

US Junior Pan Am Team points to bright future

It would be impossible to pick just one highlight from the US team's performance at the recent Pan American Junior Championships. And that bodes very well for the future of judo in this country – there were lots of stars and lots of stellar moments at this major youth competition.

The medal total for the team included five gold, seven silver and 12 bronze, an improvement over last year's Pan Am Junior Championships held in El Salvador where the U.S earned 22 medals including three gold.

Competition this year was fierce. Held over Labor Day weekend at Disney's ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex in Orlando, FL, the tournament attracted some of the best young fighters in the hemisphere from more than a dozen countries including Argentina, Colombia, Puerto Rico, Canada, Peru, Costa Rica, Chile, Dominican Republic and a full team representing current Judo powerhouse Brazil.

Making a special appearance at the Pan Ams was Max Schneider (Menomonee Judo Club, Chicago, Illinois) who along with Katelyn Bouyssou (Hope, R.I. / NYAC / Mayo Quanchi Judo Club) took gold at the recent Youth Olympic Games in Singapore.

"The US team had so many great achievements at this tournament," said Brett Wolf, one of several coaches for the Pan American Junior Championship Team and head coach of Menomonee Judo in Chicago.

Some of the highlights for the U.S included the gold medal winning performances by Mindy Chow (Honolulu, Hawaii / Hawaii Tenri), Colton Brown (San Jose, Calif. / USA Judo National Training Site at San Jose State University), Kyle Taketa (Torrance, Calif. / Gardena Judo) and Anthony Igne (North Hollywood, Calif. / Mojica Judo Club).

On her way to the gold, Chow scored a beautiful ippon with an uchi mata to defeat 2009 Cadet World Judo Champion Flavia Gomes (BRA). Taketa, the most experienced player on the U.S team improved on his bronze medal performance from last year in El Salvador. His gold medal match went to flags after two minutes of golden score, where he was given his deserved victory. Brown was dominant the entire day, using clean technique and superior strength to score ippons in three of his four matches. Igne, one of the youngest players on the U.S team had a breakout performance. He used eye catching speed and a variety of seoi nages to earn the gold.

"With this coming on the heels of USA Judo's fantastic showing at the Youth Olympics and the World Cup in Miami, the future looks really bright," Wolf said. "Many of the IJF members of the U.S Junior Pan Am team will be heading to Morocco this October to compete at the IJF Junior World Championships."

The team of 30 from the United States consisted of a mix of experienced players from previous Pan Am teams and a group representing the country for the first time. In addition to Wolf, the Pan American Junior Championship Team was coached by Gerry Navarro (Panther Judo, Pembroke Pines, Fla.) and Jhonny Prado (USA Judo National Training Site at South Florida, Coral Springs, Fla.). Devin Cohen (Brooklyn, N.Y.) was the team manager.