

## Grandmaster S. Henry Cho's 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual All American Open

By Benjamin Paris

On March 10, 2007, Grandmaster S. Henry Cho held the 42<sup>nd</sup> All American Open at Manhattan College in New York City. The event marked another memorable chapter in the history of the tournament, a history that began at the dawn of American martial arts consciousness and continued for decades as the preeminent forum for martial artists to prove their skills.

Steven Lennon, Jr. won the Men's Sparring Grand Championship with a dynamic combination of attacks and careful spacing on defense. All night Mr. Lennon use quick and long kicks to keep his opponents guessing, occasionally but effectively rushing in with reverse punches when the defense overcommitted to the kick. Mr. Lennon, the winner of the Light Heavyweight Division and a student of his father, Steve Lennon, Sr., defeated Lee Anderson in the final. Mr. Anderson, a student of John Bussard, won the Middleweight Division. Mr. Lennon opened the scoring in the final with the move of the night: a kick that started off looking like a probing side kick but was raised high and turned into a perfect axe kick. Drawing on the skill demonstrated on previous side kicks, this kick came out of nowhere to draw appreciation from the crowd. With the lead, Mr. Lennon pressed the advantage, scoring twice more on attacking reverse punches that followed more fake side kicks. His victory earned him a place in the honored history of All American Open winners.

After that strong finals performance, it might have been easy to forget that Mr. Lennon almost was eliminated in the Grand Championship semifinals. There, he won by 3-2 over Hannibal Mitchell, a student of Amos Johnson and the winner of the Lightweight Division. Again, Mr. Lennon's side kicks provided the difference, either by scoring directly or by setting up another move. But Mr. Mitchell's speed and kicking precision almost won out. In the other semifinal, Mr. Anderson prevailed over Ben Losman, a student of James Roberts and winner of the Heavyweight Division. Mr. Losman's attacking style often puts him in the Grand Championship round, but Mr. Anderson countered a height and reach disadvantage with timely sidestepping and kicking with movement. A roundhouse to the head off a step was the highlight of the match, which ended with a defensive side kick countering a rush.

The Grand Champion Forms competition lived up to the high expectations of a contest between skilled practitioners of very different styles. Cristal Duarte, a student of Chris Robinson and the winner of the Kung Fu Division, won by the smallest possible margin over a talented field to take home her first All American Grand Championship. Ms. Duarte was positioned similarly last year until a mistake derailed her performance. But this year she came back undaunted to reach the final and win with a combination of speed, precision, and dramatic composition that won over the judges. Trailing just behind was Derrick Williams, a legend at the All American Open, and Olivia Sun, who likely has Grand Championships ahead of her. Mr. Williams, the winner of the Men's Karate Division, performed his traditional Shotokan Kata *Unsu*, a form that is to many

tournament watchers inseparable from Mr. Williams. Ms. Sun, winner of the Women's Korean Division and one of three students of James Roberts in the final, executed *Kempo*, a form that has been taught to only a few people. Trailing just behind them, and providing another stark contrast, was Master Jonas Nunez. Master Nunez, the winner of the Master's Division, performed a dynamic modern form featuring his speed and flexibility. Master Nunez also took home the Weapons Division and the Free Style Form Division in a productive day.

Other Form Grand Championship finalists included Nicolas Gonzales, a student of Grandmaster Cho and the winner of the Senior Division, and two more students of James Roberts: Andrew Han, winner of the Men's Korean Division, and Melissa Reyes, winner of the Karate Women's Division.

During the opening ceremony, Grandmaster Cho honored Master Thomas Eum, Master of Tae Kwon Do, with the All American Open "Hall of Fame" award, commemorating his contributions to martial arts. The opening ceremony also featured a dynamic and entertaining self-defense demonstration by Ninjitsu Master Felix Vasquez.

In 1964, when the All American Open began, its early supporters included American martial arts legends such as Ki Whang Kim, Ed Parker, Tadashi Nakamura, Toyotaro Miyasaki, Jhoon Rhee, Don Nagle, Peter Urban and Bruce Lee. The list of past champions of the All-American reads like a "Who's Who" of American martial arts. Chuck Norris, Michael Warren, and Herbert Perez are among the Sparring Grand Championship winners.

Grandmaster S. Henry Cho, Black Belt magazine's "Man of the Year" in 1971, has been a major figure in East Coast Martial arts for over forty years. He was the first Tae Kwon Do teacher in the New York area, and he has continued to promote the martial arts in a variety of ways. In 1964, he toured American and Canadian cities, demonstrating Tae Kwon Do for the Wonderful World of Sports. Grandmaster Cho has also appeared on many national programs such as the "Tonight Show" with Johnny Carson and "Good Morning America." Today, he continues to lead S. Henry Cho affiliated schools all over the world.