



BLACK BELT GRADING – 6TH March 2010

Blood, Sweat and yes Tears Too!

"For those of you for whom the day passed in an exhausted blur ...!"



On arrival at Kingston Arena the hushed tones announced the fact that the grading paper was in full swing. The pale faces that looked up at each and every noise without really seeing told their own story. These black-tag students' minds were back in their notebooks and they really wanted to pass this exam.

We had the unusually quiet and still Jake Yeadon. The heads down attitude with hair over their faces of the teenage girls: Jessica Ramsley, Katherine & Emma Stonehouse, Hannah Matthews and Leanne Evans. The studious air of Connor McCormack, James Davis and the freshly scalped Neil Kober. The head down 'I'm going to get this' approach from Aiden Yip. An almost frantic 'What the ??...am I doing here, I thought I gave all this up years ago' look from Steve Matthews. Quiet confidence from Mr Colin Salmon and a smartly suited and booted approach from William Ofei-Kwatia. Most amusing to watch was Mr Sam Brown sitting at the table performing all the blocks and hand attacks. We did wonder if he would be able to get his leg over the back of the chair for his 360 reverse turning kick.



A moment of panic ensued when Master Hogan announced '45 minutes left' as a few candidates mis-heard thinking he had announced the last 5 minutes.

First to finish, and perhaps appropriately so, was Instructor Colin Salmon who was happy with his paper even though he had left a few questions unanswered. Finished papers were given to Silvia Ofei-kwatia to be marked as each student left the table to change into their doboks. Jessica's first words were 'what's 'student' in Korean?' and Aiden walked in to the hall saying that he had done much better than last time. Well done!

Helping with the grading this time were: Mr James Home, John Vernazza, Pete, Luke and Ethan Yip, Ali Gower, Rosie Hall, Caroline Poullain and the mistress of the camera Sue Yip. Each helper teamed up with one or two of the candidates for the dreaded 50,50,50,50s as they have come to be known. Whichever way you do them, they are awful (unless your name is Tomas Norsis who actually enjoys them). So 50 sit ups, 50 burpees, 50 squat thrusts and 50 press ups. Connor and Neil looked impressive and powered through theirs, some of the teenagers looked the worse for wear when they had finished, and mentioning no names, the red faces showed where the fitness needed some work.

One minute was allowed for hands and feet to be gloved and booted and then straight into the 1x1 sparring. There was no let up for ten rounds. A few unguarded vital spots were found and students were injured. Steve Matthews fell heavily to the floor with a well placed shall we say 'under the belt' shot. Emma without a guard to her face allowed a kick to her lip spurting blood. She was more upset at the sight of her own blood than of James' foot coming towards her face. That will be a fat lip for a few days (a war wound for school perhaps?)

2x1 followed straight on. Katherine v Emma v Jessica. Ethan v Jake v Hannah. Leanne v William v Neil. Connor v Luke v Aiden. Steve v John v James. There was perhaps a lull in the pace of the fighting as there were shouts from the Master such as 'Stop cruising, you're not working hard enough' and the classic 'you should be fighting for your life'. At that point Neil crashed to the floor but he was luckier than when James fell as Master H spat out a barking 'Get Up J'.



3x1 followed. At this point everyone knows the end is in sight but they are SO exhausted. Leanne v James v Steve with Pete. Katherine v Jessica v Emma with Rosie. Connor v Aiden with Ali & Luke. William v Neil with Colin and John. Jake v Ethan v Hannah and Caroline. This was the point at which the Black belt helpers are there to encourage. With shouts of 'hit me' and 'keep going', 'show your kicks', the students somehow find enough within themselves to keep moving, dodge the worst of the attacks and strike out with the remaining dregs of energy. Particularly impressive was Aiden, who kept going, even though I don't believe at this point he knew where he was or where he was going. His brother's 'helping' consisted of smashing him in the face with ferocious frequency.



It was at this point in the sparring that Leanne's hip dislocated. She being the determined fighter we know her to be, kept moving, striking out with her fists, her eyes streaming with tears whilst she tried to push her hip back into place. Unbelievably enough no one else saw this feat of endurance except her attackers who kept up the punishing pace. She earned her blackbelt then and there !

Whilst the coloured belts were sparring Mr Salmon and Mr Brown were taken the other side of the curtain for their grading. Was this to perpetuate the myth of the blackbelt grading, where no visitors are allowed in, no one can watch, each grading a closed session? For the two of them going for their 3rd Dan they did not have to do the 50s but had to do all the coloured belt patterns and 3 1st Dan patterns, 3 2nd Dan patterns and 3 3rd Dan patterns in front of Mr Home. Then Master Hogan swapped with Mr Home and Colin and Sam had to again perform their 3rd Dan patterns and 2 coloured belt patterns of Master Hogans choosing.



Back to the coloured belts and another one minute given for all pads to be removed then the boys were called up for patterns. From Chon-ji to Choong Moo the boys were mostly in sync. Jake, however, going in his own time would not be hurried; perhaps because every lesson he is told he is too fast. Worried looks on the faces of the spectators when James went wrong in one pattern then had to start again in two others (we couldn't bear to watch!) a deep breath and he got it together and finished well. A strong performance from William, Connor and Steve and great legs, I'm talking kicks, from Neil.

The girls patterns next. Hannah worrying (because she had had a hard session on the Thursday), the foursome of Leanne, Jessica, Katherine and Emma in sync because of their training sessions, they all looked good yet Leanne stood out due to the power she puts into each move.

1 step sparring next, not allowing anyone to pause for a rest. The Stonehouse girls were stopped when they attempted to go together. Master Hogan placed Emma v William, James v Katherine, Steve v Jessica, Luke v Connor, Hannah v Aiden, Leanne v Neil and Jake v Ali. After this Jake had completed his grading and was allowed to sit down while the others attempted their self-defence techniques with a few dodgy moves and some well executed ones on display.



All teenagers now knew their grading was over and they along with the helpers could now sit and cool down whilst watching the adults perform their breaking. Due to numbers and the abilities of the students there was a variety of breaking examples, a few heart-stopping moments but enough breaking by each student to pass their grading successfully.

Colin - Both legs 2 boards jumping back kick

Reverse turning 1 board air break

2 boards ap joomuk

Neil - jumping side kick 2 boards

1 board ap joomuk (yelping pain on first attempt cunning masked with breath control)

James - Jumping side kick 2 boards (after kicking Colins finger-ouch!!)

1 board ap joomuk

Jump back kick 3 times one leg then straight through to cheers after changing legs.

Reverse turning kick 2 boards and turning kick 2 boards.

William - black board Ap Joomuk

Reverse turning kick

Leanne - both legs jumping side kick

Palkup 1 board right arm.



Steve - jumping side kick 2 boards both legs

Ap joomuk 1 board

Colin - 3 boards special technique, also managing to drop the board on John's toes.

Sam - special technique , 360 turning air breaking-kick

All breaking done in front of a truly impressed audience, especially the teenagers who all were glad to get to the black belt grading before they were old enough to break.

All Black tag students were then lined up in front of Master Hogan to hear the great news that they all had passed. 5 of them, Katherine, Jessica, Emma, Neil and Leanne had achieved a distinction in their written paper. Each one in turn to loud applause walked up to receive their black belts from Master Hogan, the loudest cheers for Aiden for going the distance and achieving his belt after his second attempt. Mr Salmon and Mr Brown both successfully passed their (hidden) grading and received their 3rd Dan belts.

Congratulations to all of you, it was a great day you all worked so hard.



Also on another note a sad goodbye to Caroline Poullain for whom this was her last training session with us as she leaves to return to France. Goodbye Caroline good luck with your future training wherever that may take you. We will miss you, but not Master Hogan's attempt at French, who will he pick on now !! ☺☺

(For those who want to know 'student' in Korean is 'Jeja').

Ali Gower