

The JKS World Championships 2016 - A Bird's Eye View

By Neil Bukavs JKS England

Just as always happens, even the most enjoyable memories begin to fade and just as I write this, it may well be the case for the most recent JKS World Championships (8th-10th September). These were hosted by JKS Scotland in Glasgow and followed another fantastic year for British sport, especially Team GB and Northern Ireland at the Rio Olympics/Paralympics. A high which most definitely continued into the karate world with the news released a short while ago about its inclusion in the next Olympics, Tokyo 2020. I'm sure that all would agree there couldn't be a better place to realise its introduction.

I cannot comment for all involved but only reflect on my personal experiences of the event and in doing so in its entirety, I hope to give a little bit of an insight into what happens and also appreciate the importance of all of those in attendance.

Having never been to an international karate tournament, this was certainly a special time to start. Held at the Emirates Arena and in The Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome, the venue very much befitted the occasion, a site which would go on to host the Davis Cup just a week later, although I won't go as far as mentioning the result.

A relatively short trip for the majority of JKS England team members, the event attracts participants from all across the globe with much more convoluted travel arrangements. I left early on Thursday morning by train and was fortunate enough to arrive in Glasgow just about on time. Setting off with two others we had very different roles in the weekend ahead; I could rest easy and enjoy everything the spectacle had to offer but my compatriots were hard at work, studying, discussing and contemplating what was to come. They were to play a crucial part of the delivery of the Championships as part of the Referees/Judges team. This meant first refreshing their knowledge and application of the rules, ahead of the examinations which were to be held on the Thursday evening. Rulebooks out for some of the trip and then onto reviewing the designated koten (non-syllabus) kata meant a morning of concentration which only wavered when a power nap was called for!

The journey started off very dry and bright, although it seemed that the border to Scotland had a different idea for the weather. At least our train was moving north however, as at one stage it was the only one doing so on the East Coast Mainline.

Into Edinburgh, a pasty and straightforward change had us on our way west to Glasgow, with the

weather brightening up and some nice views to enjoy; we started relaxing ahead of the activities to follow.

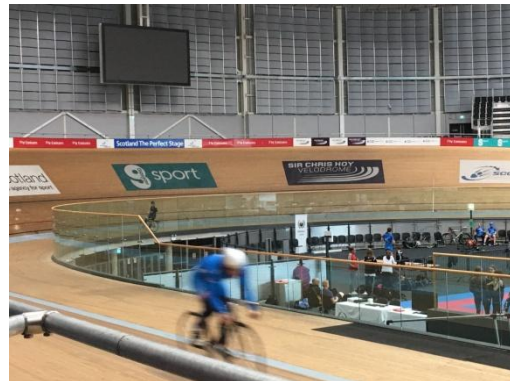


At the hotel, it was a case of checking in and grabbing an iron to address the travel weary gis, which incidentally suffered a lot more than their owners. Onwards again and after only a few minutes in a taxi, we approached the Emirates Arena. We first collected the necessary

wristbands and information packs from the organisers before chatting to others arriving at the same time. Very few were without huge smiles and if this was the case, I'm sure it was just nerves showing through in anticipation of the weekend.

With various people arriving throughout the evening, it was good to see all of the competitors in matching attire with their team's national overgi or tracksuit. The officials also looked...well...official. A professional and friendly start to what would be an exciting event. The organisers worked hard to ensure everyone had what they needed in good time so there was one less thing to think about.

Deciding with a few others to take a look around the venue, we found ourselves in the velodrome seating area, overlooking the mats which had been laid in the middle of the arena. Being distracted only for a second by the cyclists flying round the top of the track and sometimes only a matter of inches from our heads, it was easy to forget they were there, only to have the same thing happen just seconds later.



This Thursday night cycling session also acted as a reminder of how champions are made; in the background with an uncompromised hunger to be the best they can be. After all, cycling is something which has further gripped the nation in recent years and pinching an ounce of their enthusiasm and desire would be nothing but beneficial. Named after the most successful British Olympian of all time Sir Chris Hoy, the velodrome also gave some of us a chance to see just how intimidating the banking of the track was, something which isn't quite conveyed over a television screen.

A moment's reflection also allowed us to consider the different feelings that the competitors would have and although anxious for success for JKS England and Wales the pressure as a spectator was nothing to compare. With the competitors all keen to do justice to their training it would make for some thrilling encounters.

At this point the officiating team were meeting with Kagawa Shihan and some of the JKS seniors from the headquarters in Japan. Comments made were diligently understood and relayed to the teams. Bringing everyone back together in the middle of the arena, the seminar scheduled next would provide a great way of establishing an intimate feel for what is such a large event.

An introduction and gracious reception by Paul Giannandrea Sensei-Head of JKS Scotland took place before it was over to Kagawa Shihan. Some people competing and some injured looked on as the seminar began, taking a sensible option or heeding coaches' advice to relax and collect their thoughts ahead of the opening day's competition.

The seminar was impressively attended with well over two hundred karateka keen to buffer their training with yet more world class instruction. Kagawa Shihan moved with a fluidity that all karate-ka dream of, beginning with some basic techniques, timing and stance work. Following on from this, Kagawa Shihan delivered the next part of the seminar on kata, hoping to standardise and cement current teaching practice for the whole of the JKS. Kagawa Shihan went through all of the Heian and

Junro katas making comments on important instruction points relevant to all. The students all tried to emulate the precision and technique which Kagawa Shihan is revered for with the added complication of trying not to step on anyone's toes or turn into a neighbour's oncoming punch!

After a short break, Yamaguchi Sensei presented some of the koten Kata (Kakuyoku Shodan, Nidan and Sandan). These kata, which are often less practiced, needed a lot of concentration (and sometimes someone next to you who knew them) to perform. Yamaguchi Sensei was aided by Matsue Sensei and showed the application of the movements in order to help the students understand and remember what they had been learning. These excellent demonstrations also emphasized the importance of comprehension, not just copying the techniques but instead deepening the level of understanding on how to deliver them.

Lastly, the seminar drew to a close with some kumite partner work overseen by Kanayama Sensei, who highlighted the importance of maintaining a correct front foot position when moving. Kanayama Sensei also encouraged direct movement into a completed stance as students tired legs struggled to combine these deep and correct postures with fast movement to avoid being hit by their partner. After bowing, a huge round of applause was then due as the students caught their breath from this inspiring session.

Following the seminar, many people would disappear to have an evening socialising or maybe choose an early night, but JKS England and Wales had much more work to do at the office. A large contingent was involved in all aspects of the assessments taking place after the seminar, either attempting a dan grading, instructor qualification or completing a judging/refereeing exam.

For those grading, the watchful eyes of Kagawa Shihan awaited. One by one they presented their kata of choice, followed by an appropriate selection from the on looking table. This made for a great display of higher grade kata with the majority of nerves emanating from the audience of family and friends and not those applicants whose minds were firmly fixed on the job in hand.



Instructors also had to present kata to Kagawa Shihan with queries on technique or application being made. This gave them an opportunity to illustrate to Kagawa and Norman Robinson Shihan the karate principles and teaching points relevant to the application(s) being demonstrated. Matsue Sensei was utilised as a willing recipient...mostly, as some techniques are much more tolerable than a well delivered strike to the throat!

After kata, kumite remained and towards the end this took place with the judges and referees being

concurrently assessed, meanwhile those grading were determined to display their abilities. A few exhilarating bouts concluded the gradings as it was obvious everyone had given all they could. The judges and referees also executed their decisions with speed and



confidence, being questioned only occasionally by Yamaguchi and Kanayama Sensei to reaffirm their choices.

Finishing late, the evening ended with a great deal of success for JKS England and Wales across all of the assessments, highlighting what happens beyond the normal training regime in the dojo which entails teacher and student only. It was great to see the wider potential for development and need to expand karate knowledge to help facilitate the impressive championships which lay ahead.

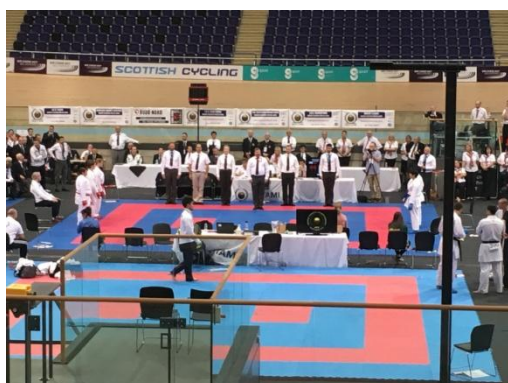


Back to the hotel for some food and a pint, bed called and it was the end to a great first day.

Saturday morning began as the tournament arena slowly but steadily filled with competitors ahead of the days team events. Team kata was presented and it was fair to say that the representatives from Japan attracted a great deal of attention when performing. More importantly and much closer to home, a fantastic start was also made by JKS England who, with a gritty determination went about their business. Some

excellent performances allowed the team to shine and the accomplishments showed no sign of abating as success quickly became infectious!

The quality of coaching must also be commended as there didn't ever appear to be a lack of support on the mats. The family and friends of JKS England and Wales members also tried to raise their voices and make that little extra impact by backing their competitors. Grouped together, a contingent of interested karateka and relatives shared positive thoughts and sometimes a necessary explanation of what had transpired as it was often tricky to make sense of what had happened below. The setup of the arena gave the gladiatorial feel of an amphitheatre, an apt sensation for a martial arts competition as the track divided the spectators from the competitors.



A little later in the day the team kumite events started. There was certainly no let up and JKS England built on its earlier triumphs. The day would end with the senior male and female team kumite finals, with special interest for JKS England contesting the female final. A valiant effort from the team (pictured) saw them take silver with JKS England Team Captain Ashley Scott-Heald running Okamoto Sensei close in their match, one arguably which should have ended with an England victory.

After the morning's pulsating and non-stop action, an early afternoon finish allowed everyone the chance to explore what Glasgow had to offer or to team up to make final preparations for the final day.

A well-earned meal and a few drinks was the obvious choice for the evening and I'm sure a lot of people all over the city were recounting the impressive display and closely fought events which saw

plenty of JKS England team members crowned World Champions. I believe that most if not all JKS England competitors achieved a medal (some a number of medals) on day one.

Day two started with the obligatory flag placement in the stands which meant that those supporting could do so in unity. This approach worked well and the JKS England supporters t-shirts also meant that people looked the part as they went about bodyguarding duty. Those who had made the journey couldn't help but continue vitalised by the impressive karate on offer from JKS England and Wales.



Day two began with an immediate intensity. Kotei kata was a very visible part of the early morning and gave exposure to a lesser known set of katas which do not permeate the JKS grading syllabus. Employing an expanded range of techniques, these kata sometimes offer a more relaxed approach but still require the utmost co-ordination, speed and power to deliver.

Okamoto Sensei, who recently visited the UK also performed her trademark kata Sochin (I could say this about most of her katas) on the way to gold, and with this near faultless performance continued to exemplify the quality of karate being developed and practiced at the headquarters in Japan. Arimoto Sensei who is also due to teach on the Autumn Seminar followed his compatriot to victory and showed that they were a cut above the rest of the field. Pleasing to watch and always humble the Japanese team epitomised the way karate should be and the resultant applause recognised this.

Wheelchair kata also featured which I am sure was a first for many, myself included. Adapting the technique and movements, the competitors exhibited the same attributes being assessed in the able-bodied competitors. With tailored kata, the JKS really does promote an attitude of karate for all, removing all limitations and enabling people to benefit from karate as a whole, through recognition of the additional need for the forms of disability kata and kumite.



As the morning progressed, spectating became much more complex and as the kumite followed once again, it became difficult to know just when to nip to the toilet or grab a bite to eat. This was to avoid missing any of the frequent accomplishments being achieved. JKS England had a large amount of entries across all age ranges which meant that someone was never far from the mat, or a medal ceremony! At one stage, almost all of the 8 matted areas had a JKS England elite squad member fighting, a widescreen cinematic experience, truly worthy of the popcorn available just outside the arena doors. Trying to follow everything as a spectator needed an acuity which left the people watching feeling like they had exercised all weekend too. The quality on offer was certainly not short lived not relenting for the rest of the competition, as once again the podium appeared magnetic for the home nations.

Midway through the Saturday, the opening ceremony took place. An opportunity to showcase the athletes and officials to the crowd, it was an uplifting event which brought everyone together again. Bagpipes and dancing meant a Scottish atmosphere accompanied the entrants, who congregated in their respective teams to be cheered by the crowd. A speech from Kagawa Shihan touched on the value of the World Championships and the potential for future changes and improvements with Tokyo 2020 in mind.

Following this, JKS Benelux (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) took centre stage to expose the advances being made in disability teaching. A wheelchair kata and a kumite demonstration had the focus of all in the arena as a comprehensive karate experience was displayed by many of the competitors involved in the championships. A definite watch and very eye-opening few minutes, this can be viewed on the JKS World Karate-Do Championships 2016 YouTube page. This was made possible by Eric Bortels of JKS Benelux who is helping to pioneer inclusive karate and on this presentation, is doing a fantastic job of it.

The Saturday morning also saw the Old Firm derby taking place which ended in a 5-1 victory for Celtic. Even with this high scoring match, the crowd at Celtic Park able to be seen from the stands could not be heard inside the velodrome as the spectators did their best to make noise for their country's participants and the cheering did not stop for a second.

The remaining individual contests concluded the competition and saw the Japanese competitors meeting each other in the finals, a spectacle which everyone could enjoy without bias and which certainly did not disappoint. This provided another memorable occasion which will always be happily remembered and sharing the experience left everyone with a great feeling. Watching the Someya sisters in the final was a privilege and a great example of the need for a strong mindset when competing against a sibling and/or teammate.

The Saturday evening brought the World Championships to a true close as the after party took place in the Emirates Arena. With food, drink and a great ambience, conversation flowed and it allowed everyone to let their hair down and reflect on what had come to pass.

This major event showcased once more, that the JKS is going from strength to strength and with a vision which incorporates quality and inclusion, is definitely a great organisation to be a part of. Another mention must go to JKS Scotland for their central role in hosting the competition which ran as smoothly as one could have hoped for.

Please take a look at the news feed on the JKS England website for the full set of team results and special mentions. There were too many excellent performances to name here and it is a testament to the association to have such a rounded approach to karate. The support from family and friends continues to be appreciated and a crucial part of delivering competitive karate in the best possible environment.

Congratulations JKS England and Wales, onwards and upwards with training and I cannot wait to see the Olympic potential in the team realised in the years ahead. A brilliant competition with enormous success showed just how well the team are being managed, with second place in the medal table achieved. Competing with great attitude and sharp focus the equal success in kata and kumite is the

ideal position from which to keep striving for more. With a well established squad and the best coaches available JKS England and Wales have once again made their supporters very proud.

The JKS England and Wales officials also had a huge hand in the tournament, well represented in number, everyone applied the necessary concentration over the whole two days. A much harder task than it looks it is definitely one where more people should become involved for the benefits it can bring to both association and individual.

A refreshing experience of great quality and professionalism, the weekend is one I'm very grateful for and will hopefully have been thoroughly enjoyed by many others as well.

Osu.



(JKS England competitors, squad coaches and officials pictured above with Kagawa Shihan).