

35th European Junior And Cadet Karate Championships Report

With 44 countries and 700 elite athletes competing, this was the largest Junior & Cadet European Championships to date. The England squad flew out from Heathrow Airport on Tuesday 12th February arriving at their hotel in Trieste, Italy, early evening. The following two days the squad had some training sessions at the Palatrieste Stadium, venue of the 35th Junior & Cadet Championships.

For many of the squad they trained with the knowledge that this would be their last Junior & Cadet Championships, whilst for some this was their first time wearing an England badge. For the weekend of the Championships, the Palatrieste was the theatre of dreams where so many hopes and aspirations were either realised or dashed within a couple of minutes. For many of the England squad there was a real rollercoaster ride of emotions, with many of the squad members coming within a hare's breath of victory. The Europeans are reputed to be one of the toughest tournaments to compete in, there are no weak teams or categories, many of the competing countries have 'full time' athletes and for some Karate is their national sport. Competing against these odds is difficult given England's situation and it was a credit to the squad's determination that they actually gave a very good account of themselves, not only coming away with one Silver medal and two Bronze medals, but coming oh-so-close to medalling on a few other occasions too and many others just losing out by a point or two.

Day one of the Championships started with the Junior Kata events. Reece Taylor failed to make it past the opening round as his Seienchin Kata was beaten, while Samantha Cannon bowed out in the 2nd round to the Serbian finalist. Samantha did make repechage and won her first repechage round but narrowly lost out 3 flags to 2 in the repechage semi-final to her Dutch counterpart just missing out on the chance to go for a medal. The Junior Individual Kumite events followed and Thomas Gibbings, competing in the Junior Male U75kg category, lost out on Gold by a single point to his Italian opponent after successfully negotiating four rounds. The showcase final, held in the evening after the opening ceremony, was a close affair with Tom fighting well but his opponent managed to snatch a point which Tom couldn't get back and had to settle for a brilliant Silver. There were many other close fights with Jamie Holt just missing out on a Bronze. He went through three rounds before losing to the current German WKF World Champion in the semi-final. Jamie made the repechage final but his Turkish opponent held on to a 3-1 lead to leave Jamie pleased with his performance yet frustrated at going so close to medalling. Katie Hurry did manage to secure a Bronze medal where Jamie had just missed out. Like Jamie, Katie had successfully won three rounds before losing 4-2 in the semi-final of the Female Junior 60kg+ category to the Spanish competitor. Katie made no mistakes in the repechage final as she secured a 2-0 victory to claim the squad's second medal of the Championships.

The second day saw the male and female cadets take centre stage. Once again the day's events commenced with the Individual Kata competitions. Gareth Hains performed a good Seipai Kata but narrowly lost out 3 flags to 2 to his Austrian opponents Jion Kata. Ashleigh Kenny did better as she stormed through to the semi-finals only dropping one flag en-route. The semi-final saw Ashleigh perform Chatanyara Kushanku but her Italian's opponents Kanku-Sho Kata just nicked it with a 3 flags to 2 win leaving Ashleigh the repechage final to contend with. Ashleigh looked in good form as she eventually secured her Bronze medal with a 5 flags to 0 win over her Russian opponent for her Suparimpei Kata bringing the squad's medal tally to three. Saule Del-Rio came close to taking the squad's medal total to four as he narrowly lost out in the repechage final 1-0 in the Male Cadet 75kg+ category. Saule won his first two rounds before losing out to Montenegro 4-1. He came back strong in his repechage semi-final round beating his Spanish opponent 6-3 before losing out 1-0 to Greece in the repechage final just short of a medal.

Other close matches saw Ashley Tancock lose 1-0 in the 2nd round to Serbia in the Cadet U60kg, Alex Sell lost 2-1 to Bulgaria in his opening round match in the Cadet U70kg, Tyrone Josephine made it to the 3rd round in the Cadet U65kg before losing out to Montenegro, Chris Harris lost 2-1 to Russia in his opening round following extra time in the Junior U60kg, Akan Eka lost out 1-0 to Bosnia & Herzegovina in the Junior U80kg also in his 1st round and Sarah Donnelly also lost by a single point 4-3 to Poland in the Junior U60kg event. Rio Smith fought an extremely hard fight but her opponent eventually won the fight 5-2. Other early casualties were Emma O'Callaghan, Tom Canham, Alex Hodge, Sophie Richardson, Reish Hull and Adam Francis who lost their opening rounds by only a couple of points.

Day three and time for the Junior team events, Kata and Kumite. As England had not sent over any Kata teams to compete it was down to the Kumite teams to fly the flag. The team events offered the Junior competitors another chance for glory and claim a medal in the blue-ribbon events. Unfortunately the other teams felt the same way and stole the impetus a both the male and female

teams bowed out in their opening rounds. Both teams faced Russian opponents, the male team going out first James Steadman, Ritchie McMillan losing their initial fights. Jamie Holt gave the team hope as he drew his fight 4-4 but Tom Gibbings failed to secure the win needed to progress to the next round. Stephen Scott, who was also in the team, was unlucky not to get the chance to fight but wouldn't have passed up the opportunity to represent his country and still wore his badge with pride. The female team also failed to make it past the opening round as both Lauren Adams and Katie Hurry lost out. Their Russian victors made it all the way to the semi-finals and with one win, one loss it all came down to their last fighter as to whether the English female team had a shot at repechage. Leading 6-4 with seconds on the clock the Russian competitor fell victim to a take-down and lost the match 7-6 as the buzzer went. Shame, as the female team were gearing up for the repechage match only to see their chance snatched away.

The majority of the results in both kata and kumite were extremely close. The squad were definitely on par with their counterparts it was only the slightest of margins that more medals were not secured. At this high level of competition the difference between winning and losing is probably less than 1%. Out of 44 countries competing in Trieste only 22 medalled with England coming 14th on the medal table.

Thanks to Ticky Donovan OBE, Wayne Otto OBE, Juliette Toney, Jonathan Mottram and Dr Surdhur Mohinder. Also thanks to the supporters that managed to come and watch the Squad and to the people behind the scenes who gave their time to ensure the team had a successful trip. Also a special thank you to Sensei Wingrove for sponsoring the Staff for this trip without whose help some staff would not have been able to attend.

The squad have a year to prepare now for Paris 2009, Trieste was the first successful European Championships attended by the newly formed English Karate Federation and an important stepping stone for the Federation.