



Black belt Grading Nov 2010

And then there were three ... As the confident 'Yep, I'm definitely going for it' became increasingly replaced by the more considered 'I don't think I'm quite ready for it yet' in the weeks leading up to this winter's black belt grading, only three black belts - Rosie Hall (1st dan), Luke Yip (1st dan) and John Vernazza (2nd dan) - were ready to try and advance to their next level under Master Hogan at the Spit and Sawdust gym in Surbiton on 20th November. Disappointing? Not really, all of Master Hogan's students know that his standards are high and that there is no point in 'just having a go', so all credit to Rosie, Luke and John for their preparation, determination and courage - there's truly nowhere to hide when there's just three of you!

The grading started with a major physical challenge: undertaking an hour long theory paper whilst sitting cross legged on a cold dojang floor. All passed this gruelling test of endurance although the actual answers in their papers were marked during the rest of the grading (more on that later) and they then proceeded with the lightest of warm ups: a mere 30 repetitions of press ups, sit ups, burpees and squat thrusts (I'm sure it was 100 in my day!). And then straight into 12 rounds of sparring where all acquitted themselves well, but a special mention to Luke who had slipped into 'competition mode', getting faster and more intense in each successive round. By the last round he was sparring as if he was behind in the finals of the World Championships, throwing and receiving some of the strongest shots of the day - great spirit. With a final round of two against one sparring, all three had clearly dug deep - indeed, even those who had just turned up to help provide some opposition were looking fairly drained (one so much so that he parted company with his



breakfast!). But no rest for the three candidates as they demonstrated their self defence skills and further tested their stamina by performing 100 jumping kicks.

It is a tall order at the best of times to perform 9 patterns consecutively, let alone perform them well and after such an exhausting work out, but Rosie and Luke had to perform all of the coloured belt patterns and the first three black belt patterns, and John from Won-Hyo through to Kodang. It is not just the physical effort, but the change in pace and intense concentration required that make this part of the grading so challenging. All three acquitted themselves well, with Luke showing a consistent crispness and accuracy of technique, Rosie getting stronger with each successive pattern and John tackling the more advanced patterns with aplomb, deftly avoiding stepping through Master Hogan's table with some swift readjustments at the end of Kodang.

Last but not least, breaking, with Luke having to break in a grading for the first time since reaching the ripe old age of 16. Luke took it all in his stride and slipped in an unexpected and most impressive high section twisting kick that showed great promise for the future. John demonstrated the power and accuracy of his techniques well, breaking everything that Master Hogan asked with the same look of calm concentration that he even managed to maintain as his knuckles visibly swelled after his final back fist break.

The grading over, Rosie, Luke and John lined up in front of Master Hogan to be taken to task about the number of blank spaces in the terminology answers in their papers, although John gamely tried to



use the fact that he was the last to hand in his paper to claim that he had merely 'run out of time'. Some oral questions quickly disproved this assertion and all three were 'encouraged' by Master Hogan to devote more effort to their terminology before being told that they had all been successful with Rosie and Luke being promoted to 2nd dan and John to 3rd dan.

It was not easy, but Rosie, Luke and John earned their promotions and their friends' congratulations. At only 14 years of age, Rosie's 2nd dan is a marvellous achievement that augurs well for the future, Luke marked the start of his transition to the senior ranks with an emphatic and spirited performance and John, although slightly over 21, showed that hard work and perseverance can continue to deliver significant improvement throughout one's Taekwon-Do training. Well done everyone!

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