

6th WTF World Poomsae Championships

Vladivostok, Russia July 29-31 2011

Master Bailey set off on a 20 hour journey to Vladivostok in the early hours of Sunday 24th July. A few hours later Angie Bailey set off to make the exact same journey. Master Bailey had to be in Vladivostok one day before the UK poomsae team to start 3 days of referee training. Angie met up with the rest of the UK poomsae team at Heathrow. The journey included a 9 hour internal flight from Moscow to Vladivostok. Master Bailey was met by members of the organising committee and was driven to the official hotel via long stretches of temporary roads consisting of pot holes and gravel. The city is being prepared to run a major summit next year and construction sites are everywhere. On the approach to the city was the first of hundreds of huge billboards advertising the world championships and declaring “Welcome to Russia”.



After arriving at the hotel, Master Bailey was introduced to the other 47 referees – representing 38 different countries. A mix of senior taekwondo masters from Europe, Asia, Pan-America, Oceania and North Africa. The referees were taken to a restaurant serving food from Uzbekistan and started to get to know each other. The referee training started the following morning. The referee chairman, Grandmaster Kim Kyung Chan, 9th Dan from Korea, conducted the sessions. Grandmaster Kim is well respected around the world and renowned for his knowledge and expertise in competition poomsae. It was clear from the start that he was there to do a serious job, making sure all the referee's were ready to sit and judge the world's best players and produce the correct winners. He emphasised the importance of not making any mistakes and pointed out the consequences if anyone were to make a mistake.



Master Bailey (far left) with the International Referees and Dr Chungwon Chou WTF President

Later that day, Angie arrived with the team and was taken to their hotel. Unfortunately, it didn't live up to its appearance on the internet and the rooms were small and not very clean! It was packed to the helm; it appeared as if all 570 players were staying in this one hotel!! The car park was packed with athletes practising around the cars and buses wearing the tracksuits of Turkey, China, Egypt, Australia, Columbia and many others.



Angie (front row left) with the UK Team at the venue

The venue for the championships was situated right on the harbour which had a long stretch of promenade where you could look out across the sea. A number of Russian navy war ships were anchored in the harbour with many cameras from around the world capturing pictures of such an impressive sight. Entering the hall for the first time, you could tell how important the event was to the WTF and the RTU. Everything appeared brand new. The raised centre court was surrounded by TV cameras and huge screens hung above the arena. Master Bailey spent two days at the venue practising poomsae with every movement being analysed in great detail. There was also lots of practise scoring poomsae with the electronic scoring system.

Angie and the team were allocated an hour a day practise time at the venue. Coach, Master Gemma, wanted more time to check her players were ready so arranged for an additional 3 hours practise at a local university. The players were given the new poomsae doboks when they arrived so they could try them out and get used to them. They looked a little unusual at first, being quite a bit different from the traditional white uniform but the majority of players approved of their new attire and it did make the event more colourful.



The UK Team try out the new Poomsae Dobok

Finally the Friday arrived and the competition got underway. Master Bailey was part of the team asked to judge the junior female category. The standard of the players was quite incredible with country after country producing near perfect performances. The level of concentration required to make sure, as a judge, you don't miss anything is immense. Grandmaster Kim explaining in depth that any judge missing a 0.5 error would be sent back to the hotel only added to the pressure.

By far, the biggest highlight of day 1 was the 3rd Master individual male category with Master Shin defending the title he won last year in Uzbekistan. This time the division was much stronger with 12 countries sending their top players. Master Shin was 4th in the semi-final with Korea, Iran and Netherlands ahead of him. In the final, he produced his best performance and scored very high marks, putting him in first place but his main rivals were still to perform. There was great excitement and tension as one by one the other Master's weren't able to match Master Shin's score. Master Shin was still in first place with one player remaining – 'Korea.' The Korean gave a faultless performance and all eyes were on the scoreboard. It seems like an age before the important numbers were displayed. "8.26" Flashed onto the big screen. Master Shin had scored 8.33. A huge cheer went up from the UK players and they ran to congratulate the two times World Champion, Master Shin. Master Bailey spent the rest of Day 1 telling every referee who would listen of his pride, that Master Shin was his instructor and had been for over 31 years. It was very emotional.



Master Shin – World Poomsae Champion 2011

The opening ceremony was an amazing spectacle which included traditional Russian music and ballet. The teams marched in behind their flags and the players stood for almost 3 hours! Many found the heat in the hall too much, the first aid attendants were kept very busy. The WTF demonstration team did a breath taking 15 minute display showing off almost super human skills! After all the speeches the crowd was treated to a kyorugi match between Russian and Uzbekistan using the new team sparring competition

format. It is like a tag match with 5 players on each side. It's definitely the most exciting way to enjoy sport Tkd. The action is non-stop; the crowd were so loud you couldn't hear yourself think. Uzbekistan were 10 points ahead with only 30 seconds remaining. Russia sent in their best player who scored three head shots in quick succession and brought the score to 32-32. With 2 seconds left, he grabbed the winning point and the stadium erupted. All who witnessed it agreed this is the future for sport Taekwondo. The Russian TV cameras lapped it up showing the conclusion of the match again and again on numerous channels.



The WTF Demo Team perform at the opening ceremony

Day 2 saw even more poomsae categories played out. The standard again was incredibly high. Most UK players made it through to the semi-finals but missed out making the final 8.

Day 3 was Angie's 1st Master's female category. It was to be the 2nd group on Court C. Master Bailey was judging the 1st group and was confident that he would be free to watch Angie in action! Just as the category was about to start, Master Bailey was asked to go up on the raised centre court to act as co-ordinator. He had to watch over Court C out of the corner of his eye as Angie's opponents performed Sipjin & Jitae. He could see the scores were high and the nerves built up as it drew closer to Angie's turn. She was number 12 out of 15 countries. She had to follow the Korean- five times World Champion and Spain, the current European Champion. Angie managed to control the nerves enough to produce her best performance and an impressive high score of 8.00.

She needed a top 8 finish to make the final and sat in 8th place with 3 players remaining. Unfortunately, the Russian player scored 8.01 and pushed Angie back to 9th. She just missed out on the final but beat Finland, Canada, Singapore, USA, Mexico and Australia. A 6th place at the Europeans and now ranked 9th in the world, this shows how much Angie's hard work and dedication has paid off. She has hardly missed a day's practise since her selection back in April and attended every national team training session in Nottingham. All involved with UK poomsae agreed she has shown tremendous improvement and has the potential to go further in the future.



Angie celebrates after her 9th place finish

The final of the 1st Masters was the most dramatic of them all. The Korean player, going for her 6th world title, had a sudden loss of balance during Pyongwon and this affected the rest of her performance. The judges were harsh and her scores were poor. This left the door open for the other finalists and the Chinese Taipei player took advantage to become the new World Champion. The Russian who beat Angie by 0.01 came away with a bronze medal.

Master Bailey was asked to judge the last 2 finals of the competition, the 2nd Senior male & female categories. Both divisions were won by the Koreans. Korea were away out in front in the final medal table with Great Britain finishing in an impressive 6th place thanks to Master Shin's gold medal. The Russian federation put on a huge party for all athletes, coaches and officials to celebrate a very successful World Championships. There was enough food to feed the city and entertainment was provided which kept everyone dancing until midnight.



Russian entertainers at the closing party

The whole trip had been fantastic experience. Next year the 7th World Championships are probably going to be held in Colombia. Let's hope Central will have some involvement there and for years to come!