

2015 Sanix Tournament Report

The team that represented the US Konan team this year was made up of 4 male athletes and 3 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. Sergio Tinoco (13) – Grand Rapids, MI
2. Mitchel Nakayama (13) – Portage MI
3. Isaiah Ramirez (13) – Barstow, CA
4. Ajay Rajendran (13) – Colorado Springs, CO

Female Team Members:

1. Noelle Acosta (13) – Ontario, OR
2. Marisol Quon Torres (13) – Los Angeles, CA
3. Serenity Stewart (12) – St. Louis, MO

Staff Members:

1. Noboru Saito (Advisor and Guest of Organizer)
2. Robert Fukuda (Male Head of Delegation)
3. Michael Eldred (Male Team Coach)
4. Greg Ondrus (Female Team Coach)
5. Terry Fukuda (Female Head of Delegation)

The majority of the team was scheduled to arrive in Fukuoka on December 22st. 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. For the team members that arrived early, they attended a practice at a Jozan Jr. High School in Munakata City.

On December 23rd and 24th an international training camp was held. Several international teams participated in the camp along with some 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 special instruction from Masahiko Otsuka (Former top 73kg player for Japan) and Mika Sugimoto (2012 Olympic Silver Medalist and 2010 World Champion +78kg). Both players demonstrated their favorite techniques that included seoi toshi and osotogari (Otsuka) and harai goshi (Sugimoto). 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 reception included some great food and the introduction of the international teams.

The official Sanix team tournament took place on December 27th. The boys team won their first match of the day against Aratsu Junior High School 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 four members who represented the USA Konan team were Ajay Rajendrar, Sergio Tinoco, Mitchel Nakayama, and Isaiah Ramirez. In the first match the team finished with 2 wins and 2 losses. Isaiah and Sergio produced the wins for the first round. Isaiah won his match by throwing his opponent with Seoinage for Ippon. Sergio received a forfeit since the other team only had three players. Mitchel and Ajay lost their fights but showed great fighting spirit against larger competitors. Since the two teams were tied with 2 wins and 2 Ippons, we had to select a player to fight an additional match to decide the winner. Isaiah was selected for the match and came through for the team with an exciting victory by throwing for Wazari first, then for Ippon.

In the second round, the boys faced Kamigori Junior High School. This was a stronger team and we finished with only one win. During the previous round, Ajay was injured, so our team was down to 3 players to face their 5 players. Sergio and Mitchel lost their matches to strong players. Isaiah won his match again with a nice Seionage for Yuko and held onto to the lead for the rest of the match.

The girls team also won their first match of the day against Jyozan Junior High School. The format for the girls tournament is the same as the boys except it is a three-person team instead of five. Noelle Acosta, Serenity Stewart, and Marisol Quon Torres were the representatives for the USA Konan team. In this match, there were 2 draws and 1 win for the team. Marisol and Noelle showed great effort in their matches that ended in a draw. Serenity threw her opponent for Ippon to produce the one win needed to take the match for the team.

For the second round, the girls faced Nishiomura Junior High School. This team was a stronger challenge and eliminated our girls from the tournament. Marisol and Noelle both battled hard again, but were not able to overcome their opponents in their losses. Serenity and her opponent went the entire 3-minutes without a score and the match ended in a draw.

Both teams took advantage of their first round draws for the day and advanced to the second round. Most of the team members gave up a size advantage to their opponents but demonstrated courage by leaving their best effort on the mat. The boys bracket included 83 teams and the girls had 48 teams in total. After a good showing at the team tournament, the team was looking forward to the exhibition matches the next day that would provide many matches for all the USA players.

The exhibition matches took place on December 28th at the same location as the team tournament, along with additional matches being held at Matsumoto Yasuichi Memorial Martial Arts Gymnasium. The boys team was placed in league J (8 leagues total- A to E and I to K, A is the strongest) with 7 other teams in the Martial Arts Gym and the girls team in league H (3 leagues total- F to H, F is the strongest) with 10 other teams.

The boys team fought very well during the exhibition matches and ended up winning 4 out of 8 matches. For the exhibition matches we added Max Rajendran and John Stewart to our team so they could get some matches in also. After the 7 scheduled matches we accepted one additional match from a team that was not in our league. The individual results for the day were:

- Sergio Tinoco – 2W-6L-1D
- Mitchel Nakayama- 2W-7L
- Isaiah Ramirez – 6W-2L-3D
- Max Rajendran – 5W-5L
- John Stewart- 5W-1L-2D

The girls team ended up not be placed in the original bracket for the exhibition matches so they joined forces with team Australia for a few rounds and then alternated matches with them. With this set up, most of the team members on the girls team received 8-10 matches. 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 Aya Town. During our five-hour bus ride to Aya town 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 Aya Town the team attended a judo practice at a local dojo, followed by a dinner at our hotel. At the dinner, team staff members, parents, and kids were invited to interact with local members of the community and share in some delicious food. The highlight of the night was the American and Japanese kids putting on a skit in both Japanese and English. That night, the adults stayed in nice hotel rooms and the kids got to experience staying a night in cabins along a river.

On December 29th we had breakfast at the hotel followed by a trip to the famous suspension bridge in the area and then finish with a community gathering at the local sports arena. The Aya Teruha Suspension Bridge is an amazing structure that spans 820 feet and is 460 feet above the river below. The scenery surround the bridge is beautiful and walking across the bridge was exciting. At the community gathering we were introduced to the traditional way of making mochi. Everyone was giving a chance to pound the hot rice with a wooden mallet to make the mochi. The people of Aya Town 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 USJF/Konan for the funding, Lia at Hatashita Sports for the uniforms, and Saito Sensei for organizing this trip.