

2014 Sanix Tournament Report

The team that represented the United States this year was made up of 7 male athletes and 2 female athletes. To help support the team, 5 staff members made the trip to Fukuoka. The complete list can be found below.

Male Team Members:

1. Jucoy Johnson (13) – Grand Rapids, MI
2. Michael Ramos (14) – Scotch Plains, NJ
3. Isaac Mendez (14) – Fruitland, ID
4. Michael Mutz (13) – Chicago, IL
5. Max Rajendran (14) – Colorado Springs, CO
6. Jackson Butler (13) – Pleasanton, CA
7. Robert Tanaka (14) – Denver, CO



Female Team Members:

1. Noelle Acosta (12) – Ontario, OR
2. Elizabeth Wright (14) – Hinkley, CA

Staff Members:

1. Noboru Saito (Advisor and Guest of Organizer)
2. Michael Mutz (Head of Delegation)
3. Michael Eldred (Male Team Coach)
4. Kevin Butler (Female Team Coach)
5. William Wright (Assistant Coach)

The majority of the team was scheduled to arrive in Fukuoka on December 22nd. Several of the team members were delayed and arrived a day later on December 23rd. The location for the tournament is at Global Arena, which is a 50-min car ride from the Fukuoka airport. Global Arena is a large sports complex that has numerous sporting facilities, restaurants, and housing options located on site.

On December 23rd and 24th an international training camp was held. Seven international teams participated in the camp along with several local jr. high teams and one high school team. The first day of the training camp involved an opening lecture, warm-up, and uchikomi session in the morning. In the afternoon a 2-hour randori workout took place, which included newaza and tachiwaza randori.

The second day of the camp included a technical exchange of techniques from the participating teams along with special instruction from Masahiko Otsuka (Former top 73kg player for Japan) and Nae Udaka (Current World Champion at 57kg). Both players demonstrated their favorite techniques that included morote seoinage (Otsuka) and osotogari (Udaka). The instruction given was of a high quality from both presenters. The training camp concluded with a final tachiwaza randori session in the afternoon followed by an explanation of the rules that would be used for the team tournament.



On Christmas day the team had a light team practice to make sure everyone was ready for the tournament the next day. During the day the team took a short trip to a mall so they could do some shopping and try some food off the Global Arena campus. In the afternoon the coaches attended the coaches meeting and found out the schedule for the tournament. At 7pm was a welcome reception that the team staff members and the parents attended. The highlight of the night was the fresh 94kg tuna that was cut up at the party for sashimi.



The official Sanix team tournament took place on December 26th. The boys team lost their first and only match of the day to Saitama Sakae at Global Arena Gymnasium. The format for the tournament is single elimination, with the team with the most wins at the end of five individual matches advancing to the next round. The five members who represented the USA were Max Rajendrar, Michael Ramos, Jackson Butler, Michael Mutz, and Isaac Mendez. The team finished with one win and four losses. Jackson produced an exciting win by throwing his opponent for yuko and following into a pin for the win. Michael M. threw his opponent for Yuko at the beginning of his match, but was later thrown and pinned for ippon. Max, Michael R., and Isaac lost their fights but showed great fighting spirit against strong competitors. The team from Saitama continued winning and finished in 3rd place from a field of 82 teams.

The girls team also lost their first match of the day against Tanushimaru, the eventual winning team of the tournament. There were a total of 31 teams participating in the girls event. The format for the girls tournament is the same as the boys except it is a three-person team instead of five. Noelle Acosta and Elizabeth Wright were the representatives for the United States. Both of the girls lost their matches, which gave the team from Fukuoka a 3-0 win including the forfeited match. Each one of the girls gave up 30kgs or more in weight to their competitors, but showed great effort against their intimidating opponents.

Both teams received difficult draws for the day, but demonstrated courage in leaving their best effort on the mat. After a tough day, the team was looking forward to the exhibition matches the next that would provide many matches for all the USA players.

The exhibition matches took place on December 27th at the same location as the team tournament. The boys team was placed in league E (8 leagues total- A to E and I to K, A is the strongest) with 11 other teams and the girls team in league H (3 leagues total- F to H, F is the strongest) with 9 other teams.

The boys team fought very well during the exhibition matches and ended up winning 8 out of 9 matches. The individual results for the day were:

- Michael Mutz- 8W-0L
- Michael Ramos- 8W-0L-1D

- Jackson Butler- 8W-0L-1D
- Isaac Mendez- 6W-1L-2D
- Jucoy Johnson- 6W-3L-1D
- Robert Tanaka- 5W-2L-3D
- Max Rajendran- 3W-8L

During the girls first round match, Elizabeth injured her knee during her second match and could not continue fighting. With only one team member able to fight, the US team was not eligible to continue in the competition. Luckily the team from Taipei allowed Noelle to join their team so she could continue to get matches. Noelle finished the day with 1 win, 2 losses, and 3 draws. For both teams the exhibition matches were very valuable and provided a great opportunity to gain experience.



The final leg of our trip involved an overnight excursion to Mizukami Village. During our four-hour bus ride to Mizukami we stopped at Kumamoto Castle. The castle was built during the 1600s and was a nice sightseeing stop for the team to experience. Once we arrived in Mizukami the team attended a judo practice at Mizukami Jr. High School, followed by a dinner at a local restaurant. After dinner the team was taken to Ichifusayama campground to stay for the night. The team staff members and parents were invited to a gathering that night with local members of the community to interact with them and share in some delicious homemade food.



On December 29th we had breakfast at a local restaurant followed by a community gathering at the local town hall. At the gathering we were introduced to the mayor of Mizukami, helped young students practice their English skills and experienced a Karate demonstration. The people of Mizukami showed us great hospitality the entire trip and even lined up along the road to wave us goodbye as we head back to Global Arena on the bus.



On December 30th the entire US delegation left Global Arena to head for home or for some families, explore different parts of Japan.



This trip was a unique opportunity for everyone involved. The athletes on the team trained hard, competed with fighting spirit, and did an excellent job of representing the United States.

On behalf of the coaching staff I would like to make a very special thank you to USA Judo for the sanction, USJF/Konan/MJDA for the funding, Lia at Hatashita Sports for the uniforms, and Saito Sensei for organizing this trip.



Reported by Michael Eldred (1-4-2015)