

TIMES COLONIST



Getting Their Kicks

Organizers aim to put on top-notch show at Bear Mountain Arena

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Ken Marchtaler is looking forward to Monday. For the past year the operator of Victoria's OMAC Martial Arts school has been inventing the wheel, working as chairman of the first-ever World Martial Arts Games that takes place this weekend at Bear Mountain Arena. He needs a break.

Not the kind of break he experienced when his event fell into the shadows of the Pan Pacific Swimming Championships on from Thursday to Monday at Saanich Commonwealth Place. When planning began a year ago, this weekend was the ideal date for the martial arts showcase. The Pan Pacs were scheduled for Vancouver, and Marchtaler, the president of the Canadian National Martial Arts Association, had his time in the sun to promote martial arts. That changed in March when the Pan Pacs venue was moved here from the University of British Columbia.

SportHost Victoria executive director Hugh MacDonald, who was prepared to help Marchtaler with the bid process to attract the games, says "the conflict was unfortunate, but there was nothing that could be done about it." And MacDonald never did have to help out with the bid. "He [Marchtaler] is so well respected around the world that he went off [to a competition last year in Germany] and he came back with the games."

Marchtaler is well past thinking about the conflicting events. "I was happy for Victoria, that it was able to get the swimming championships. But I was disappointed there would be a conflict, and there was initially with the hotel rooms, but it has worked out. "For the actual meet itself, some people are going to watch swimming, but some people might not want to watch swimming and they may want to come out and watch us."

What those people will see are 160 athletes -- 40 from Victoria, 60 from the rest of Canada and the remainder from such countries as Australia, Germany, England, Nigeria, Pakistan, U.S.A., Switzerland and Uganda. Putting on the games has been an uphill fight for Marchtaler. First, sponsorship has been difficult to attract and government funding non-existent. This limits the event's modest budget to under \$50,000, most of that coming from athlete registration and ticket sales, which have been soft to date. "We're doing it bare bones. If we had money we could hire people to do the work and that would take time a pressure away from me. "The big challenge I have right now is that I spend more time on things that are not bringing in revenue."



CREDIT: John McKay, Times Colonist

Martial arts athletes go through series of warmups at Bear Mountain Arena in preparation for the World Martial Arts Games being held in Victoria this weekend. At right, 8-year-old Trevor Kim of Vancouver stretches before practising his karate moves.

That's one of the reasons Marchtaler agreed to the job in the first place. A primary goal of the games is to become a successful martial arts umbrella event that attracts funding in the future. "If we work as a group it's a lot better than say just karate trying to get funding or Wushu trying to get it."

As well, the list of athletes that were at first interested in coming has shrunk because visas to enter Canada were either denied or delivered too late. But that hasn't influenced Marchtaler's goal of growing the games into something bigger. "I know the IOC [International Olympic Committee] isn't even going to look at us until we are better organized. That's our job and this is the starting point for us. "And the time I'm putting into this I see as a contribution to the future of martial arts."

Come Monday, Marchtaler's contribution will drop considerably. He'll have input into which country hosts next year's games and he'll hand off the blueprints.

Then, he'll put his feet up.

MORE THAN JUST COMPETITION FOR LOCAL FANS

With 30 martial arts schools in Victoria, Ken Marchtaler expects to see a lot of fans in the stands at Bear Mountain Arena this weekend, even if pre-event ticket sales have been slow. "Last year, more than 20 million people in the United States took at least one martial arts class. In Canada it was more than one million." Then there are those who enjoy martial arts movies and are fans of martial arts film star Mike Chat (Mortal Kombat Conquest, Martial Law, Power Rangers) who, as a matter of fact, will be at Bear Mountain Resort today from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. holding an extreme martial arts seminar.

With clout like that, the chairman of the World Martial Arts Games is confident the event will be a success. He is even more pumped about the opening ceremonies Friday from 9 a.m. to 11:15 a.m. at the arena, during which a play called The Martial Arts Story will be unveiled. The hour-long production follows a little girl who wakes up during a dream. Her father comes into her room and tells her about the history of martial arts and its beginnings in AD 280 in India. The story continues to modern-day martial arts.

Competition -- in sanshou, jujitsu, karate, kempo, kung fu, tae kwon-do and wushu -- begins at 1 p.m. Friday with forms. On Saturday fighting divisions begin at 9 a.m. Team competitions and mixed martial arts takes place Sunday at 9 a.m. The grand championships are on Sunday at 1 p.m. For those who believe martial arts is violent, Marchtaler says these games are not. "The goal is to be able to hit someone but not to punch them. If there head moves, they don't score a point. It takes the violence away from it. It's all light contact or touch."

For tickets call the Bear Mountain Arena box office at 385-1555. Full-event passes are \$55. Day passes are \$25.

Ran with fact box "More Than Just Competition for Local Fans" which has been appended to the story.