

Bruce Lee vs. The Kiss Army

Tae Kwon Do tournament teaches ignorant

BY PATRICK BLACKIE

I would have considered myself to be somewhat ignorant of the various martial arts — Tae Kwon do, Jiu-Jiutsu, Karate, Kung-Fu, it was all the same to me.

How I was wrong.

This past weekend, the Tower at St. Mary's held host to an 'international' Tae Kwon Do tournament, organized by local Tae Kwon Do leader Grandmaster Carabin. The tournament, featuring hundreds of competitors, offered competition classes for basically anyone over the age of six or seven years-old. There were form competitions, weapons and board breaking demonstrations, and of course, sparring.

Tae Kwon Do is more like a sport than a martial "Art." Competitors must wear protective gear, including chest and padding, to guard from serious injury. The goal of a Tae Kwon Do fight is to score the most points in a two-minute span, and points are awarded through kicks and punches on the target area of the chest pads, or through kicks to the head. All other forms of combat (ie: trips, throws, low kicks, etc.) result in a disqualification.

Despite the precautions, however, it is still very possible to be seriously injured in a match. Upon arriving at the tournament, I noticed a young boy who was breathing out of a respirator with the aid of an EMS attendant. The boy had received a kick to the throat, obstructing his breathing for a few minutes. Although there were no severe injuries, it shows the potential for injury in Tae Kwon Do.

The idea of scoring points in a set amount of time differs from the concept behind most martial arts. Martial arts teach self-defense, discipline, respect and grace, and is not treated as a sport by most followers. Although it requires discipline to achieve any success at this form of Tae Kwon Do, and it is an effective means of self defense, it lacks the fine tuning, patience and mental dedication that different schools (ie: Kung-Fu, Jiu-Jiutsu) concentrate on.

I spent the first third of the tournament sitting in the stands, watching the dozens of young children, some of which could hardly climb the stairs down to the floor, suiting up and fighting. Now as you can imagine, children this young couldn't punch or kick, but they were trying.

One thing that was blatant about the Tae Kwon Do style was the kick. The higher of the belts were able to lift their feet level to their opponents head and strike down with incredible speed. They may not have the discipline, but those were some impressive kicks.

In observing the board breaking demonstration, I noticed something interesting. The 'boards' used were flimsy at best, and could be broken fairly easily. But the breaking of the wood was not where the interest and skill was. Young children were flying through the air,



Kung-Fu student Willie Geldart (left) prepares to place his foot on the side of his opponents head with extreme force.

photo by Patrick Blackie

kicking and swatting with excellent precision, demonstrating more strength and acrobatics than an ability to break wood with limbs.

I was suprised to see a second-degree Black Belt Tae Kwon Do student stretching with a somewhat nervous expression. When I asked him how he prepared for a match, he told me that he was nervous, whereas this was his first fight, and that he was just trying to relax. I don't know for sure if he lost, but I do know for sure that lack of confidence in a fight smells like stank on a hooker.

The tournament was a non-stop event, with numerous matches and demonstrations occuring simultaneously, so only certain aspects of the event were focussed on.

One of the things I found interesting was the presence of competitors from different schools, specifically Kung-Fu. There were three members of the Hung Gar Kung-Fu school Halifax that stood out in particular. They were three out of four that represented their school, and they each came away with first place honours in different categories.

Jason Hum, a yellow belt, took gold in the form competition with a superb recitation of the Tiger Style, as well as silver for sparring.

Nathan Stever took gold in the green belt division, tearing through his opponents with ease. He also recieved silver in the forms category for green belts.

Willie Geldart showing obvious skill and grace in the weapons demonstration, walking away with the gold. He also recieved bronze in his category for sparring.

The fourth competitor from the Hung Gar school was not recognized for his display in the forms competition because his style was "too foreign" to the judges.

Looking at the confidence and control of the Kung-Fu students, it reminded me of the extensive training they receive, and the time and energy spent studying these forms of self-defense, and looking at a lot of the Tae Kwon Do students, I thought of the cool kicks they did: It was an interesting tournament, and Tae Kwon Do is a respectable sport, but I'll never refer to it as a martial art again.

(With files from Matt Strickland)



photo by Patrick Blackie

Competitors pose dramatically after their part in the weapons demonstration.



photo by Patrick Blackie

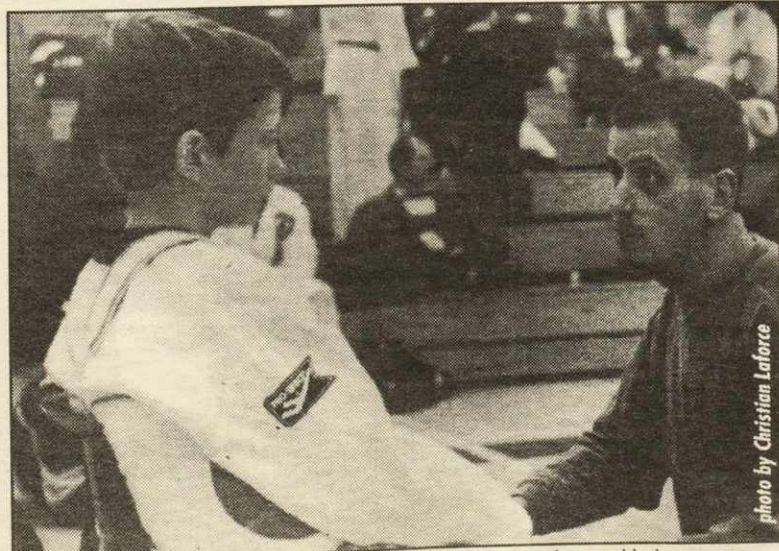


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Young Tae Kwon Do student receives some guidance prior to punching and kicking another.

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