

National Open Squad Training and Selections – 30-31 May 2009

What a weekend the end of May proved to be; the hottest weekend of the year so far, the final of Britain's Got Talent watched by record audiences, the climax to the football season with the FA Cup final featuring Everton v Chelsea and first round of selections for the WKF Junior World Championships being hosted in Morocco in November.

Due to the anticipated number of athletes attending and the venue hall allocation at Stourbridge's Crystal Leisure Centre, the National Coach, Wayne Otto OBE, decided to split the Kata and Kumite disciplines over two days with the Kata open squad training and selections taking place on the Saturday and the Kumite open squad training and selections following on the Sunday. The foresight proved justified as National Kata Coach, Jonathan Mottram, had 40 athletes attending the first days training and a further 85 attending the on the second day under the guidance of Wayne and Assistant Coach, Ian Cole.

Kata training started in earnest at 11:00am with the athletes split into two groups, those intending to select and those just training. Both groups worked hard on a number of different Katas and combinations under Jonathan's watchful eye. With 30 minutes remaining of the two hour training session, the selecting athletes were allowed a break whilst the remaining athletes training were put through their paces. After the session had completed, many stayed to watch the selections take place. There are four Kata categories for the World Championships, Male and Female, Cadet and Junior, and the selection session started with the athletes for one specific category lined up with each performing their initial opening WKF compulsory Kata. The next group of athletes were then called to perform their Katas followed by the remaining groups. The process was then repeated with each group required to perform their second choice WKF compulsory Katas. The groups were then split further with 2-3 from each group performing their Katas once again simultaneously which was repeated a number of times. The Katas were then broken down into combinations for the athletes to perform. Full Katas on the mat followed with some initial work going into team combinations too. The athletes then had to undergo their fitness tests performing a number of exercises within a specified time limit.

The session was gruelling on the athletes but gave Jonathan a good insight into each athlete's abilities, performance and fitness levels. Jonathan praised all the athletes for their efforts during the day and all were invited back to attend the next selection session pencilled in for the 4th or 5th July (full details to be confirmed and published shortly).

Jonathan Mottram commented

"Squad training and selections both went very well on Saturday. There was a lot of support from all different styles, the training session went very good and everyone worked hard. The attendance was high so I got to see a lot of England's best kata athletes in one training session. Everyone that trained is at different levels but all a high level. Everyone seemed to enjoy the training, and had fun which is the main element. The selections went very smoothly and the standard in my opinion is the highest it has ever been for under 18's in England. They all trained and performed to their full potential so what more could I ask for? They showed good attitude and a lot of confidence. It's great to see that England are going to have a full kata squad for the first time in many years and I'm pleased with everyone's hard work. Every amazing journey begins with one single step and on Saturday I saw a lot of great karate-ka and England's future."

The Kumite session got underway at shortly after 11:30 in the Sunday with a large athlete base training. The initial warm-up session was taken by European Silver medallist, Natalie Williams, after being congratulated on her recent success at the Senior European Championships held in Croatia earlier in the month. The coaches, Wayne and Ian, then drilled the athletes in Kumite techniques with the athletes

pairing themselves to practice the techniques. The two-hour session soon finished with many athletes buzzing and a few nervous of the selections about to commence.

The selections were split into two areas, Male and Female. Ian and Natalie oversaw the female fighters with Wayne presiding over the male fighters. A number of referees had attending this session allowing each mat to have three flag judges and one referee all under the guidance of Vince Parker. The athletes contesting the individual categories were called into action commencing with the Cadet 14-15 year olds.

For many of the young fighters this was their first selection experience and is something totally different from competition experiences as they fight in silent surroundings unaided by the normal coach's. A few nerves at the start but they soon got into their stride. Many of the Cadets who attended the Junior European Championships in Paris earlier this year had moved up into the Junior categories so there were many spaces up for grabs for the young athletes hoping to gain their England Squad badge.

The Junior 16-17year olds followed the Cadets and this section looked to be hotly contested as some of the previous Cadet squad members and medal winners from Paris fought to regain their places on the squad as did the current Junior Squad members and the other athletes fighting for their first badge.

The Under 21 year olds completed the initial selection fights with some good hard scraps showing the Juniors what they have to look forward to when they jump sections too.

There were many close fights on the day with some repeating the match against the same opponent as the coach's matched up the fighters and made notes of the wins, draws and scores.

Wayne Otto OBE commented

"I thought the selections last Saturday and Sunday was well attended and on a whole I think the whole event was a success. A few of the athletes during their selection fights showed great promise and potential, however I think it is important for all the athletes both Kata and Kumite to remember that one good selection does not mean an automatic placing at the World championships in Morocco. What I and my coaching staff want to see is commitment to training and the selection criteria, and consistency in their performance. Those who did well at the last selection on Saturday and Sunday need to solidify their position over the next up and coming squad training and selection dates, and those that did not perform so well need to impress on me and the other coaches as to why they should be included in the final closed selection date in July. In the end I think all athletes need to bring their A Game to the these selections and on a whole I think most did last weekend. Well Done and Good Luck."

The referees did a fantastic job aiding these selections making the job of the coach's much easier and must be congratulated on their commitment. The coach's worked hard all day, as did the Physio Dr Surdhur Mohinder who is ever present.

The session ended around 5pm with Wayne Otto OBE reiterating the need for every athlete to attend the Regional Satellite Kumite classes, complete their fitness tests and continue to compete in competition to gain valuable experience to enable them to compete at the highest levels. Subject to confirmation, the next Kumite selection session will be on 28th June and full details will be available shortly.