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Martial arts qualifiers kick off

Sports

April 30, 2009 09:00 AM

BY ADAM MC LEAN

With a flurry of kicks, punches and throws, the martial art of Sanshou took centre stage at Elgin Barrow Arena April 25 and 26 with a round of qualifying matches for athletes looking to win a spot on Team Canada and participate in this year's World Wushu Championships.

The two days of action were historic in the fact that it was the first sanctioned Sanshou event to be held in Ontario and it kicked off a journey for many athletes, leading to the world championships which will be held in Toronto this October.

Sanshou is the full combative, contact element of Wushu, while 'Taolu' is the sport's performance or routine element; made famous by movie stars Jackie Chan and Jet Li.

Another famous star was on hand for the first round of Sanshou qualifiers, in the form of former world figure skating champion and Richmond Hill native Elvis Stojko.

Mr. Stojko is the official Wushu ambassador and he attended both days of the event, speaking with and meeting participants and patrons.

In Sanshou, participants engage in three, two-minute rounds and are awarded points for strikes and throws to opponents. Victory can be achieved by scoring more points than an opponent, achieving a knockout or absolute victory - where the match is stopped by the referee.

Last year was the first time Canada sent a Sanshou team to the world championships and now that events in Ontario are sanctioned by the Ministry of Health and Promotion, Canada's ranking in the sport is expected to rise, according to World Championships host organizing committee chairperson Alan Tang.

"From this point to the start of the worlds in October, I expect Sanshou participation in this province to increase 1,000 per cent," Mr. Tang said.

"The great thing about the sport of Wushu and Sanshou is that all other disciplines of martial arts derive from Wushu. Whether you participate as a kick boxer, in karate or taekwondo, you can find all of these elements in Wushu - so it is an easy transition for an athlete to make," he added.

The popularity of martial arts continues to grow. That's particularly true of mixed martial arts company the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), and Mr. Tang admitted that the popularity of the UFC and its athletes - some who have a Wushu background - will no doubt draw some people to future events and qualifiers.

Still Mr. Tang is quick to stress that Wushu is a different discipline than that of the cage fighting some watch on television.

"Wushu is not two guys in an octagon trying to kill each other. Our participants wear protective gloves and headgear and there is no ground fighting. Once a participant goes to ground, the match is paused."

Though knockouts do sometimes occur. Mr. Tang said more points are awarded for a blow to the body than the head. With that in mind, Wushu Canada looks to focus on technique and the development of overall skill, rather than establishing a knockout punch.

Future provincial Sanshou qualifiers will be held throughout York Region on the following dates. For more information visit www.wushucanada.com

May 30-31, 2009: Magna Centre, Newmarket

June 06-06, 2009: Centennial Arena, Markham

June 21-22, 2009: Elgin Barrow Arena, Richmond Hill

July 18-19, 2009: Magna Centre, Newmarket

National Championships

August 15-16, 2009: Magna Centre, Newmarket

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