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COLUMBIA TAEKWONDO TOURNAMENT BRINGS 1,000 COMPETITORS - 4/5/2005
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Contact: Jeff Hockman
573-875-5425

Editor's Note: Especially good times for interesting video or photos of the competition might be at about 8:30 a.m. Saturday, April 9, when the black belts are sparring, or about 11 a.m. when the 3- to 5-year-olds are competing.

Columbia Taekwondo Tournament Brings 1,000 Competitors

Columbia, Mo. – Thunderous “kiyap” yells and lightning-fast kicks will ring from the rafters as more than 1,000 competitors from across the nation compete in Columbia’s taekwondo tournament, sponsored by Hockman’s ATA Black Belt Academy, Friday and Saturday, April 8 and 9, at the Hearnes Center Indoor Fieldhouse.

For the second time, the American Taekwondo Association (ATA) awarded “Class A” distinction to Columbia’s taekwondo tournament. Less than 5 percent of tournaments receive the Class A designation, which allows winners of events to earn more points than usual toward their national rankings.

Participants will compete in sparring, weapons and forms events. ATA taekwondo students from nearby states as well as Florida, Georgia, Colorado, Texas, Nevada and Pennsylvania have already signed up, said Jeff Hockman, owner of Hockman’s ATA Black Belt Academy.

“Taekwondo is more than a sport; it’s a discipline honed over centuries in Korea and adapted for students in this country by the American Taekwondo Association,” Hockman said. “Anybody at any age or ability level can do it. The goal is self-improvement. If the student works hard and improves him- or herself, the student brings honor to the school.”

A special competition for fourth- and fifth-degree black belts, along with weapons competition, will start at 6:30 p.m. Friday, April 8, at the Hearnes Center. Opening ceremonies begin at 8 a.m. Saturday, April 9, at Hearnes and will feature as special guests seventh-degree black belt Master Steve Westbrook and sixth-degree black belt Jack Wenenn.

The ATA sanctions tournaments for ATA members only. Tournaments are designed to supplement taekwondo classes and to offer a fun outlet for ATA students of all ages and ranks. Form (or pattern) competition runs first in each ring. After form competition, students at the

white-, orange- and yellow-belt levels perform one-step sparring, which involves set moves and no contact. Those with camouflage belts and above compete in “free-style” sparring for points.

“ATA officials work to keep each ring division limited to no more than 16 competitors and to match students as nearly as possible by rank, age, size, sex and experience level,” Hockman said. “We have found that such matching makes the event more fun and a good gauge of a student’s abilities.”

In addition to Taekwondo for Adults and Karate for Kids divisions, Tiny Tiger tournament rings are a fun, safe introduction to competition for children ages 3 to 6. Tigers build confidence by learning to perform in front of a crowd and judges without the pressure of scores. All Tiny Tigers who compete earn a gold “I’m a Winner” medal made in Korea, similar to the gold, silver and bronze medals the adults and older children win.

Hockman's ATA Black Belt Academy offers three convenient locations in Mid-Missouri: at Broadway Marketplace and on Buttonwood Drive in Columbia, and in Fulton. In addition to the owners, fifth-degree black belt Jeff Hockman and fourth-degree black belt Jade Hockman, the local instruction staff includes second-degree black belts Mike Witt and Susan Zarn, along with additional help from many other certified instructors, trainee instructors and junior leader instructors.

Established in 1969, the ATA is the world's largest centrally administered martial arts system. Its family consists of more than 250,000 men, women and children training in Songahm Taekwondo at more than 1,000 schools and clubs across the United States. The ATA is the founding organization of other international affiliates that include the World Traditional Taekwondo Union (WTTU) and the Songahm Taekwondo Federation (STF). These branches include some 16 countries, offering instruction to more than 50,000 students.

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