan and Hawaiian favorite, 'O Ka Lei O'.

Gasshuku training also includes time for discussions and this year had plenty of them. Saito Soke discussed at length the importance of karate-do training without confusing it with competition training. He also discussed the relevance of karate-do in today's society with consideration of each person's character and positive actions. Jim Hamilton sensei also talked about the spiral effects of drug users and why it is important to keep a good circle of friends.

The Shihan Kai members tested and unanimously granted Urgell Navines Ferrer to Sandan rank, Arnau Navines Ferrer to Sandan rank, Anne McGuire to Sandan rank, Kim Dyer to Shodan rank, and Nico Yargas, to Shodan rank. Kyu ranks were also included and Tracie Ballensky was upgraded to 6th Kyu and TJ Pelletier to 1st Kyu.

Each session included the more advanced theories and applications of the katas with regards to stance, hip usage, rhythm, breathing and bunkai/oyo.

The final evening's dinner provided enough energy for each team to present their cleverly orchestrated skit and the make-up and props had the neighbors wondering where the roars of laughter came from. Sam Manuel Sensei led his team in a Chuuk Island War Dance. Tokia (stick dance) was believed to be one of the most popular performative arts in Chuuk even before their islands were discovered by the Europeans. This dance was to energize the warriors' spirit before battle. Aside from a few battle scars on the fingers, the team's performance was excellent. Sensei Lisa Codella mimicked Soke with mustache and all and after conducting a class, told everyone that she was perfect. She then approached Soke Saito and praised him that he was close to perfect. She then sat next to him, looked at him for awhile, and then asked him how it felt to be sitting next to perfect. Stomachs were hurting for a long time.

Another favorite was Team F's presentation of bunkai-oyo led by Tony Mendonca Shihan. After the team lined up, they began to show their intricate marching routines similar to a well-tuned drill team. The traditional bow followed and members began demonstrating effective maneuvers against various attacks including the deadly 1 finger poke. Urgell wasn't happy with her male counterpart's ego-driven methods, so challenged them to attack her. Wanting her all to herself, Tony pushes everyone to the side to show them his prowess. Urgell quickly deploys her hypnotic technique and has Tony squaring off with the rest of his team to do all her dirty work. Tony tries to ward off her trance but to no avail. They all attack at once only to find Urgell's powerful vibration pass through Tony's arms which then knocks everyone down. They all get up moving backwards while clicking their fingers with dipped shoulders, as if you were watching an episode of Happy Days. A well deserved applause followed for this entertaining presentation.

Before the closing of the gasshuku, participants were asked to come forward to talk about the kinship and experience they received from the past few days of competition and training. Spectators were amazed at how many attendees came forward to share their thoughts. The effort and courage for many were admirable. Their appreciation for our special art, their senseis and the entire TKFI family were heartfelt and sincere.

As everyone said their farewells, they thanked each other for their help and support. Another very successful TKFI gasshuku where everyone can take this wonderful experience back to their dojos and share it with their dojo mates. It will remind us that collectively as a family, we can all be winners in life no matter how difficult the challenges. This is true karate-do.

A big thank you to all the businesses that supported this event, including Pebble Beach (Monterey) and Turtle Bay (Hawaii) Golf Resorts, ASE Martial Arts Supplies (California), Vison USA (California), Harrington Publishing (Hawaii) and International Color Imaging (Hawaii). Many thanks to Jim and Misty Hamilton, Robert and Jaine Burstein and Dave and Carol Latham for opening their homes to host our athletes and officials. A big thank you to Steve Pechon and the Glass Forge for teaching our Spanish team how to forge their colorful paperweights.