

# Titans in Taekwondo

## Ron “Hopper” Bilton takes on the World

*Researched and written by John Burchill, Vice President, Winnipeg Police Museum and Historical Society*

In our continuing salute to Canada’s Summer Games, taking place this summer in Winnipeg, we recognize another one of our own members who was on the national stage as a four-time medalist in taekwondo. Although not an event at the Canada Games, it is an Olympic and Pam-Am medal event and an optional sport in the Commonwealth Games. In addition, there are annual Canadian championships.

Taekwondo is a traditional Korean martial art, which means “the way of kicking and punching”. It is characterized by its head-height kicks, jumping and spinning kicks, and fast kicking techniques. While the hands may also be used, the sport’s trademark is its combination of kicks.



While taekwondo is a relatively recent sport, developed during the 1940s and ‘50s, it incorporates various elements of karate and Han Chinese Kung-Fu with traditional Korean martial arts traditions dating back two thousand years. It subsequently became the dominant form of martial arts practised in Korea. In 1973 the first World Taekwondo Championships were held in Seoul, Korea.

Taekwondo made its debut as a medal event at the Pam American Games in 1987 in Indianapolis and was a demonstration sport the following year at the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul. It was again a demonstration sport in 1992 and in 2000 it became an official medal sport at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games.

Taekwondo is also an optional sport in the Commonwealth Games, although it has never been a medal event. While other individual combat events such as Judo and Wrestling, and previously Boxing, are medal events at the Canada Games, Taekwondo is not. However national championships are still held on an annual basis in Canada.

One of the early Canadian taekwondo pioneers was Sergeant Ron Bilton. Born in Winnipeg in 1960, Ron took up Taekwondo at an early age and entered his first tournament in 1972. Ron received his black belt in 1978 and competed in his first national championships in 1983. In 1984 he won his first Canadian national championships as a welterweight.

In 1986 Ron won the Canadian championships again in Toronto and went on to fight that year in the World Cup in Colorado Springs and the Pan American Taekwondo Championships in Ecuador, but did not place.



## **Bilton named to team**

Winnipeg's Ron Bilton was named to the national taekwon do team following a selection competition in Toronto last weekend.

Bilton will compete for Canada at the World Cup in Colorado Springs in July, a competition that launches preparations for the 1988 Olympics in Seoul, South Korea, at which taekwon do will be a demonstration sport.

In 1987 Ron again won the Canadian championships in Saskatoon, securing himself a place as team captain at the Pan American Games in Indianapolis in August. Unfortunately, Ron broke his ankle with a hard kick to his opponent during his opening match. While he scored enough points to win his match, he was unable to successfully complete the rest of the tournament. Nevertheless, his ankle had mended enough to compete in the 1987 World Games in Barcelona, Spain, in October that year. Again he was selected as team captain but did not medal.

## **Sparrers earn bronze**

Gold medals were sparse, but Winnipeg fighters managed to capture a few bronze medals in sparring at the 1989 Canadian National Taekwondo Championships.

Five local competitors earned bronze medals in sparring at the event, which took place at Red River Community College, May 27.

Roger Cordoviz, Victor Luke, and Ron Bilton placed third in the country in the flyweight, featherweight, and welterweight divisions respectively. Tammy Skrabek and Angela Sann tied for third place in the women's heavyweight division.

Local entries fared better in the pattern competition, sweeping the junior male division. Steven Bautista finished first, followed by Jason Woo and Sal Loria. Roger Cordoviz won the first dan pattern event, with Luu Ha placing third. Paul Affleck won the second dan event, and Keith Saunders won the bronze in third dan competition.

Almyra Gomez placed second in the junior female pattern competition. Colleen won bronze in first dan, and Tammy matched her sparring bronze with a bronze medal in second dan patterns.

After the World Games were over Ron joined the Winnipeg Police Service on February 1, 1988 (Badge #1549). While he was unable to attend the Seoul Olympics, graduating instead from police recruit class #110 on the same day as the opening ceremonies, Ron still had one more national taekwondo tournament in him after becoming a police officer. In May 1989 Ron earned a bronze medal in the 1989 Canadian championships in Winnipeg. After retiring from competition Ron remained in the sport as a coach and trainer until 1994. In 2012 he published a book on his life experiences called "One Piece of a Life".

# She was a leader for young women in the sport

During the 1989 national championships, another young star was rising - Tammy Skrabek. She had previously followed her three brothers into the sport and showed great promise early on. She began training in 1984 and earned a black belt by 1986 when she began competing at a national level. Tammy placed in the top three of her division at the Canadian Nationals, three years in a row. She took home the Canadian gold medal in 1989, launching her onto the international stage. Tammy trained at the Olympic Training Centre in Colorado Springs for a month prior to competing in her first World Championships where she placed third, taking home a bronze medal.

While training, Tammy took on the role of assistant instructor at her club, teaching children's class and beginners class, and training adults to compete in sparring. She holds a 4<sup>th</sup> degree black belt (Chang Moo Kwan) and a 4<sup>th</sup> Degree black belt (Kukkiwon), is a certified referee and coach.

After competing, Tammy also joined the Winnipeg Police on June 14, 1993 (Badge #1826) and remained active in the sport for the next decade as an instructor and trainer at her club and the University of Manitoba.

Tammy retired from policing in 2020 and now serves as Curator of the Winnipeg Police Museum and Historical Society.

