

Beat: Miscellaneous

An Evening Of Champions

Young martial arts champions converge

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USPA NEWS - Here we are folks. It is nighttime at the 36th annual Ocean State Grand Nationals extravaganza 2016. Red carpet superstar Cynthia Rothrock has arrived as well as many other prominent martial arts cornerstones.

Saturday morning started bright and early for us at the Ocean State Grand National Karate Championships Competing in Ring 9 Plaza Ballroom were men's blackbelt thirty years plus in traditional weapons, creative weapons, traditional forms, creative forms, and fighting in four weight classes. That is where we found challengers from across the USA, Canada, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico. While waiting for the matches to begin, a young man introduced himself to me like I was part of his family. He is kind, full of life and dedicates (win or loss) all he has to God. His name is Ramon Fernandez of Puerto Rico. As I watched him interact with the other competitors he did the same, as if he were rooting for everyone to win.

We captured the spirit that each competitor brought to their bout. For some matches there was but one challenger, resulting in automatic wins. Then each winner from all the disciplines faced off to determine who would be Grand Champion. Though competition was high caliber, at the end of the day Ramon Fernandez won Grand Champion!

Upon examining the other competition rooms we found many had completed for the day. However, we heard a crowds roar with loud background music coming from the Rotunda, Rings 11 and 12, that drew us towards the festivities. Here we found 16 to 17 year old boys and girls competing in their respective rings. It was standing room only and that was limited too. We caught a glimpse of a few of their amazing performances and then moved on to prepare for the evening main events.

Here we are folks. It is nighttime at the Ocean State Grand Nationals extravaganza 2016. Red carpet superstar Cynthia Rothrock has arrived as well as many other prominent martial arts cornerstones. With the wind of fortune blowing our way, we were blessed with the opportunity to capture heartfelt moments of them sharing updates with their life-long friends. We were honored to be a part of those, Thank you.

They have set center stage ablaze with a sensational display of aerial tricks, precision routines, sharp jabs, high kicks and skilled weaponry. The culmination of the first 2 days of this 3 day event began at 7 pm with Grand Master Don Rodrigues and his wife Christine Bannon-Rodrigues welcoming competitors, sponsors, and martial arts families and friends, special guests and award presenters. Distinguished community members and martial arts legacies gathered to honor the accomplishments of present blackbelt champions as well as past phenoms.

The pattern of this evening's events was woven together perfectly to set the tone and pace of the night. Entertain, electrify, award"next. With thousands of dollars on the line in prize money and gifts the bar gets raised on their performances.

*First up was the USA National Anthem, followed by the best competing for overall championship.

*Demo Team Winners: Team Impulse with award presenters Greg Ruth and Charlie Lane

*13 and under Blackbelt Forms: Finals competitors Aidan Kennedy, Ethan Allesandro and Haley (Bulletproof) Glass. Winner Aidan Kennedy with presenters Mayor Scott Averdisian, City Council President Donna Travis, and Karen Jedson

*14 - 17 Blackbelt Forms: Finals competitors Noelle Jellison, Rebecca Yah, Zachary Jarvis, and Danny Etkin. Winner Danny Etkin with presenters Joe Greenhalgh and Christopher Rodrigues

*Woman's Weapons: Finals competitors Jasmine Kitterman, Kim Ross, Sammy Smith, and Mackenzie Emory. Winner Mackenzie

Emory with presenters David Bossinette, Claire Cocozza, and Samuel Gagnon

*Men's Weapons: Finals competitors Reid Presley, Jared Chastain, Jackson Rudolph, and Shahin Jahanvash. Winner Jackson Rudolph with presenters Dennis Brown and Lee Ireland

*Power Breaking Demo by John Kanabay with presenter Tony Cogliandro

Introduction of Grand Master Kevin Thompson. Special tribute and standing ovation was given to former world champion Grand Master Kevin Thompson who continues in his fight against ALS. Chris Rappold, Executive Director of Paul Mitchell Karate introduced Kevin Thompson as the "undisputed best all around sports martial artist of all time."^[2]

Mr. Rappold expressed that following Kevin being diagnosed with ALS several years ago, "his spirit today burns brighter than when he was in the ring." Chris implored everyone to join in helping Kevin to find a cure for ALS. Last year the Kevin Thompson Board Breaking Challenge was initiated in hopes to help fund this quest. This year the National Association of ALS is in consideration of switching our the ice bucket challenge with the board breaking challenge, the movement Kevin started.

Everyone was urged to purchase a T-shirt in which proceeds go to Kevin Thompson's family, and asked to take a video or picture of yourself breaking through a board (write "Breaking Through ALS"^[2] on the board) and post it to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. along with using #BreakingThroughALS in the message. If we can get one million (1,000,000) posts in the next two weeks the ALS Association will solidify this movement. Mr. Rappold ended with, "Together we will find a cure for ALS!"^[2]

Immediately following Mr. Rappold's suggestion swarms of audience members took his advice to heart and went to the front table to purchase their T-shirts and break their board in support of Kevin Thompson. Even our Iron Leaf Press Team participated in the efforts.

*Men's Team Sparring: Team Paul Mitchell vs Team Str8Up. Winner Team Paul Mitchell with presenters David Wahl and Melissa Torres

*Women's Blackbelt Sparring: Katie Lacy vs Nikki Pelland. Winner Nikki Pelland with presenters Rich Baptista and Grand Master Bob Cheezic

*13 and under Weapons: Finals competitors Aidan Kennedy, Jake (The Snake) Presley and Haley (Bulletproof) Glass. Winner Jake Presley with presenters Larry Carnahan and Mike Sawyer

*14 - 17 Weapons Grand Championship: Finals competitors Isabella Caracta, Aidan Considine, Trinity Davis, and Nico Rivera. Winner Aidan Considine with presenters Gina and Anthony Zangari

*Hall Of Fame Awards: Inductees Henry Guidoboni, Jackie Greenhalgh, Jim Smith, Gerald Dawson, (not present) Barbara Bernhardt, and Denise Rouleau.

*Special Recognition to Grand Master Bob Cheezic

The Tori Lynn Andreozzi Foundation was inspired through the devastating damages sustained by 12-year old Tori who was hit by a drunk driver. This award asks the deserving recipient to make a pledge to accept responsibility for their choices and with courage and hope live out and inspire others to make positive choices as well.

*The Winds of Change Award: The first recipient ever to receive this humble honor is Jackson Rudolph

*Synchronized Forms: Reid Presley and Tyler Weaver with presenters Julie Sowa and Cathy Andreozzi

*Men's Blackbelt Traditional Forms: Finals competitors Joey Castro, Jean Paul Panizza and Shahin Jahanvash. Winner Shahin Jahanvash with presenter Cynthia Rothrock

*Women's Blackbelt Forms Grand Championship: Finals competitors Maia DiDomenico, Sammy Smith, Jasmine Kitterman, Kim Ross, and Mackenzie Emory. Winner Mackenzie Emory with presenter Maurice Elmalem

*Men's Blackbelt CMX Forms: Finals competitors Reid Presley vs Tyler Weaver. Winner Tyler Weaver with presenter Tom Festa

*Men's Blackbelt Light Weight Fighting:
Justin Ortiz vs Kevin Walker - Winner Justin Ortiz with presenter Mohammad Johanvash

*Men's Blackbelt Heavy Weight Fighting:
Anthony Merricks vs Zsolt Moradi - Winner Zsolt Moradi with presenter Mark Russo

Ladies and Gentlemen this was one fun filled night to remember. The Rodrigues's, Don Rodrigues Karate and all that lent a hand have done it again. Well done.

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