

Whitehorse will become national karate destination

by ECHO ROSS

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Get ready for something the territory has never seen before. Whitehorse has been awarded the 2006 Japan Karate Association (JKA) Canada National Karate Championships. About 300 competitors — ranging from beginners to seniors — and instructors, plus their families, will be heading north for the first time. The competition will last two days, but the participants will stay for at least three or four days.

“Part of the reason to bring it here, is to open up awareness of martial arts,” says Todd Hardy, the chief instructor for JKA Yukon. “This is a very traditional martial art, and it’s an extremely effective one.” Hardy recently travelled to Vancouver with his son, Lymond Hardy, for the 2003 nationals. It was there that Todd made the pitch to the JKA Board of Directors.

“It didn’t take much to sway them,” says Hardy, who’s been involved in karate for 27 years. “The Board wants to ensure the championships are held in different parts of Canada. My pitch was based on the Yukon’s history hosting events and the facilities, as well as how important it would be to the territory’s economy.”

Accompanying the competitors and instructors will be Senseis Okasaki and Yaguchi. Okasaki is a ninth degree master, the second highest ranked person in the world. Yaguchi is considered by many as the best Ku-mo-say coach in the world.

Hardy says the national competitions are very intense because people are competing to be able to represent Canada at events such as the Pan-American Games and the world championships.

However, Hardy says the sport's not really about winning.

“A small percentage of people in martial arts actually compete. What you want to teach is, treat it as another training opportunity, and an opportunity to teach each other.”

Lymond Hardy learned that first hand in Vancouver earlier this month when he represented the Yukon at the national championships.

“At first, it was very intimidating,” he says. “But it gave me a lot better focus for training, and made me want to improve.”

Lymond grew up watching his father Todd, and his mother Louise, practicing karate, and always wanted to try it himself. But it wasn’t until two years ago that he started training more seriously. Now, his goal is to train hard enough to represent the Yukon well in 2006 on

his home turf.

“I want to train in karate for the rest of my life,” he says. “It’s a pretty intense form of sport, but it’s fun, good exercise and it’s very disciplined. You learn how to control your body very well.”

There are about 140 JKA clubs in Canada. There is just one club in the Yukon, consisting of about 45 people. There are two other karate clubs in the territory, and one has applied to join the Japan Karate Association.

Despite the small population, Todd Hardy believes the Yukon has a strong future in karate.

“I’ve always been a believer that, individually, we do much better than as a team. Especially within a small population like the Yukon. We have done well individually, in sports such as weightlifting, wrestling and cross-country skiing.”

What words of advice does Todd have for his son, Lymond?

“Train hard,” he says with a smile. “Train very hard. Karate is a way of life. If I stop, physically I fall apart, and mentally, I lose that focus.”

The senior Hardys advice for Yukoners is to take advantage of an amazing opportunity to help out with the 2006 JKA Championships.

“I doubt very much that it will show up here again. This is a huge undertaking.”

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