

Panelists Kanokogi and Kellman-

Commission on the Status of Women 2008 at United Nations

This is the article by Mia Kellman, 13 year old student of Rusty Kanokogi of Kyushu Judo & Community SVC Center, Inc. Both Rusty and Mia were panelist to the Commission on the Status of Women 2008 at the division for the advancement for women at the United Nations on Feb 28, 2008. They spoke on Women, Gender Equality and Sport.



from left to right: Counselor Zhang Dan (Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN), Mia Kellman (Nationally ranked Judo athlete in Junior division), Rena "Rusty" Kanokogi (Instructor, Kyushu Judo & Community SVC Center, Inc), Johanna Adriaanse (International Working Group on Women and Sport), Carolyn Hannan (Director, Division for the Advancement for Women, UN).

When I first arrived at the United Nations conference on "Women 2000 and Beyond," I was nervous and a bit overwhelmed. Eventually I was introduced to athletes and former athletes from as far away as China and Namibia and as close as New York. The point of the forum was for people to communicate regarding equality for women in the world of sports. Many of the women shared their views and experiences. The athlete from Namibia explained that in her country most people could not afford to attend a proper gym or buy proper athletic equipment.

She explained that often she or her teammates would suffer injuries because they did not have a proper track to run on or proper shoes to wear. She described how her team couldn't even afford uniforms which would make them look like a team. Her coach explained that it was hard for women in Namibia to become great athletes because they were first and foremost responsible for homemaking tasks like cooking, cleaning, parenting and "taking care of their husbands."

When it was my turn to speak, I tried to remember how I feel before a judo match. At first nervous and then ready to explode. Over the years of doing judo, and especially through competing all over the United States, I feel stronger in my body as well as my mind. I get a lot of confidence from judo and from the fact that I know that my senseis, Mr. & Mrs. Kanokogi, believe in my ability to succeed. I figure if they think I can win...then it must be true! I know that things were different when Mrs. Kanokogi wanted to compete in judo and there were no women's events. Of course, she was so strong and she would hide the fact she was a woman and do competition against men anyway -- and win many of the times! From the Kanokogis I have learned to be confident and to believe in myself.

So, as I began to speak, I explained that I felt it was unfair that the press always covered sporting events from the perspective of men's interests. In the NY Times Sports section, men are always featured on the front pages in color, while women's stories can be found on the back page, in black and white, unless the story is negative or someone famous mocking a women athlete, like in golf. On the day of the United Nations conference, the headline on the front page of the sports section in the New York Times, reported that the IOC had banned women's softball from the upcoming Olympics in Beijing. This was so sad because this was an Olympic event that women really enjoyed and were successful at.

Overall, the day was interesting and informative. I learned a lot about women's sports and equality and about how lucky we are here in the United States, where at least we have a fighting chance. Attending the United Nations event made me realize how lucky we are here in the United States. I want to thank the Kanokogi's for believing in me and supporting me. I also want to thank the USJF for caring about things that happen on the mat and off the mat.