



World Combat Games 2013,

Saint Petersburg

The World Combat Games were held in St. Petersburg in October 2013. The Games are organised by Sport Accord formerly the General Assembly of International Sporting Federations (GAISF) of which the International Aikido Federation is a member. The first Combat Games were held in Beijing in 2009.

Most widely recognised martial arts these days involve competition but Aikido has no competition. The IAF agreed for Aikido to participate provided it could do so as a demonstration.

Sport Accord agreed to this request The Hong Kong Aikido Association was invited to send a delegation. The qualifying criteria meant few members could qualify, but we were lucky that Jerald Tai was able to attend. As we could send only one delegate, the organising Committee arranged for Jerald to demonstrate with a delegate from Switzerland.

Below is Jerald's report

Arrival at St. Petersburg

After a journey of more than 17 hours, I arrived at St. Petersburg airport at midnight on the Sunday. Most of the other aikido participants had arrived earlier that day.

A volunteer met me and accompanied me to the Park Inn Pulkovskaya. All the aikido participants were lodging at the same hotel, and a large number of volunteers were ready to receive and help us.

The following day was to begin with an early training session and seminar at the sports centre then a rehearsal at the Games venue.

Meeting the Delegations

I met some of the other delegates at breakfast the following morning. Spirits were high as everyone took the opportunity to get acquainted.

I met more delegates in the hotel lobby where everyone was smiling and friendly. The atmosphere was congenial and conducive to a good day's training.

Training, Seminars and Rehearsal



My

demonstration partner was Gabriel Horsch, 3rd Dan from Switzerland. The class was led by IAF Chairman Dr. Peter Goldsbury. He started with some warm-up activities and focused primarily on correcting errors in our form.

We also took part in a special international seminar, during which three shihan – Ulf Evenås, Christian Tissier and Tsuruzo Miyamoto – each taught a class. Waka Sensei Mitsuteru Ueshiba conducted the final class of the seminar. His energetic style inspired us all.

The seminar took place at the Volleyball Academy Platonov with around 200 participants including many aikido students from several Russian aikido organizations.

After the seminar, there was a mix-up with bookings so we were free for the evening. The

seminar was very intense and participants felt as though they had had a very comprehensive workout.

Taking Direction from the Shihan and the Technical Delegate

The participants were eager to absorb as much advice as possible from the Shihan and Technical Delegates for our demonstrations. I sought out Christian Tissier Shihan for his opinion. He provided incredibly useful commentary on our demonstration as well as some helpful reminders on some of the practical aspects of performing before a crowd, such as how best to use our time.

He gave just a few comments to my group, I made sure to stay and listen to what he had to say to some of the other delegations. He provided a lot of very good advice and even demonstrated some movements that would come in handy during the demonstration. I found it all extremely useful, and I believe his advice helped inform my own demonstration.

I also observed Miyamoto Shihan, who was advising the Japanese delegation. It seemed that they were so well trained that Miyamoto Shihan concentrated on the spiritual aspects and elegance of their performance.

The shihan were all incredibly focused and able to easily judge and correct the performance of the many participants. Such patience and understanding help explain how they became shihan.

The First Day

The aikido demonstrations took place in the Peterburgsky arena, on a large stage before hundreds of spectators. The first of the two days of aikido demonstrations was divided into two blocks of two hours each, with four minutes per demonstration. The first block was devoted to basics. My partner and I were assigned to perform Basic Techniques in Tachi-waza, and shared the stage with the Slovakia delegation. Each of us had one minute to perform as Tori/Nage. My focus was on performing the basics with elegance.

The second demonstration called for higher speed and intensity, as well as some more advanced techniques and attacks. This time we shared the stage with the Belgian delegation. They had decided to perform Yokomen-uchi techniques – and coincidentally we were meant to do the same! My partner and I decided that I would do Shomen-uchi, while my partner would do Ushiro-Kata-Tori. I made some minor mistakes but I felt that my partner and I worked so well together that any imperfections were minor.

The national teams then performed in quick succession according to a given program. Eighty aikidoka from 32 countries around the world showed a multitude of aikido techniques and training forms for a total of four hours. The second day was to feature even more.

The Second Day

The second and last day of aikido demonstrations featured an increasing level of complexity. The first portion was the same as the first day. I was tasked to perform freestyle for Tachi-waza, while my partner was to handle Ushiro-waza. I was confident about this demonstration and with my partner's support we performed what I felt was a high-quality embu. We received some compliments from other delegations.

The second block was a mixed demonstration of weapon techniques. Several groups had been invited specifically to handle this portion of the demonstration, so I was free to observe.

The final part of the day had the theme of basics by experts. Five teams demonstrated specific techniques for Suwari-waza, Hanmi-handachi, Tachi-waza, and freestyle weapons and randori. I was not originally to perform in this part but Swedish Team Head Anna Wilder Hjerpe, 4th Dan, invited me to join her group for Suwari-waza. Jikou Sugano, 5th Dan of Australia, invited me to participate in Tachi-waza. I was so delighted and proud to join them.

These demonstrations went smoothly as the participants followed the movements of the team leaders. The performance was both serene and vigorous.

The final part ended with demonstrations by the three shihan, Ulf Evenås, Christian Tissier and Tsuruzo Miyamoto. After the completion of the demonstration program, each participant received a certificate from IAF Chairman Dr. Peter Goldsbury and Russian Aikido President Sergey Kirienko.

Sayonara Party

There was a much-deserved sayonara party for all the participants. We shared our feelings and a few laughs about some of the funnier moments that happened on stage. It was also a precious opportunity to talk with such leading lights as Tsuruzo Miyamoto Shihan and Waka Sensei. I am pleased to say that Christian Tissier Shihan had some very nice things to say about my performance, which made for a pleasant end to the event. When the party ended, we all adjourned to the hotel lounge to continue enjoying one another's company. I had the opportunity to chat with the Russian National Team, who shared their feelings on what it was like to be part of the national team as well as the promotional representatives for the Combat Games.

Partnership

I was the sole representative of Hong Kong, so I was partnered with Gabriel Horsch of Switzerland. I did not know him before and was feeling a little apprehensive about us performing together. However, my worries did not linger past our first meeting, as I found him to be very nice and easy-going.

We needed only to practice together a few times before we were ready to work through the

techniques required for our demonstrations. One we were comfortable with our performance, we took the opportunity to engage in friendly conversation.

Working together presented an irresistible opportunity to discuss aikido and ambitions for our future training. I was also pleased to discover our shared preference for a gentle approach when it came to our demonstration. Clearly, we had much in common.

Final Words

The Games were broadcast live worldwide. Highlights and parts of the demonstrations are available for viewing at the SportAccord World Combat Games YouTube account. IAF Senior Council Member Tony Smibert Shihan served as commentator during the live coverage. One of the special benefits of performing in the arena was that some of the highlights of each team's performance were broadcast in slow motion on large screens throughout the venue. This footage was truly awe-inspiring — and helped explain the intensity of the applause! I am pleased to say that there are many official photographs of my performance, and I was able to put together a gallery of my own photos of this memorable event.

I was honored to have participated in Games and represent Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Aikido Association. Experience, souvenirs and friendships are a few of the things I was able to take away. I would like to express my gratitude to the Hong Kong Aikido Association for sponsoring my visit to this World Combat Games, with funds from the Kenneth Cottier Fund. I was enriched beyond measure and will treasure my memories for years to come.

Jerald TAI

October 2013