

Winter Nationals

By Mark Hatton for Real Judo

The 2nd annual USJA Winter Nationals were held in Ontario, California (30 miles east of Los Angeles) on December 1st and 2nd, 2007. There were over 500 registered participants in '07, up 10% from the inaugural 2006 Winter Nationals. Sensei Gary Goltz, 7th Dan, COO of the USJA, and head of Goltz Judo Club launched the Winter Nationals to fill a perceived need: "Towards the end of the year our calendar, especially on the West Coast, provided no opportunity for serious competition to judo players. Basically there was a hole the schedule."

Well, there is a hole no longer. Goltz' Winter Nationals is as successful as any two-year old tournament we know of. Nationally ranked players and Olympic hopefuls Ronda Rousey and Aaron Kunihiro (to name only two) competed in the Winter Nationals in '07 keeping their technique sharp against a variety of competitors. But Goltz lays the initial strength of the event not at the depth of the competition pool but on his team's focus from the beginning on the peripherals.

"First Zebra mats have been huge in stepping up and understanding what we were trying to do and making sure we got it done right, both before and after the fact. An enlightened sponsor can't be overestimated," observed Goltz. USJA donor of the year Dr. James Lally, Chief Medical Officer of Chino Valley Medical Center and a nidan at Goltz' club brought in an experienced medical team accustomed to working



together which provided a basis for security for all athletes, plan sponsors and coaches.

Next referees must be found and Goltz' 40+ years in judo and network of respectful judo colleagues brought in some of the most experienced. They were anchored by Head Referee Hayward Nishioka and included Robert Fukuda and Frank Morales as



well as Bernie Semel. The event was coordinated using a state of the art scoreboard and pooling program projected on 40" monitors developed by Goltz' team of judo IT experts.

Goltz said "one of the things we would like to establish at our 2008 Winter Nationals is a referee clinic with Hayward Nishioka. This would work in tandem with our already-established coach certification program with Jim Pedro. We also hope to continue keeping the tournament and related clinics very affordable for families looking for an escape from the snow.

And that's the truth of it, no sooner are the mats picked up then the Tournament Director is planning for the next event. How to improve, streamline, economize, and enhance the players' experience? Who should we invite to next teach at next year's carousel where numerous national and international senseis move from mat to mat in twenty minute intervals demonstrating their favorite tech-



Photography courtesy of Gary Wagstaff

niques? Teachers have included Jim Bregman, Jim and Jimmy Pedro, AnnMaria and Ronda Rousey, George Harris, Tony Okada, & Jin Iizumi. Such questions roil Goltz' mind daily.



Real Judo pressed Sensei Goltz by asking "What makes this event any better or different other than its place on the calendar and location in California's Inland Empire?" Goltz thought for a time, laughed and became less the event promoter and more himself in answering: "What's really cool about the Winter Nationals for me is the variety of players, the grass roots feel of the event, the clinics for competitors, coaches, and referees. We had a team from Tasei High School in Japan that competed.

Our team was coached by Jim Pedro. and while we won a couple of matches they basically took us to school. We learned a great deal and everyone had a blast."

When summed up that way we know Goltz' original Pittsburgh, PA Sensei Kyu Ha Kim would be very proud. 2008's third annual Winter Nationals will be held the first weekend in December (5, 6 and 7) that has been so helpful to date. "Sensei Kim will be one of our featured clinicians in the coming year", according to Goltz

This year's event will be even bigger as is it now going to be a joint USJA and USJF event! The Winter Nationals are serviced best through Ontario International Airport (ONT). More information can be found at www.goltzjudo.com. Real Judo will see you at matside!