

WARRIOR CUP - 2004

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It was history in the making by two in Chicago, Illinois over Halloween weekend (October 29-30, 2004). The AKA Grand Nationals celebrated its 40th year running while the new World Sport Karate Federation (WSKF) completed its first full season in existence with its finals competition. The combination of two tournaments in one, along with the first WSKF finals posed some interesting logistical issues for promoter John Sharkey and his staff. Friday night competition was a little shaky as the scorekeepers and judges became familiar with the WSKF seeding but once things were figured out, the Saturday competition ran smoothly and was finished by 4pm.

In order to accomodate all the divisions, two large stages were set up in the ballroom to run the championship competition for all forms and weapons divisions. Each division was tiered with competitors who had no WSKF seeding points from during the year competing in the first tier with the overall champion from that tier moving up to the next level.

Level two consisted of the competitors with regional and national seeds (other than the number one national seed). This second tier was run off to find two champions (for forms and weapons) or three (for sparring) to move up to the third level to compete against the number one national seed in the division. For forms and weapons three people would go to the stage to compete for the title while in sparring, the number one seed was seeded into the final four and faced the top three competitors who made it through the first two tiers of competition.

As a result, competition throughout the season did have its advantages. Possibly even more exciting than the new WSKF set up for the championships was the caliber of competition at the event. Competitors from all over North America were in attendance to not only check out the new WSKF but also to support promoter John Sharkey - someone who has done a lot for the sport of martial arts and its competitors. Teams like Straight Up, Pro Rank, J. Phillips, Paul Mitchell, K.I.C.K. Team, EKS, Sidekick, Revolution, Twism, IDC, AKA, Golden State, Midwest Force, NWK, Five Knuckle Bullet, TAC, Victory, Sun City and many more were in the arena vying for the titles.

And the AKA Grand Nationals also carried its own tradition - the Warrior Cup championship - where the overall competitors in men's sparring, youth forms, youth weapons, adult weapons and adult forms would compete for the largest trophies you have ever seen and a chance at history. Former winners of warrior cups include (but are not limited to) Richard Plowden, Jeff Gears, Mike Chat, Steve Anderson, Matt Mullins, Matt Bowles and Suzanne Wanckett. Friday Night Weapons of all types - extreme, creative and traditional - were run on Friday night along with continuous sparring and team sparring. Jarrett Leiker was a double weapons winner taking the 15-17 traditional weapons division and 16-17 boys creative weapons.

But executive competitor Johnny Watkins was even more impressive as he won the 35 and over weapons division and the 45 and over division. Non-seeded competitor Caitlin Dechelle wowed the audience with her wins in 12-14 traditional weapons, the 12-13 girls creative weapons division and the 12-14 girls extreme weapons division.

Since she was unseeded, she performed at least six times on Friday night and then a seventh time to make it into the Warrior Cup competition. Continuous sparring was intense for the juniors. Colbey Northcutt was fighting hard in her 88 and under continuous division, facing Patrick Williams of Michigan for the title. She was down after the first round but determination and perhaps her father's crazed yells in the corner spurred her on to the win in the division (following in the footsteps of her little brother Sage who won the 66 and under division).

We were pretty certain that Mr. Northcutt's head was going to explode at one point and we were ready with the camera to catch the action but luckily he stayed in one piece to help coach his daughter in team sparring where Team Victory consisting of Northcutt, Leann Dumlao and Janie Smith won, defeating Team IDC's Megan Schmidt, Gianna Esposito and Kelsey Gilpatrick. Donald Mills fought hard against the formidable Venya Bruk in his continuous sparring division for the title. The two exchanged brutal blows and Bruk's nose was bleeding throughout.

When the smoke cleared, it was Mills in the lead with the win. Team IDC's Luke Chesney, Andrew Ford and Anthony Difilippo and Thee Team's Brandon Yocum, Ty Hinds and Brandon Allen were the number one seeded teams for boys

team sparring. Five other teams showed up to fight and in the ensuing brawls, both number one seeds were eliminated.

Team Twism's Frankie Fernandez, Jake Lysgaard and Donald Vickers took out Team IDC while Team EES of Dylan Smith, Casey Williamson and Ryan Freeman defeated Thee Team. In the match for first and second, Fernandez got his team out to a great lead with an 8-2 win over Smith. But Williamson's 15-1 routing of Lysgaard put EES back in the game. Vickers had his work cut out for him as he faced Freeman.

Freeman was able to hold on to his team's sizeable lead as EES took the title. In men's team sparring, Team IDC's Chris Milares, Ronel Williams and Travis Plowden won the title. However, there was an even more serious team sparring challenge on the horizon as the AKA Grand Nationals offered a three-man, one-woman team challenge with \$4000 for the overall winning team.

After the elimination rounds, two teams advanced to face the seeded teams (Team Straight UP and Team IDC). Team Tankson Elite and Team Straight Up 2 moved forward to the Saturday night finals. One of the highlights of the evening was a little show by Craig Henningsen and Daniel Pitlock for those who stayed late to watch the Warrior Cup youth run offs for weapons. Henningsen and Pitlock tied in the run offs forcing the judges to point to determine the order in which they would perform in the finals. Henningsen walked up to face the judges and threw a webster, Pitlock, not to be outdone, threw his own.

And from there, a trick battle of epic proportions began as the two went back and forth throwing tricks from standing position with the crowd cheering and the judges laughing. In the end, Henningsen won the point off from the judges but the crowd who got to watch the "tricks battle" were the ultimate winners as the two youth competitors put on a great performance to end the evening. Saturday Everything that wasn't run on Friday night had to get done on Saturday. The arena was abuzz with activity all day as divisions were run as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The Finals Machine award goes to Michael Bernardo who got a system running for his finals stage where he had divisions staged and ready to go up to perform so quickly that the next group was ready to bow in before the finishing group got their awards.

Little Nashandra Kissel was back and showed that she hasn't lost a step. In fact, she has been involved in competitive gymnastics which has improved her extreme performances dramatically. Kissel won her creative, extreme and musical forms divisions.

Teammate Zach Hassan won the 9 and under boys extreme form division. Two females dominated the traditional divisions. Ashley Artese won the women's Korean and Japanese divisions along with womens extreme form, creative form, musical form and adult soft style weapons.

Nichole Sullivan of Ohio was the overall winner for 11 and under Korean forms, Japanese forms and traditional weapons. Another Ohioan, Brandon Allen, won his first overall title in the 15-17 youth Korean division. K.I.C.K. Team competitors Johnny Liscar and Nicolle Provost brought back titles for their team winning the musical forms division and Korean division respectively. Scotty Zimmerman was a two time title winner in the 10-11 boys divisions. He tied with Nick Soncrant in creative forms but Zimmerman won after the tie breaker. Soncrant earned his own title in 10-11 musical forms with Alex Kwon and Jake Greaves following close behind. Daniel Pitlock followed up on his Friday night performance with wins in the 12-14 Japanese division and the 12-14 boys extreme forms division with Adam Cannon and Johnny Liscar in second and third. Chris Brewster was the dominate force in the men's divisions as he won the men's creative division, extreme division and musical division. Daniel Marshall picked up where Brewster does not go - the traditional divisions. Marshall, a champion in Korean forms in his youth, showed his dominance in the adult divisions as he won the men's Korean title defeating Jeff LaFrance and Steve Yu. Andrew Cabilan brought his Canadian mojo to Illinois to win the men's Japanese division.

Lionell Ellison is the boy to beat in 9 & under sparring and in continuous sparring as he won them both coming from a non-seeded position. He ended up defeating a valiant Heather Grandy of Canada for the title in point sparring. Frankie Fernandez traveled all the way from South Carolina to take a his second title of the event in 10-11 boys point sparring defeating Luke Chesney for the win.

Nichole Sullivan won a fourth title of the event as she won the 10-11 girls sparring title over Ashley McShane. Michigan brought home a win as Morgan Plowden showed she is following in her dad's footsteps with a win in 12-13 girls point sparring while Frederick Norfleet of Louisiana was the winner in for 12-13 boys. Adult sparring brought some tough fighting. In the super lightweight division, Jack Felton was eliminated from competition in an early round. Chris Walker of Florida fought like a maniac to take the overall win.

Marques Dumlao almost handed Jason Tankson-Bourelly a defeat in the men's lightmiddle division, only losing by one point. But it was Willie Hicks, in an inspired performance, who took Tankson-Bourelly down to the wire and forced overtime in the fight for first and second. In the sudden victory round, Hicks ducked under a Tankson-Bourelly technique and scored with a backfist to win the fight and the title. Joyce Blanco made a surprise appearance at the event in a Team IDC uniform. Blanco faced Regena Thompson in the women's lightweight division where Thompson defeated Blanco for the win. Claire Coccozza was the overall winner for the women's superlight division while Marielle Elliott of California won the middleweight division.

Chris Milares has gone all season in the WSKF without a defeat but his reign ended at the AKA's when Hakim Walker handed Milares his first defeat in the men's middleweight division. Walker went on to win the division. In the men's light heavyweight division, Raymond Daniels defeated Travis Plowden with a score of 6-2 to take the win.

Daniels appeared to suffer a knee or leg injury and was immediately iced down after the division. In the men's lightweight division, Alex Davydov was handed a defeat by his bedmate of the night before - Ronel Williams. However, Davydov accidentally landed a round kick to Williams' spine in the match which would cause Williams problems throughout the rest of the tournament. Davydov went on to fight Derrick Cox where Cox won by one point to take third in the division.

In the fight for first place, it was two lanky, thin guys facing off as Ronel Williams and Jason Holmes went head to head. In a close, low scoring match, Williams won the division with a score of 3-2. All that was left for the Saturday eliminations was the men's sparring Warrior Cup run off. Only four would advance to determine who would fight for the overall title.

Raymond Daniels put on a blitz showcase as he handily defeated Russ Vansteelandt to move into the finals. In round two, Joey Shiflett faced Willie Hicks. Hicks connected with blitz after blitz to take an easy win over Shiflett despite Shiflett's display of flexibility with a side kick to Hicks' head. In the third match, Bernard Frost faced Chris Walker.

Frost, the winner of the 35 and over heavyweight division showed Walker that the experienced fighters should not be taken lightly as Frost won 5-4. Finally, Hakim Walker bowed out to Carlos Tearney setting up the four finalists for the event. The Finals The youth competitors opened up the AKA Grand Nationals finals.

Caitlin Dechelle, Daniel Pitlock and Craig Henningsen provided exciting weapons performances for the youth weapons warrior cup. The 2003 winner had been Craig Henningsen and he was able to accomplish a repeat in 2004 with five 10s from the judges.

The finals quickly moved on to the first round of men's sparring. Raymond Daniels faced Willie Hicks. Daniels, still nursing an injured leg, was able to stay ahead of the hungry Hicks and win 5-3. Carlos Tearney and Bernard Frost were next up. Tearney scored first when Frost stepped out of bounds. Frost gained back the point with a quick blitz that surprised Tearney but then Tearney came back scoring two points to move on to face teammate Daniels for the Warrior Cup.

Next up was the men's sparring finals with teammates Tearney and Daniels facing each other. Daniels' speed and blitzes were too much for Tearney as Daniels took a quick lead and kept it; winning his second Warrior Cup with a score of 7-2. The finals then moved to the Hall of Fame and appreciation awards.

Michael "the Machine" Bernardo was inducted into the Hall of Fame as was Mike Chat of XMA fame. Chris "Brewsky" Brewster had a quite a night during the finals. He had already cleaned up in the majority of men's divisions during the daytime eliminations.

During the Warrior Cup finals, he faced Rene Herrera and Ashley Artese for the adult forms title. Herrera performed a

soft style routine and Artese did her best with her musical performance but none could top Brewster as the judges were unanimous in their decision in his favor.

For the adult weapons Warrior Cup title, William Cornell, Chris Brewster and Jonathan Boyd faced off. In 2001, when he was a junior, Boyd severely injured his foot at the AKA Grand Nationals but forced himself to perform because of his desperate desire to win a Warrior Cup.

He was unable to reach his dream that year. With that dream in mind, Boyd entered the finals stage as the top competitor from the earlier run offs. Boyd, who has won nearly every major NASKA grand championship in 2004 for weapons put on a performance that had the crowd cheering even louder than for the local favorite Chris Brewster. In the end, Boyd's performance earned him two perfect 10s and his first Warrior Cup - something he will likely cherish forever.

The Team Form championships was a chance for MONEY as the prize was \$1500 in cash for the winner. The final three teams were Pro Rank's Marcel Jones and Kalman Csoka from Georgia, Team Wisconsin's Jeff Spridco and Mike Welch and Team AKA of Chris Brewster and Craig Henningsen. Pro Rank put on their usual solid performance and got the crowd excited.

Welch and Spridco also got quite a reaction from the crowd but a fall by Spridco clearly took them out of the running. It was up to Team AKA - the number one seed in the WSKF. Brewster and Henningsen did their usual shirt removal to show off their glistening youthful bodies, and this time, they tried a new routine for the audience.

But the new routine was not good enough to defeat the top NASKA team of Pro Rank as Pro Rank earned a 10, 9.99s and one 9.98 (the judge who awarded that score was booed extensively by the crowd) which was enough to give them the win and the money. But the real money was being handed out in the team sparring challenge. \$4000 was on the line for the winning team.

The rules required each team to have three men and one woman. Four teams made it to the finals but only one could take home the money. The first match up pitted Team Tankson Elite against Team Straight Up Purple. Davie Anderson, a fighter we haven't seen for awhile, faced Joey Greenhalgh in match one. Anderson held Greenhalgh to a tie of 4-4 but after that promising start, it all went downhill for Team Tankson Elite. Next, Claire Cocozza, representing Straight Up, faced Mishonne Berry. Berry is known more for continuous fighting and boxing and Cocozza took advantage of this by racking up a 13-1 win over Berry.

Team Tankson was unable to recover from the second round as Jason Tankson-Bourelly (Straight Up) defeated Dejuan Brown of Team Tankson 10-1 and Raymond Daniels (Straight Up) handled the much smaller LaRoyce Tankson with a 5-1 win. The next match up was Team Straight Up Gold against Team IDC.

Straight Up first sent in Marc Canonizado to the surprise of IDC's Ronel Williams. Williams was unprepared for Canonizado's blitzes and neither were we. As a junior in sparring, Canonizado rarely used his hands, except maybe to catch himself if he fell down. Canonizado was able to give his team a 7-2 lead to open the round. But IDC's pick up of Joyce Blanco proved an excellent decision as Blanco brought her team back into the running after Williams' disappointing performance with a 10-0 defeat of Krystle Retamoza.

Next Chris faced Chris as Chris Walker of Straight Up faced Chris Milares of IDC. Walker came off the line with zest and vigor as he was in the zone during this fight scoring point after point for an impressive 10-3 win over Milares, putting Straight Up in the lead once again. The final round had Travis Plowden representing IDC, facing Hakim Walker of Straight Up.

Plowden was down by 3 points and worked hard to make them up to tie the score. After a mistimed spin kick that allowed Hakim Walker to tie the team score up, Plowden scored with a blitz at the final bell to give his team a one point advantage and the win, allowing them to move into the final match against Team Straight Up Purple. With a lot of money on the line, Team Straight Up Purple faced IDC for the team sparring challenge. Round one was Cocozza versus Blanco. Blanco's last match up with Cocozza resulted in a win to Blanco at the recent Diamond Nationals tournament.

This time, Coccozza was ready for Blanco and used new strategy that worked as Coccozza won the round 8-1, giving her team a great start. In round two, Chris Milares of IDC faced Jason Tankson-Bourelly, Team Straight Up's most recent addition. Milares had a better round than his last match up against Chris Walker but he was still unable to top his opponent as Tankson-Bourelly got his revenge for Milares' win at the Canadian Open with a 6-4 win. IDC got back into the game in round three as Travis Plowden reversed punched his way to a 9-1 win over Joey Greenhalgh, bringing the team score to 15-14, narrowly in favor of Straight Up. The final match up was Raymond "the Real Deal" Daniels of Straight Up against Ronel Williams. Daniels started the round like beast, launching blitz after blitz on Williams and bringing his team to a 7 point lead with only thirty seconds left.

Williams was unable to make any kind of come back and the match ended with a 7-1 score in favor of Daniels as Team Straight Up won the big time bling bling for the night. The AKA after party was a mix of dancing, drinks and 40th Anniversary cake as everyone partied the night away in Chicago. Congratulations to all of the WSKF title winners and everyone else who competed! Watch for the photo gallery, videos and results from this event on