

ENGLISH KARATE FEDERATION CHAMPIONSHIPS - PONDS FORGE SHEFFIELD

So what does it take to hold a successful competition? Suitable venue, good organisation, quality referees, appropriate categories to encourage large participation, minimum grade to ensure high standard and spectator support amongst other things...

Well the first EKF English National Karate Championships had it all; Ponds Forge was the chosen venue for the National Championships. Its central location, accessibility, amenities and history of hosting many national events made it ideal. Pete Allen has years of experience hosting many former national championships as well as his own AMA regional, national and international championships so the organisation of the event was in good hands. Out of 55 registered referees, 46 had attended these championships that were overseen by the EKF Chief Referee Terry Pottage. The categories were divided by gender, age and weight and with 75 unique categories to ensure competitiveness, all competitors were catered for. To encourage the very best standards competing, there was a minimum 3rd Kyu grade entry requirement in place for the older children and seniors and still 585 competitors registered to compete from 43 competing associations, all showing tremendous support for the EKF. At the end of the day, it's the associations that make up the EKF, these championships were for them and to give something back, the entry fees for spectators had been waived allowing many more families and friends to attend and support their competitors. What more could you ask for?

The two-day event, which took place over the weekend of 5th and 6th April 2008 in Sheffield, saw many familiar faces in attendance and there were many new kids on the block too. It was good to see athletes such as Rory Daniels, Alton Brown, Natalie Williams, Sonny Roberts, Craig Burke, Paul Abel and many of the current Senior, Junior and Cadet squad competing and supporting this event.

Support also came in the way of sponsors – a first for the national championships? There were two levels of sponsorship on offer for these championships: –

Tatami sponsors –

- **Institute of Sport and Recreation Management** (Mark Newey)
<http://www.isrm.co.uk/>
- **AVA Sports** (who also had a stand on site)
<http://www.avasports.com/>

Category sponsors –

- **Mike Billman** specifically sponsoring the Senior Male Kumite Heavyweight and Senior Female Team Kumite events
- **Heian Ryu Karate Group** specifically sponsoring the Senior Female U53kg Kumite event
- **TISKA** (Mick Billman / Gursharn Sahota)
- **Chingford Shotokan Karate Club** (Mark Durham)
- **Metropolitan Police** (Andy Maddocks / Mick Billman)
- **Ticky Donovan OBE Ishinryu** - Black Belt Kata event.
- **NLSK (John De Bono)** - Mens -80kg senior kumite

As well as AVA Sports being on site, Kachi-Do (www.kachi-do.com) also had a stand with merchandise for sale during the championships. Each category medallist was also given a merchandise voucher by Kachi-Do, redeemable on-line or at their stand with AVA Sports supplying a discount voucher too. Also in attendance were official

tournament photographers, DE Photos (www.dephotos.co.uk) who took many photos over the two-day event. You can visit their website to browse and order photos through the following web link: http://www.dephotos.co.uk/emAlbum/cgi-bin/pro/emAlbum.cgi?c=show_album;p=Martial%20Arts/English%20Karate/2008

With all this planning in place there was only one thing left to do – let the games begin!

The championships themselves commenced with the Team Kata events followed by the 9yrs & Under Kata categories moving upwards through the individual age groups. There were some spectacular Katas performed during the first day's events and some excellent Kata Bunki routines being displayed by the Team Kata finalists.

Ishinryu won the Senior Female Team Kata event with AMA runners-up. The Male equivalent was won by Karate Do International (KDI) with AMA 'B' runners-up. The Children's Female Team event was won by Hanko Ryu with AMA once again coming home second whilst the Children's Male Team event finally saw AMA collect a team gold with England Karate Kan (EKK) runners-up.

As the competition moved to the individual categories the level of competitiveness and tension increased, as did the standard of Kata as the age categories rose. Whilst the older children's and Cadet Kata events took place, the 9yrs & Under Kumite events commenced. With all six areas running with a mixture of Kata and Kumite between them, there was plenty of action for the spectators to enjoy and keep the referees busy. As the Kata events finished, the remaining Children's Kumite events took to the Tatami's. It was a busy, hectic first day but very successful with many parents and spectators remarking on how well it had gone how pleased they were that it hadn't cost a fortune to watch as with most tournaments within England.

Day two proved even busier than the previous day as the older children, cadets, juniors and seniors turned out in force. The team Kumite events started the days action and with some large entries in many categories the events took a while to start rolling through.

The Girls 14-15yrs Team Kumite event was won by EKKA with Kaizen Central in second place. Shindo-Kai took the honours in the Boys 14-15yrs Team event with Ken Yu Kai securing silver. Ken Yu Kai made up for their missed team gold by collecting one in the Male Cadet Team Kumite event beating the AMA 'A' team in the final. The Girls Cadet Kumite title went to Kazen Karate Association with AMA once again just missing out on top spot. Shindo-Kai made it a team double when the Senior Female Kumite team took gold beating Kaizen Central in the final whilst the Senior Shindo-Kai Male Kumite team just missed out on securing another team gold as the Senior Male team from Toyakwai took the honours in that event.

Following the team events the individual Kumite categories got underway. With the Senior Europeans in Estonia around the corner, this was a good opportunity for the seniors to get some tough competition experience under their belt and the majority of the senior squad took full advantage of this opportunity. For the recent Cadet and Junior squads who represented England in the World and European Championships, this was their chance to shine on the domestic stage and demonstrate why they've earned their England badges.

Out of the 25 strong Junior & Cadet squad that went to Trieste in February, 22 took part in these championships. From those 22, only 2 failed to medal with 13 securing national titles and the remaining 7 all medalling. Seven managed to secure two individual medals resulting in them collecting 13 Gold, 5 Silver and 9 Bronze medals. Had they entered as a squad they would have topped the medal table securing 27 medals between them.

Top association of the championships were Toyakwai who collected 10 Gold, 8 Silver and 6 Bronze medals. EKKA with 10 Gold, 3 Silver and 5 Bronze came second overall with Ishinryu coming third collecting 8 Gold, 3 Silver and 15 Bronze medals. AMA, who came fourth overall actually accumulated the highest number of medals- 35, 9 more than Ishinryu who gained 26.

These championships had now set the standard and with the British Karate Federation Championships and both EKF Regional Championships coming up there is going to be fierce competition between the athletes to be ranked No.1 in their events.