

The 2012 National Taekwondo Championships were held from June 29th – July 4th in Dallas, TX. KTA had six athletes competing this year: Garrett Baker, Kristi George, Levi King, Alec Larson, Mr. Jeremy Raymer, and Master Cooley. Below is a detailed report on our experiences.

Alec Larson competed in his first Nationals on the second day of the 6-day competition in the red belt (10-11) division on Saturday, June 30th. Alec was our only color belt competitor, and he did an outstanding job. Alec faced over 80 competitors in his Poomsae (Forms) division. The competition format this year for color belts, as well as black belts under 14 was more challenging than in years past.

A single elimination bracketing system was implemented, which puts two competitors head-to-head, and the judges immediately determine who moves forward. The winner advances in the bracket and the other competitor is out, with no further opportunity to compete (unlike in our Indy Cup where we do a double-elimination format).

Alec won his first round and lost his second round. He performed very well both times.

In sparring, Alec won his first match handily and then faced a tougher second match. Fortunately, he also won. This put Alec into the semi-finals, where he continued to improve through every round. Unfortunately, he lost the match in overtime (it was a tie at the end of regulation and a sudden death round is contested in which the first point scored/deducted determines the winner). Despite the loss, Alec is off to a great competitive start, and came home with a Bronze medal.

Some random quotes from Alec:

"I learned so much about myself during this weekend. I learned to be happy with just being there and that I already have done good work just to get to this point.....I learned so many life skills. Patience and self-control when I didn't win were big ones....I won a Bronze medal. That was so cool.....I met a lot of really nice kids. We all were talking and getting to know each other when waiting to compete together. I really had fun with Levi. He is a good friend to me....The plane ride was awesome.....It was really cool to see Dallas and experience everything I did in Dallas....I could not believe how many people were there competing. I felt really really proud of myself! ...Meeting Steven Lopez..totally cool!!!"

On Sunday, July 1st, **Levi King** competed in the black belt (12-13) division. Levi had competed at Nationals in 2009 and 2010, and was excited to be back.

Levi faced a huge division in Poomsae, and it was conducted very similar to Alec's division. The difference was that for each round, a different Form was required. Levi did Taegeuk Oh Jang in his first round and advanced to the second round to perform Taegeuk Pal Jang. Again, very stiff competition prevented Levi from advancing any further, but he had solid performances in both rounds.

In Sparring, Levi delivered some exciting action in his first match and advanced to the round of 16. In his second round Levi came up short and lost by only 1 point. Competition in the Black belt divisions is increasingly tougher every year, and this year was clearly no exception. Despite the loss, Levi showed much more confidence than ever before this year, and his future continues to be very bright.

Levi added:

“I was really excited to spar at Nationals this year instead of being really nervous during my other two trips to Nationals. I was excited to compete against the top US competition.”

Garrett Baker was our only junior (14-17) black belt that competed at Nationals this year. Garrett is a veteran competitor at Nationals, and is truly a formidable challenger. His ring experience and strong progression over the past year definitely showed, despite a first round loss in Sparring. Garrett’s opponent ended up taking the gold, but Garrett gave him a great match. He’s going to be one to watch in the coming years. Garrett would have another chance later in the week as he competed in the Senior Division.

On Tuesday, July 3rd, **Kristi George** and I competed in our Poomsae Divisions. This year, instead of having a separate Poomsae Team Trials, it was decided that the Nationals would be the trials for the 2012 team. As you are aware there are multiple divisions in which we compete.

Kristi had a great day, winning both her individual category as well as winning with her 3-person team.

Unfortunately, we took 2nd place in the pairs division, after a two year run as team members. My team, with Masters Turgeon and Southwick also came in 2nd place after a four year run as team members. With the new age change in these divisions, we struggled against competitors 15-20 years younger and although we beat several, it was not enough to place first.

Kristi remarked:

“The talent level at Nationals this year was the best I’ve ever seen. I was disappointed we did not win pairs, but it will be great to represent the U.S. in Individual and Team categories!”

Fortunately, I was able to come back from a 3rd place position after the preliminary round of my individual division and win in the finals. Competition was extremely close. I won the spot by .001 (1/100th) of a point!

We will represent the United States at the 7th World Poomsae Championships being held in Tunja, Colombia in December.

On Wednesday, July 4th both **Jeremy Raymer** and **Garrett Baker** competed in the Senior (18-32) Black Belt Sparring Division. Both of these gentlemen fought very strongly. It was evident on this final day of competition that the officials were getting tired, because there was very errant scoring and calling of penalties throughout the day which was rampant in every ring. However, this is what we must accept when participating in subjective competition.

Garrett came out even stronger in the senior division. Unfortunately, the officials chose to award points to his opponent (6 total), when his opponent’s foot hit Garrett’s shoulder (a non-valid scoring area). These put him in a do-or-die situation, as this cannot be protested. Garrett did his best to catch up including attempting a knock-out on a couple of occasions (which is legal in this division). Garrett demonstrated his tenacity and competitive determination all the way to the end.

Unfortunately, time ran out and he lost the match. This was extremely frustrating, but Garrett showed his maturity after the match by displaying a great attitude. Garrett has been competing for over 10 years and is very familiar with how this can happen. His time is close at hand.

Jeremy started the day out with a (8-6) win over a competitor from California. He then faced a competitor from Massachusetts and won (10 – 8). In over a decade of competitive sparring, this was the best I have seen Jeremy in the ring. For those who saw him compete at Indy Cup earlier this year, he was even better this time than in those matches. Jeremy advanced to the semi-finals against a competitor from Colorado who was much taller.

At first, we thought his competitor's height (6' 6") would be challenging, but it turned out that he was much slower and Jeremy managed the distance well. Additionally, his competitor did not have the stamina or the ferocity that Jeremy presented. Yet despite all of this, this competitor was not being penalized for going out of bounds or for stalling. Jeremy was really wearing him out and he was falling a lot during the match, but the official chose not to penalize him. I am convinced this would have made a difference in the outcome, but we had to settle for a (3-6) loss as the calls could not be protested.

The good news is that Jeremy took the Bronze medal. By earning a Bronze and placing in the top four, he has secured a spot to compete at the U.S. National Team Trials in January 2013! The winner of these trials will represent the U.S. at the World Sparring Championships next year in Mexico, so you can expect to see Jeremy training even harder to prepare for the trials! Two years ago he competed at the Team Trials as a Heavyweight, so he has previous experience at this level. Now going back as a Middleweight, along with more experience makes us very optimistic!

Jeremy added:

"I had a great experienceAll of the hard work and training at KTA has paid off. I placed third in the nation..... and qualified for the World Team Trials at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, CO. January will be here before we know it...so it's back to focusing, training and visualizing the GOLD. It's our time."

In summary, this entire team of athletes from KTA did a fantastic job again this year at the National level! I could not be prouder, as they put everything they had into every round of competition. This is what is required at this level and they all met that requirement with spirit, discipline, and honor!

I would like to thank all the KTA parents and families who supported the athletes all year at the tournaments we attended, which laid the groundwork for our success. Thanks also for the support of Mrs. Larson, Mr. King, & Mr. & Mrs. Baker for the efforts they made and the support they gave us in Dallas – which led to such great performances and results by the entire team.

Although not everyone chooses to measure the success of a martial arts school by its students' tournament victories, it is impossible not to see the quality of the skills by those who compete and represent a given school; which is a clear indicator about the quality of education and instruction received. KTA is the only school in Indiana and in the Midwest that brought home high results in both disciplines – Poomsae and Sparring. Two are

heading to World Poomsae Championships and one is advancing on to Team Trials for next year's World Kyoroogi (Sparring) Championships! You cannot do much better than that!!