

# 17<sup>th</sup> World Kendo Championships 2018 – Captains Report

With new members and first time as captain at a WKC for me – the 17th World Kendo Championships were a new experience for Team GB.

Numerous members travelled to Japan early to train in preparation for the event and gain the best experience they could before they went to South Korea. Three members, including myself, trained with Sotaro Honda Sensei and Masatake Sumi Sensei at Fukuoka University of Education and with the Fukuoka Tokuren. Two other members joined those in Fukuoka to travel to South Korea as a team before the event and one other flew from Osaka. We met up with the rest of the team and management in Incheon on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> September.

Here I would like to express an initial thanks to the BKA and O'Donnell Sensei for their support and financial backing during our time in Korea. Though not everything was paid for, the provision of some meals and transport during this week made the trip much more manageable for the members of the team.

The WKC started on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> September with the Men's individuals. Though we had trained hard, none of the GB men were able to progress out of their pool. I lost in encho to both opponents (China and Canada). Chris Bowden won his first match 2-1 but lost his second match to Kensaku Maemoto (2016 European champion). Sarfraz Aziz had two fights against Serbia and Romania which were so close the pool ended in a re-match. The Serbian won the re-match and so progressed to the next round instead of Aziz. Finally, Rick Collins drew the short straw, fighting Sho Ando in his pool... so despite winning his match against a Belgian opponent, he couldn't stand up to the soon-to-be-world champion.

Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> saw the Women's day unfold. This began with the individuals' competition. Junko Takata drew France and Chinese Taipei in the pools and did not progress. Emily Knight came up against Chinese Taipei and Sweden, though she beat Sweden she lost to Chinese Taipei in encho. Juliette Liwanpo had a very difficult pool which contained France (Pauline Stolarz – current European champion) and Korea. Although Juliette only lost 1-0 to her Korean opponent, she was unable to progress further. Rosanna Riches was against Israel first, she won 2-0 and progressed to fight Loidi from France who she beat 2-1. In the Last 32, Rosanna came up against the Italian Taisho, Orizio and lost 1-0 in encho.

The women's team matches followed with Team GB's first match against Portugal. GB first beat Portugal 4-0 and then won against Mexico 2-1 before coming up against Japan. Though they lost 5-0 against Japan, the women all fought above what anyone could have expected with some strikes close to ippon (enough for the crowd to show their surprise!). They progressed 2<sup>nd</sup> out of the pool and came up against Australia in the last 16 where they were knocked out.

Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> September, the final day of this WKC, was the Men's team event. Though the final match would be surrounded by the usual controversy, Team GB were focussed on only two things: Bulgaria and Italy. Their first match against Bulgaria went well with GB taking the match 4-1 before facing Italy immediately afterwards. We were not able to defeat the very experienced Italian team this year and we left the competition with a 5-0 defeat. Though this was hard for us, a small consolation came from Hiyama Sensei when he shared his thoughts that the results did not reflect the real difference in the level between the two teams. He felt we could and should have been able to have a much closer fought match. This bodes well for the men's team as we move forwards with

our preparation for the EKC for the next two years. We feel positive that all our work has taken us in the right direction. I also feel that the improvements have been enhanced with a new dynamic where members work well together and are beginning to form more of a close knit team.

Overall there were many positives in this WKC. As always, a big positive was the support of the BKA and its membership. This was in the form of financial support and the support that came from the members this year as they got behind the team with well wishes and with every ounce of help they could provide. Another positive was the coaching and guidance provided by Yasuyuki Hiyama Sensei along with the strengthening of bonds between team members that could build a much stronger team as we begin to fight for more than just ourselves during these events. Finally, the success of the Women's team set a high bar for the men to try to reach. The women showcased everything they were taught and how hard they had trained in preparation for this WKC. Reaching the last 16 is an achievement that the Men's team have not managed in the last 3 WKC and for one of the Women's team to reach the Last 32, a feat last achieved by Andy Fisher in 2012, is testament to how much they have improved but also how the system and support is yielding results.

I hope that we can continue to rely on your support for years to come and I look forward to both the Men's and Women's teams/individuals achieving more and more together.

James Ogle.

Team GB Captain.