



Sometimes
you just
have to
Kiai*!



The martial arts as a healthy response to discrimination. Participants at the 2002 Gay Games share their experiences.

By Anthony Mohamed

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* Kiai (pronounced "key-eye") is a Japanese word referring to the yell or scream that martial artists use at the point of impact of an attack or block. The kiai results in releasing your 'ki' or internal life force (chi or qi in Chinese), allowing an opportunity to deliver a movement with focus, power, and strength. It is important to recognize that there is sometimes no sound associated with a kiai, as it is not the sound that defines focus or power. (Adapted from blackdragonsden.com)

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Profiles of Martial Artists from the Gay Games 2002

Name: Hao Thai
Representing: USA
Gender: Male
Sexuality: Gay
Ethnicity: East-Asian
Age group: 26-40
Primary martial art: Wushu
Current rank: Advanced (no formal ranking)
Training for: 3 years



2002 was Hao's first time competing at the Gay Games. He decided to come to, *"bring exposure to Wushu. It's the official national sport of China and will be in the Beijing summer Olympic games, yet no one knows of it outside of Asia."*

When asked about racism he replied, *"in secondary school I'd have Chinese slurs said to me. I grew up in a conservative, primarily white part of the US (Salt Lake City). However, because I'm Chinese, my classmates naturally assumed I knew martial arts. This "protected" me from violence. So I decided to actually learn it."*

Although it has been difficult to dedicate six to nine hours a week to training, as well as the physical and mental demands, he doesn't find this to be unreasonable. As in all martial arts, there is always a risk of injury both to yourself and others but he sees this as par for the course and the vast majority of competitors are not out to hurt anyone, including themselves.

Since beginning Wushu he believes that his self esteem and self confidence have really improved, especially knowing that he is, *"able to move in ways that others cannot."* He said that it's also a very good cardio workout, adding greater flexibility and balance to his life, both mentally and physically. Regarding the community of martial artists, he said that the *"pain and exhaustion of training brings team mates closer."* In addition, he notes that being a part of Wushu has given him a greater connection to and pride in his Chinese heritage.

"I need to show people that gay folks are in Wushu."

Profiles of Martial Artists from the Gay Games 2002

Name: Anonymous
Representing:
Gender:
Sexuality:
Ethnicity:
Age group:
Primary martial art:
Current rank:
Training for:

One competitor decided to remain anonymous as s/he worried that the discrimination still faced by people living with HIV/AIDS might affect his/her chances to participate in future competitions.

This person has been HIV positive since s/he began training in the martial arts but decided not to disclose this status publicly. Even though no one has said anything negative regarding HIV or AIDS to this person, s/he expressed a concern that some people may feel uncomfortable sparring with him/her. The reality is that sometimes there can be a cut that bleeds and although the realistic chance of transferring the virus is next to none, others may avoid contact for this reason. As well, some countries have a ban on allowing HIV+ people to enter, even as visitors.

The medications that this competitor must take sometimes causes stomach aches, low energy and dizziness. This situation affects his/her performance from day to day.

This person said that, *“the martial arts has helped strengthen my body, mind and spirit. However, the social stigma of HIV can be overwhelming. As a result, I choose to stay quiet, keep my spirits high and hope that no one finds out.”*

“...the martial arts has helped strengthen my body, mind and spirit.”

Profiles of Martial Artists from the Gay Games 2002



Name: Marcos E. García-Ojeda
Representing: Puerto Rico
Gender: Male
Sexuality: Gay
Ethnicity: Latin American-Caribbean
Age group: 26-40
Primary martial art: Jujitsu
Current rank: Purple Belt
Training for: 6 years

“I love the feeling of competition and comradery at the Gay Games.”

Marcos believes that the martial arts keeps him in shape and more prepared for unpleasant situations. However the fear of injury to himself or others and the time he spends training can be hard.

Regarding discrimination Marcos remembered, *“I lived in the USA for 15 years and I have experienced discrimination for being Latino, male and gay. People used profanities in relation to my ethnicity and called me a ‘spick.’ I was made to feel worthless because of who I am. I would like to hang out with my women friends but sometimes I’m not able to participate in outings just for being male. Some bars will not allow men. I was also bashed for being gay and called many homophobic names.”*

He completed the survey stating *“the martial arts have provided me with increased self esteem and self confidence to deal with discrimination, at both the physical and mental level. I don’t feel like a victim anymore.”*



Sometimes You Just Have To Kiai!

Profiles of Martial Artists from the Gay Games 2002

Name: Kathleen P. Webster
Representing: USA
Gender: Female
Sexuality: Lesbian
Ethnicity: North American
Age group: 41-55
Primary martial art: Kung Fu and Tae Kwon Do
Current rank: 3rd degree Black Belt
Training for: 15 years



Kathleen has been an active member of the past four Gay Games. She participates as an official and teacher, *"...because I believe it's really important for women - lesbian and gay people - to have opportunities to train, learn and achieve any goals we set in a safe environment of respect and inclusion. It's essential that Black Belts are visible role models, leaders and teachers - that we open doors for future martial artists - not just as competitors but also as officials, seminar leaders - we take that energy and achievement home to mainstream martial arts organizations and to all areas of our lives."*

Although the time commitment, fear of injury and demands on the mind and body can be challenging she felt the strengths of self-control, confidence, esteem, exercise, spiritual dimensions and learning new skills that she has gained from the martial arts greatly outweigh them.

Regarding discrimination she offered the following example. *"During an internship in my 2nd year of law school - I had the best appraisals, most billable hours, best results on matters on which I worked - yet someone else was offered a position with the firm. There was no direct proof of sexism or homophobia but I was out to everyone at the time."*

"The martial arts has given me the confidence to believe in myself, to know that I can work hard to achieve any goal I set and succeed - no matter what other people think, say or do. My training helps me focus my anger in a productive, healthy way rather than negative and self-destructive. It calms me, gives me visible proof of my progress towards goals. My training has gotten me through fears, loss, crisis, challenges - in many areas/times of my life."

"The martial arts has given me the confidence to believe in myself."

Profiles of Martial Artists from the Gay Games 2002



Name: Hao Nguyen
Representing: Australia
Gender: Male
Sexuality: Gay
Ethnicity: East-Asian
Age group: 26-40
Primary martial art: Kung Fu
Current rank: Yellow Belt
Training for: 1 year

“The martial arts... teaches you discipline, fairness and humility to help better understand differences.”

This was Hao’s first time participating at the Gay Games. Being a ‘Sydney-Sider’ (how Sydney residents refer to themselves) this was his opportunity to show ambition and commitment to the martial arts. He also wanted the world to know that Australians know how to put on a party!

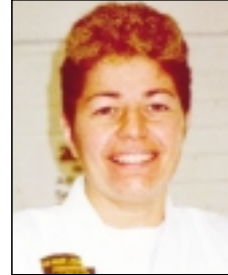
In high school, Hao recalls some homophobic teasing. *“He called a friend and I names like ‘poofa’ and I told the bully to back off...he didn’t and started to get physical so I kicked him, which scared him off. He actually thought I already knew martial arts!”*

The financial cost of his training, the demands on his body and the time commitment required have been difficult but he agrees that the exchange is reasonable. Since beginning Kung Fu he has noticed his self esteem and control have increased. He enjoys learning new skills and has noticed his fitness level and spiritual focus have also improved.

“The martial arts gives you self confidence and awareness of possible dangerous situations that you might be able to avoid or deal with. It also teaches you discipline, fairness and humility to help better understand differences.”

Profiles of Martial Artists from the Gay Games 2002

Name: Adelina Santiago
Representing: USA
Gender: Female
Sexuality: Lesbian
Ethnicity: Latin American
Age group: 41-55
Primary martial art: Tae Kwon Do
Current rank: 1st degree Black Belt
Training for: unknown



Adelina has participated in numerous Gay Games events. She said that, *"it is an opportunity of a lifetime to compete against other martial artists from around the world."* There are many committed competitors who continue to impress her.

"The martial arts help me center, especially when the journey to peace is helping people understand and respect you as a person. I am confident that if threatened I will protect myself, family and friends."

"...martial arts help me center..."

Name: Jez Martin
Representing: Australia
Gender: Male
Sexuality: Gay
Ethnicity: Caribbean
Age group: 26-40
Primary martial art: Kung Fu and Karate
Current rank: Yellow Belt
Training for: 1 year



Living in Australia made it relatively easy for Jez to compete at his first Gay Games. When asked for an example of discrimination he has experienced, he replied that, *"...isms of all types occur all the time. Often these things are very subtle but their presence is still felt."*

Since beginning Kung Fu a year ago he has noticed that, in addition to his fitness level, his self control, confidence and esteem have all increased, especially when he can actually learn and apply new skills.

"...isms of all types occur all the time."

International Resources for LGBTIQ Martial Artists

International Association of Gay and Lesbian Martial Artists (IAGLMA)

www.iaglma.org

Federation of Gay Games (FGG)

www.gaygames.com

Gay Games VII (Montreal) Rendez-Vous 2006

www.montreal2006.org

International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA)

www.ilga.org

International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC)

www.iglhrc.org

International Association of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered Pride Coordinators, Inc.

www.interpride.org
