



AAU TAEKWONDO

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Our last correspondence ended with a brief introduction into what has become the ‘Olympic Style’ aspect of the AAU Taekwondo Program. In it, credit was given to individuals such as Jean Lopez and George Weissfisch, who were among the first recognizable ‘name’ players to contribute their experience and reputation in the Olympic Sparring field to what was then a ‘fledging start-up’ organization. As promised, what follows is a look at what has become of that work.

THE ‘OLYMPIC’ GAME

As with anything truly worthwhile, lots of patience and nurturing went into developing what has become one of the best Olympic-style Taekwondo programs around today. In those early years, there were not a lot of ‘elite’ Olympic-style athletes willing to give the AAU a shot. There were a small handful of experienced people willing to look beyond the initial offerings and see ‘what could be’. These individuals helped shape who we are today. Our early National Teams traveled to small events in places like Puerto Rico and Aruba gaining invaluable experience and ‘just a little’ bit of recognition.

Today’s AAU Taekwondo ranks include the names of those considered to be the best in their fields—whether athlete or coach. Names like Lopez, Poos, Kunkel, Remarck, Tubbs, Geautreux, Martinez, and Latchinian from the coaching side. And among the athletes? How about Hasnain, Saltamachia, Morrow, Mallard, Cravens, Powers, Eubanks, James, Neville, Gray, Keiser, Yim, Lee, Tubbs, Pelham, Johnson, Stone, Perieda, Top, and Jennings? And these lists are drawn from just the past two years and certainly are not meant to be all-inclusive. But they are representative!

When AAU Taekwondo decided to make the commitment to Olympic Sparring, we knew that to have a valid Program we had to have great fighters and great matches. And to draw great fighters and matches we had to have great officials. Officials who had no vested interest. Officials willing to make the sacrifices necessary to insure that every athlete had a great and fair competitive experience. And above all, officials who knew the rules AND their international interpretation, as well as the skill necessary to demonstrate that knowledge. For help and guidance in this area we turned to the best. Special thanks (and much credit) must go out to Masters Chuong Pham and Steven Dring.

The AAU Taekwondo Program had already developed a working Official’s Certification Program. Approximately twenty or so of our best official’s would go into the field and train the main body of our corps through 4-6 hour seminars. These seminars would provide our volunteer officials with the knowledge of current rules of competition for all three venues (Forms, Point Sparring, and Olympic Sparring) and do so at a minimal cost. Upgrades within the Program would

be accomplished based on performance alone—not tied in to the number of clinics attended nor personal relationships. And it was working great. But then we asked ourselves “who’s teaching the teachers?”

This group of twenty-something Clinic Administrators were chosen from among our best officials. They knew the rules better than anyone. And they could effectively demonstrate that knowledge where it counted most—on the floor at major events. But after several years of this, teaching and working, teaching and working, what were we doing to help make **them** better? What could we do to provide them-the best- even a deeper understanding of the game and greater proficiency on the floor. And so was born the Clinic Administrators Clinic. Not a 4-6 hour training seminar but a full three-day, highly intensive session—which they would repeat every year! And for the instructors of this session we decided to go outside (or at least what was then outside) the Program.

Steven Dring had already distinguished himself as one of the best officials in the country when he was chosen to officiate at the Olympic Games in Athens. Master Pham I personally met on one of our earliest team trips to Aruba. I did not know him at the time but only had to watch him work that one event to know he was among the best in the world—not just in his knowledge but even more in his demeanor--the manner in which he efficiently and effectively managed, not just the referee corps on that day, but the coaches and athletes as well. I knew immediately that we just had to have him. What was surprising then was that both of these gentlemen were not only willing but eager to help the AAU Taekwondo in its official’s training. And both have done just that ever since.

Recruiting the best educators in the field, development of our three-day Clinic Administrators session, the constant fine tuning of our Officials and Coaches Certification Program, and making it all available at a fair and reasonable price have all contributing to the overwhelming success of our Program. Fair and consistent officiating has brought the best coaches this country has to offer. And with them, the best competitors. At the apex of this work stands the National AAU Junior and Senior Teams who have enjoyed much success on the European “A” rated tournament circuit with much more to come.

Not resting on these laurels, the AAU Taekwondo Program is in the process of developing its own coaches EDUCATION Program. It is our sincerest hope that by providing our 1,000+ certified coaches with the tools necessary to raise their talents to the next level we will in turn raise the level of all participating athletes and, in doing so, insure our talent pool for many years to come.

In our next communication, Finances and Partnerships. Till then, have a GREAT Holiday Season!

Respectfully,
Michael D. Friello
National Sport Chair
AAU Taekwondo