

# Oregon takes collegiate karate

The University of Oregon has its first collegiate sports championship of the year, although it's one of the campus' best-kept secrets.

On the first weekend in November, the Oregon karate team traveled to Los Angeles to take on the country's best in collegiate karate. The Ducks weren't expecting a championship, just some needed competition and experience. They got that, plus an unexpected title to boot in only their second official year as a club sport.

Oregon outworked Stanford and Queen's College of N.Y., in winning the unofficial title. Although there is no official team championship, it was obvious to which team would have received it.

In the five official areas of competition, the Oregon men won both the team kata (instrumental moves) and kumite (actual head-to-head sparring with an opponent).

Oregon's Terrill Samura led a 1-2-3 sweep in the individual kata. Finishing behind Samura were Greg Andersen and Simon Giszter. All three are black belts. The same three teamed up to win the team kata, while Samura, Giszter and green belt Tom Stansbury combined for the team kumite title. Although Oregon was shut out from the top

three positions in the individual kumite, the Ducks also showed strength in that area.

In women's competition (there is no team title among the women), Oregon's Naomi Nagaki finished second in the women's individual kata in the only event held.

All in all, it was a very productive meet for Oregon, the first time it's ever been to the collegiate championships.

"It was kind of funny," says John Loeber, the Oregon team manager. "Six weeks before the championships we didn't even know we were going to go. We took all of our available people ready to go, drove down and competed for two days. Next thing we knew we were collegiate champions."

The championships, held at California State-Northridge, brought together the top team from each of nine regions across the country. The Far West, Oregon's region, was the only one not to hold a regional championship — there were just too few teams in this area. Just six weeks before the championships, Oregon found out it could compete as a representative of the Far West Region.

The university formed the team last year and signed 160 charter members. It now carries an average of 40 members and trains three times a week. Advanced members also meet three times a week at the Eugene Karate Club, where they receive intense training.

"People here are willing to work hard," says Bob Graves, who along with Jerry Fitzpatrick coaches the Oregon team. "What we really wanted to do when we went down to Los Angeles was to get in some needed competition. We wanted to work hard and be ready for next year. But we're an enthusiastic team and we didn't quit. That's what it really takes."

"You really have to credit this team," says Loeber. "I feel incredibly proud that they were able to do as well as they did. They're good learners and respond really well to what they've been instructed."

Along with the talent it takes to excel in something like karate, some Oregon team members also see other advantages to being on the squad.

"It's obviously an excellent way of keeping fit," says Giszter, a PhD student in neuro-biology. "I like combat sports, but I also like the group feeling you have within the team. Karate is a combative art with the precision of gymnastics. It's judged on technique and it's a good test to see how you respond under pressure."

"I played soccer my freshman year before I took up karate," says Stansbury, "but I wasn't pleased with the program. Once I got started in this, I just had to come back. It feels good to be around on a group setting like this and you make a lot of friends. And karate is a good physical and mental release. It's really a good exercise."

"The program has given a lot more than we expected of it," adds Andersen, a PhD student in theoretical chemistry. "You do a lot of testing and evaluating and it's all done in good spirit. Being successful at it just makes it all that more enjoyable."



Oregon defeated Stanford and Queens College of New York to win the national karate championship.



Naomi Nagaki of Oregon placed second in the individual kata in the only women's event of the championships.

Currently, Oregon competes mostly in invitational matches in the area and in their own tournament here in Eugene.

Officials here are also hopeful of hosting a regional championship here next September and there are also plans of starting a karate team at Lane Community College. And Graves knows of at least one person who is transferring to Oregon from southern California to join the Oregon team.

"I've been coaching for more than 10 years," says Graves, "but this is the first group that has really put their hearts into it. I think our success isn't so much the coaching as it is the enthusiasm and the dedication of the people in it. We worked hard and winning the championship is just icing on the cake. We're looking forward to next year."

They say that the only thing harder than winning a championship is defending one. For the University of Oregon karate team just getting into that type of situation is quite a feat. And with the title it's just won the team might not be a secret much longer.

Story by Greg Hanberg  
Photos by Bob Baker

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