

Grandmaster S. Henry Cho's 43rd Annual All American Open

By Benjamin Paris

On March 29, 2008, Grandmaster S. Henry Cho held the 43rd All American Open at Hunter College in New York City. Once again, the tournament gave students from a wide variety of styles the opportunity to test their skills and learn from each other. Winners came from as close as the five boroughs of New York City and as far away as Venezuela.

Andrew Hahn capped off an outstanding day for his school by capturing the Men's Sparring Grand Championship. Hahn, a student of James Roberts and the winner of the Middleweight Division, prevailed in the final over Samuel Diaz, a student of Errol Bennett and winner of the Light Heavyweight Division. The final was quick-paced and aggressive. Hahn scored the first point of a lead leg kick, and then quickly went ahead 2-0 on a reverse punch following a lead leg kick. But instead of trying to run out the clock, Hahn stayed aggressive, allowing Diaz to get back into the match with a gorgeous defensive kick. Shortly thereafter, both fighters closed the distance with punches. Hahn's punch scored first, earning him the point, the match, and the championship.

Although many fighters this day had strong lead leg techniques, Hahn was the most effective at following his lead leg kicks with punches and at countering with reverse punches. These techniques were the difference in his semifinal match, where he beat Hannibal Mitchell, a student of Amos Johnson and the winner of the Lightweight Division. Mitchell swept through his division with quick, multiple kicks, mostly from his lead leg. But more than once, Hahn stayed outside the range of those kicks and closed with perfectly-timed reverse punches. In the other semifinal, Samuel Diaz prevailed over Charles Burney, who won the Heavyweight division with deceptive speed and varied attacks. Kicks provided the margin of victory in this semifinal, with Diaz scoring on a hook-roundhouse combination and a defensive roundhouse kick.

Other Black Belt fighting winners included Hafizawaty Odusanya, who won the Women's Division. Odusanya, a student of Linda Lutes, also won the Women's Black Belt Breaking Division. Kristopher Wilson won the 14-16 Boys Division, and Maria Viliasana, from Venezuela, won the 14-16 Girls Advanced Division.

The Grand Champion Forms competition became another classic confrontation. In the end, Derrick Williams, winner of the Masters Division, won his fifth Forms Grand Championship. The phrase "living legend" gets thrown around a little too casually nowadays, but it definitely applies to Williams' place at the All American Open. When he performs the traditional Shotokan Kata *Unsu*, the tournament stops, as students of Japanese, Korean, and Chinese martial arts stop and learn about intensity, focus, and performance. Many performers can excite the crowd with a high kick, but it is the rare forms practitioner that makes an impression with every move from beginning to end. This is what Derrick Williams brings to every performance, and this year it brought him still another Grand Championship.

Just behind Williams in total score were two more exceptional forms competitors: Olivia Sun, a student of James Roberts and the winner of the Women's Korean Division, amazed the audience with her performance of *Kempo*, a form taught to only a select few. Sun demonstrated focus, precision, and flexibility from the opening, which included a flying spinning kick, to the final *kiah*. Also trailing just behind was Lee Anderson, a student of John Bussard and the winner of the Men's Korean Division. Anderson advanced to the final with a tiebreaker win over Andrew Hahn, the Sparring Grand Champion. In the final, Anderson performed the traditional form *Kong San Goon*, a demanding form requiring power, speed, and Korean martial arts' signature side kicks.

Other Form Grand Championship finalists included Carlos Shane, a student of Theodore Rivera and the winner of the Men's Karate Division. Marcus Camouche, a student of Christopher Lee, represented the competitive Kung Fu Division. Lisa Wong, yet another student of James Roberts, represented the Women's Karate Division. Nicolas Gonzales, a student of Grandmaster Cho, was the winner of the Senior Division. Gonzalez also won the Men's Black Belt Breaking Division, and his son, Nicolas Jr., finished second in Lightweight Sparring.

For the first time in the long and proud history of the All American Open, Grandmaster Cho awarded a Children's Form Grand Championship. The inaugural winner was Annie Roberts, granddaughter and student of James Roberts. In winning the 11-13 Division and the grand Championship, the younger Roberts demonstrated extraordinary power and focus for someone so young (or anyone else, for that matter). Roberts competition in the final was quite strong. Joey Allare, still another student of James Roberts, won the 14-16 Division. Master Amos Johnson also had two students in the final: Darius Bean won the 9-10 Division, and Sara Lebowitz won the 7-8 Division.

The Weapons Divisions provided another source of diverse and fascinating performances. Earl Woodbury won the Master's Division with his well-known sword kata. Katherine Miller, a student of C.S. Kim, took the Adult Advanced Division. Bridson Wallace, a student of Samuel Wallace, took the Children's Advanced Division.

During the opening ceremony, Grandmaster Cho honored Nelson Class, Master of Karate, with the All American Open "Hall of Fame" award, commemorating his decades-long support of the All American and his overall contributions to martial arts.

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.