

GREAT BRITAIN ESKRIMA

After six weeks of intense training, The WEKAF Great Britain Eskrima Team were ready for any challenge that was to be thrown at them. The first challenge for this team of players was the European championships in Italy. The event was to take place in Terracina, which is on the coast about 90 minutes drive from Rome. The event would run over 4 days starting Thursday 14th June until Sunday 17th June 2007.

Team GB had some of the most talented stick fighters to come out of Great Britain so we expected great things. On the team was Neil McLeod former world champion, John James former world champion, Roger Barnes world champion, Emar Alexander British champion, Sean O'Boyle European champion. Other talent were Sasha Ridgway GB ladies champion and Rachel McLeod GB ladies champion.

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Top Team Win Gold

By John Harvey

The team consisted of 24 stick fighters, 2 coaches and a referee. So we were off to Italy to bring back as many trophies as humanly possible. After the success in The European Championships in Berlin two years ago we were hopeful.

The team made their way to Rome and then on to The Hotel Blue River in Terracina where all the teams were staying for the 4 day event. The hotel was an excellent venue, near the beach, and with an Olympic size swimming pool. We arrived on Wednesday 13th late afternoon to be told that the weigh-in for competitors was to be held in the hotel that night instead of the next day. At the weigh-in it was decided to cancel the forms division because there was not enough competitors to take part. This was a bit disappointing because we had Emar Alexander in the adults division, who is British Champion in forms, and Jacob Stewart in the forms 2004 world champion. We also discovered that there was no fighting the very next day so it was going to be a rest day for everyone. If you did not want a rest Master Tom Sipin would conduct two seminars in Terracina on knife defence. Most of the team rested and went sightseeing. Friday, the fighting would begin to eliminate fighters for the finals on Sunday.

Friday started well with two fight areas. First up to fight was the children's divisions followed by the cadets and then the ladies. The children's division went right through to the finals because some of the children were going home on Saturday. James Carty from Kent won a silver medal in the boys' division single stick and a silver medal in the under 65k division single stick. James could be a future world champion if he continues to train at this level. Damien Lester from Doncaster got a bronze medal in the under 65k single stick division. Two talented young stick fighters! The rest of the team were going beyond expectations, with some exceptional stick fighting from Neil McLeod who got through to the finals of the single stick and the double stick under 65k. Sean O'Boyle made it into the finals of the

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Ardiano Andre Colazingari from Italy the other fight area had to stop so that all the Italian team could watch this fight. This bout is what makes this sport so exciting to watch, speed, skill and fitness.

Also in the women's double stick divisions Rachael Mcleod got gold in under 60k and Sasha Ridgway got gold in over 60k. Sasha also won gold in over 60k single stick.

Matt Steady from Leicester got gold in under 85k single stick, Frazier Cross got gold in under 85k double stick and Damien Mills from Northampton

took gold in over 85k single stick against seasoned fighter Stefan Jerzenberk from Germany.

In the veterans' division, that is over 35 years old, we were doing well with John James, Kapatiran Arnis instructor from Bristol, getting gold in the under 80k single stick and double stick. In the over 80k, JKD instructor Roger Barnes from Northampton got gold in single stick and double stick.

One fighter who should get a special mention is seasoned stick fighter Ermar Alexander from Doce Pares Kent who won three gold medals; two in the WEKAF event and a gold medal in the AKEA Italian event. This is no mean feat to win three gold medals at this tournament and we all hope Ermar can repeat this in The World Championships to be held in the Philippines in July 2008.

This was an exceptional weekend with Great Britain crowned Champions of Europe with 15 gold medals, 10 silver medals and 12 bronze. Every team member gave 100% and that is all the coaches ask for. Hopefully these members will be the core of the team going to the Philippines in July 2008 so watch for the results. ■

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The Great Britain Eskrima are looking for sponsors for the trip to the Philippines in July 2008 so if you want to be part of a winning team email

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under 75k single stick. Matt Steady and Frazier Cross made the finals of the under 85k single stick and under 85k double stick. Ermar Alexander, who at present time has got to be one of the most talented stick fighters in this country, got into the finals of the single stick and double stick under 75k.

In the ladies divisions, we had a new talent from Kapatiran Arnis Bristol in Sasha Ridgway who got into the finals of the single stick and double stick over 60k and Rachel Mcleod who got into the under 60k double stick.

This was just the first day of fighting to get to the finals on Sunday, and out of a possible 19 finals Great Britain was in 17 of these finals. So the first day of fighting was way beyond our expectations.

Saturday was a rest day but Italy was holding a

small stick competition in a different format to WEKAF rules. This was with full body armour like WEKAF but with leg pads which covered the foot and instep. The targets were the head and the legs only. This was very similar to a Karate competition with lots of stop-starting after a point was awarded. Four of the G.B team gave this a go and two of the guys, Ermar Alexander and Joe Agoncillo, got through to the finals to be held on Sunday along with the WEKAF finals.

Sunday was the day of the finals and everything was looking positive for the Great Britain Team - we had people in the finals! The countries attending this European Championship were the hosts Italy who had done an excellent job of organizing the event, Poland, Germany, Spain and Great Britain.

The day started well with probably the star of the weekend Neil Mcleod winning, in his own inimitable style, the single stick and double sticks finals. In the double stick final against

