

# U.S. National Karate Team holds training camp at OTC

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**LAKE PLACID** — Maybe watching action movies and television shows that are chock-full of hand-to-hand combat scenes does pay off for young children.

That could very well be the case for members of the United States National karate team, which has gathered in Lake Placid during the week to participate in a training camp in preparation for the Pan Am Karate Championships to be held in the Dominican Republic April 27-May 3.

The team that is training here is 22-members strong and features the top karate competitors from across the country. It's comprised of both men and women who are mainly in their mid-20s, and not only have these athletes become the best in America, but they are looking to become the best karate competitors in the world. The United States fields both a form and a fighting squad in competitions, and members training here are all members of the fighting team.

Although the athletes became involved with the sport for a number of different reasons, they all have one thing in common. In order to reach the level of competition they are at now, they all had to start at a very young age.

"A lot of them were first introduced to karate through TV and movies," said Hideharu Igaki, one of the six coaches here with the team who will also be the head U.S. coach at the Pan Am Championships. "Most started when they were 10 or 11 years old and just stuck with it."

Learning discipline and getting a chance to compete were also motivators that got team members active in the sport.

"For me, it was an organized sport to participate in after school," said Christina Muccini of Douglastown, who picked up on karate when she was 10 years old. "My focal point became the competition aspect. I love it. I thrive on it."

And Muccini has found success at the sport, garnering a bronze medal in the Pan Am Games in 1995, and taking a silver the year before in the Pan Am Championships. Other members on

competition at this year's Pan Am Championships, the men will be looking to defend the team title which they won last year at the championships held in Peru.

Doug Selchan won a gold medal on that team, and he also took the gold in the heavy-weight division. In order to repeat as champion, Selchan will have to win five or six matches, each of which can last up to three minutes.

"What I need to do is keep up with the physical conditioning aspect," Selchan said, explaining his goal in attending the training camp. "It's not the punching and kicking. I've gotta keep my wind up. That's going to be crucial."

Selchan said his mother got him involved with karate when he was seven years old to help him develop self-confidence and discipline. The 27-year old Selchan got hooked on the fighting aspect of karate, which he described as a "program form of fighting," and he's been at it for 20 straight years.

"A lot of people in karate take breaks on and off, but I haven't," said Selchan, who captains the Americans. "In order to compete at this level, you need to stay with it consistently. You can't take a vacation from it and expect to be in top physical condition to compete."

The athletes and coaches all said that the sessions at the Olympic Training Center are necessary to bring the team into top form and condition heading into the Pan Am Championships.

"The team has to be peaking at the right time. These athletes live, eat and breathe karate," said coach Jimmy Blann. "There is more contact allowed at the international level and we're working on getting used to that. We're stepping up our contact."

Igaki said in addition to enabling team members to work out with the best karate athletes in the country, the training camp allows the athletes to bond as a team. He said other countries that are much smaller in area than the United States have teams that are able to train together on a regular basis. Igaki said that the U.S. team members have had some opportunities to prac-

onships.

"Many of these athletes have traveled together since they were juniors and they certainly are there to support each other," Igaki said. "They act like brothers and sisters now. They have been working very hard and I think they actually have the chance to take both the men's and women's team titles."

John Fonseca, a 22-year old who lives in Chicago, said practicing together as a team is a morale booster for all its members.

"This is important because we are working on our technique, aerobic conditioning and fighting techniques together and we get feedback from all of the coaches," said Fonseca, who won a bronze at the world championships two years ago in South Africa. "One way we could become a better team is if we could hold these kind of camps more frequently. This is a great way for us to prepare for international competition."

Fonseca's bronze was only the second medal won by an American at the world championships, which are held every two years. The previous medal was a gold claimed in 1980 by Tokey Hill, who is a current coach of U.S. National team. Athletes who win their respective weight divisions at in the Dominican Republic will earn berths in the world championships which will be held in Brazil during October.

Fonseca said that discipline has been a big benefit that he has derived from karate, a sport that he started into when he was six. Not only has that discipline helped him to manage his time (he will be graduating from Loyola University in May), but it has also helped him stand among the top karate athletes in the world. And Fonseca is shooting to become the best in the world when October rolls around.

"To win, I have to believe in myself because at this level, I think any athlete can beat any other on any given day," Fonseca said. "It's extremely mental. I think the winners will be the athletes who can see themselves rising above the rest. It's all visualization."

The team began training at the OTC on Tuesday and wraps up camp on Saturday. All



**UNDER THE COACH'S EYE** — Jeff Kohn, one of six coaches guiding the U.S. National karate team through its training camp at the OTC, watches from the background as team members Doug Selchan, left, and John Fonseca work on fight-