

Irish Observers attend 'Wheelchair Championships'

David O'Donovan reports



The International Japan Karate Association (IJKA) and the Japan Karate Shotokai (JKS) held the first World Wheelchair Course and the JKS World Championships in Japan recently and a number of Irish black belts attended the Tokyo event as observers.

The introduction of Karate for wheelchair users owes its development to Sensei Asai 9th Dan IJKA chief instructor. Wheelchair karate has been developed over the past year in Japan and its present training format focuses on five kata. These kata formed the basis for participants entering in the competition. Competitors were judged on upper body technique as well as chair control and turns. Wheelchair participants from Japan, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand and the United States attended both the training course and competition.

"For a long time now the IJKA has been examining how the martial arts could become more inclusive and cater effectively for the disability sector.", Sensei Brian Toomey, IJKA Ireland 5th dan chief instructor, explained. "To date few martial arts organisations have developed organisational structures or policy which caters for wheelchair users or people with special needs. The IJKA has now become the first international organisation to fill this void."



It was in response to these developments that the four representatives from IJKA Ireland attended the training course and competition led by Sensei Toomey and Shihan Kato, 8th dan European chief instructor. "It is my intention to establish 'wheelchair karate' into IJKA Ireland and organisational policies and structures have already been developed by my organisation to accommodate wheelchair users", Toomey said. "This type of training will afford people with special needs the opportunity to train and compete alongside able-bodied karate-ka while at the same time being treated with equality and respect."

Along with the wheelchair entrants in the JKS World Championships it was noted that the standard of the able bodied competitors was exceptionally high. The Japanese dominated all categories; most kumite matches were over in seconds due to the speed and precise technique of the Japanese competitors.



At present in Japan, JKS Karate-ka are considered to be some of the countries best fighters coming first place in Shotokan and open Karate competitions throughout Japan. All western competitors commented on the new high standards being set by Japanese fighters and the challenge that it poses to western training standards and methods.

Further information in IJKA Ireland Wheelchair Karate and Japan Karate Shotokai can be obtained from Brian Toomey (025) 31101 or (087) 2500783