

TAO Junior Competition 2006 **- Competition Report -**

Written by Adam Wood

Once again on Saturday 11th of February, St Barnabus Church Hall, Beckenham, held the T.A.O. Children's Competition. With over 40 children ranging from the ages of five to seventeen, the organisers and judges had a full day of work ahead of them. After a successful competition last year and more entrants this year hopes were high for an even better event.

With the groupings already made up the children were split into their respective teams, totalling six in all. The teams were decided upon by a combination of years in practice, age and weight. There were three categories in the morning session consisting of Balance and Flexibility, Three Star Principle and Active Mist Form. Each category had one head judge in the form of a senior instructor/ coach and two or three assistant judges in the form of an instructor/ coach and children's coaches. The days events started at 9.30am and by the time the medal ceremony was completed had all been tied up by 5pm.

The Balance and Flexibility was headed by Jane Frew. The aim of this discipline is to show that each child can use the correct postural alignment to successfully perform a variety of skills. With box split and side splits used as the measure of the flexibility and swing, round, front and side kicks for the display of balance each child was challenged on their skill and technique.

Nick Kerwin was head judge for the Three Star Principle. Within this discipline the children are expected to show the skill and technical ability they will be required to use when competing in the Qingda (semi-contact fighting). It is a training method used to develop the evasion and punching/ kicking ability. Unlike when in competition the format for this event gave them the time to produce the skill without the pressure of an opponent attacking them.

The Active Mist Form category was headed by Sally Grinhey. Each area holds its own aspect of difficulty but with the Form they all come together to test the children to their limit. Remembering the Form correctly is what combines all of the child's teachings to produce a coherent display of skill and commitment. Without others to follow the pressure is high and with fifteen (for the less experienced) or thirty moves focus is important here.

Come the afternoon we arrive at what is the highlight for most of the children. The Qingda event is run to the same criteria as the BCCMA events, so acts as a perfect preparation to these competitions. The groups here were altered so as to follow the BCCMA rules and as such the number of categories increased to nine. With the children all fuelled up from the lunch break they were keen to get on to the mats.

Each category ran as a round robin (meaning each competitor fought all of the other competitors in that group) and consisted of one bout of one minute duration. With a head judge, referee and four corner judges the display of skill and ability was under the close scrutiny of senior members. With more parents turning up for this part of the event there was a good atmosphere and all eyes were on the fights.

Throughout the bouts we were witness to some very good fights with an overall improvement on last year. Having competed in national events, since the 2005 contest, many of the children have honed their skills there as well as in the training hall. The focus on their competition and individual fights showed with a more accurate display of kicks and punches.

The awareness of the mat area was also better displaying an improvement in their movement and postures. A number of categories went to a three way fight off to decide the eventual medal winners, testing the children even further.

All of the challenges they faced are preparing them for the larger obstacle, if they choose, of fighting children from other clubs across the UK. As the number of Kombat Kid's Classes' is growing the future looks bright for the T.A .O. Children's Competition. With this event as a starting block I am sure many will choose to go on and compete at a national level and who knows we might have a future World or European Champion in our midsts?!

So for now we will endeavour to instruct and coach the kids to be the best possible athletes they can be. With the majority of their lives ahead of them we can be certain that they will all develop further and within the structure of the T.A.O. they have good friends as well as contest opponents. Throughout the competition there was a friendly rivalry between opponents and all were encouraging to one another. The spirit of true competition was displayed in the fact that by the end of the day there was only smiling, happy faces.

Without dedicated members this sort of event could not happen and would be sadly missed by all of the children. So on behalf of all the children (and their parents) I would like to thank all of those involved in the competition and for the time spent in preparing for the event. Special thanks must go to Tony for being "master of ceremonies" and bringing such a beneficial event to all.

Hope to see you all there next year!