

# NIGERIAN TAEKWONDO – On The Ascendancy

-By George H. Ashiru

## TAEKWONDO HISTORY IN NIGERIA

A gentleman from Cote D'Ivoire, a French speaking country in the West African coast is credited for introducing Jidokwan Taekwondo to Nigeria in the year 1975. Aikpa Aime was a direct student of Grandmaster Kim Yong Tae, Korea's pioneer Taekwondo instructor in Africa since 1967. The Jidokwan school became successful and three pioneering black belts of Aikpa Aime; Dominic Basse, Emmanuel Ikpeme and Kofi Anani, began the great task of building the legacy bestowed upon them since 1977. In the same period (1976), Messrs Don Lee, Jerry Parker and Robert Beaudoin, all Americans, also visited Nigeria in different capacities and introduced the Moo Duk Kwan methods in Western and Northern Nigeria. At this time George Ashiru became a pioneering student of the Moo Duk Kwan school, and later transferred to the Jido Kwan. The Chung Do Kwan school also sprung up in Western Nigeria, pioneered by Mr. Deola Kumpayi.

In the ten ensuing years, these pioneers and their junior colleagues had established what became the most successful martial arts in Nigeria. The Jidokwan school later morphed into the Kukkiwon system under the leadership of various foreign experts, notably Masters Guack Ki Ok, then residing in Ghana; Masters Park Jung Tae and Kim, Moo Cheon, who were brought to train the Nigerian Army in 1983 and other visiting instructors. This group organized to form the Nigeria Taekwondo Black Belt College and subsequently, the Nigerian Taekwondo Association that was formally recognized by the Nigerian Government and the World Taekwondo Federation in 1987.

The Chung Do Kwan school grew independently and affiliated with the International Taekwondo Federation, but did not expand much due to the greater influence of the Kukkiwon methods on the Taekwondo community. However, individual instructors who traveled to live abroad were able to bring about resurgence in the popularity of the ITF, especially in recent years. This culminated in the hosting of Africa's first ITF International Umpire Course in Lagos, in 2005, and the grading of 32 new umpires and over 50 International Black Belts.

The Moo Duk Kwan school developed independently, joining with the U.K. based World Korean Karate Federation in the early 1980s and spread mainly through the Nigerian universities system by the effort of Master George Ashiru. In the 1990s, the members of this community elected to join with the World Tang Soo Do Association under Grandmaster Jae Chul Shin. This was a glorious period for the Moo Duk Kwan community as Tang Soo Do became a household name again, with membership granted the Nigeria Tang Soo Do Federation by the Nigerian Olympic Committee (probably the first in the world) and allowed to be a demonstration tournament at the Nigerian Olympics. Several states of the federation also created their own state sponsored associations, ensuring the continual existence of Tang Soo Do in Nigeria.

However, the Jido Kwan's Kukkiwon involvement is the greatest success story of Nigerian Taekwondo. Great strides were made in the sporting side of Taekwondo, which created far more interest in the arts and produced more membership than the traditional one-on-one mentorship that characterized the old schools. Taekwondo quickly became a universal art that was adopted by all the military forces, schools at all levels and even private organizations and foreign embassies. The interests created led the formalization of coaching qualification with the establishment of the Taekwondo coaching curriculum at the prestigious National Institute for Sports in 1992 by Master George Ashiru.

Nigerian athletes were winning medals at all international events; African Championships, World Championships, World Cup and the Olympic Games. World class athletes were coming up yearly, like; Emmanuel Oghenejobo, Martins Obiorah, Chika Chukwmerije, Princess Dudu e.t.c.

## **THE FUTURE**

Nigeria, as the largest black nation in the world – with one in every three Africans being a Nigerian – also has, per square meter, more talents than all other African nations. The harnessing of these talents presents the greatest challenge for the current leaders of Taekwondo in Nigeria. The potential is huge and the opportunity is also massive for professional instructors in Nigeria. The nation is steadily growing on economic front and Nigeria is Africa's first totally debt free country, having paid out \$18 billion in one year to all her creditors. The future for the country and for her youth and the Taekwondo is great and invite lovers of our arts to look toward Nigeria for the world and Olympic greats.

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