

BJA Iaidobu

Iaido Bucho Report 2020

Since the 2019 AGM the disruption due to the global pandemic of COVID-19 meant that we have only been able to run two events, the 2019 Summer and Northern Seminars.

The 2019 Summer seminar was led by Matsuoka Sensei and Kinomoto Sensei, supported by Shoji Sensei and UK nanadan sensei. The event went very well, and positive feedback was received from the membership. These sensei have a very 'genki' approach to training and certainly put the 90+ attendees through their paces with an innovative selection of kihons designed to support study of the ZNKR iaido kata. Many people said they enjoyed these and would be taking them back to their dojo.

This successful event led to Oshita Sensei and Morita Sensei accepting our invitation to lead the 2020 Summer Seminar. The iaidobu and jodobu teams made great efforts and the venue, flights and accommodation were all booked when it became clear that cancellation was unavoidable. However, the Sensei shared our disappointment and are planning to attend our 2021 seminar, the organisation of which has already started in earnest.

The 2019 EICs were held in Athens, Greece in November and a full UK delegation attended. Kristina Silk won bronze in the yondan category and Dan Silk was awarded fighting spirit for his performance in the godan category. Well done to both!

The 2019 Northern Seminar was well attended (67) and ran smoothly.

Whilst the lockdown has meant the cancellation of virtually all 2020 events, I am aware of many networks that have sprung up, whether person-to-person, groups of dojo, or even internationally. These networks have afforded iaidoka opportunities to train, albeit often in restricted spaces and with some very creative solutions to practicing with low ceilings! But, equally importantly, they have allowed us to keep in touch with budoka near and far, exchanging stories of lockdown experiences, and deepening friendships. Some of these sessions will continue after the lockdowns have ended so that we will now see each other more frequently than just at the odd seminar here and there. So social distancing has led to a social coming together, even if a few light-fittings have suffered as a result!

To much astonishment, and indeed some concern, the 2020 EICs have just been announced as going ahead in Serbia, November. Whilst we cannot say what the pandemic situation will be at that time in Europe (possible second waves etc.), the iaidobu EC gave this some thought and have reservations about sending a squad in the event does indeed go ahead.

The reasons are:

1. lack of UK seminars or taikai to make a transparent, fair and well-informed squad selection.
2. Lack of opportunities to prepare a squad with dedicated training sessions.
3. Financial concerns, during a year of reduced income, around the need to book more expensive refundable flights (higher probably of cancellation), or difficulties with insurance cover now COVID-19 is a 'known condition'.
4. Asking people to put themselves or family/dependents at risk from COVID-19 by attending an event with 300 plus people from all over Europe. Whilst social distancing may be observed in the dojo, other 'pinch points' such as changing facilities, eating and drinking venues, travel etc. are a cause for significant concern.

5. Potential squad members who are at higher risk from COVID-19, who are shielding vulnerable relatives or who have other health/caring responsibilities etc. would be disadvantaged in any selection process.

These concerns, whilst not unanimous, are shared by many iaidoka across Europe and the discussions continue. We are also considering the issues around sending shinpan to an EIC this year and a straw poll is being conducted amongst our nanadan and rokudan sensei to garner opinion.

Acknowledgements:

All officers of the iaidobu and jodobu; I am very grateful for their efforts. I am also very grateful to our members, who have shown a great deal of understanding and patience during these very strange times. As soon as it is safe to do so, I look forward to restarting events and making up for lost time!

William Heal, June 2020.