

Sensei Says

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I hope you can endure one more installment from my recent adventures in South Korea. There seems to be one important aspect of the trip that I have not addressed yet.

That, of course, is the international conspiracy that caused the disruption of my trip.

As some of my readers have surmised, the trip didn't go as smoothly as my companions and I had anticipated. What external forces could possibly alter the travel plans of an all-powerful Sensei and cause him and his friends such inconveniences? There must have been more powerful forces at work!

To root out the conspirators we have to go all the way to the top of the power structure, not just of taekwondo, but of control of all amateur sports in the world!

Remember all the stories about the scandalous activities surrounding the upcoming Salt Lake City Winter Olympic Games? Officials on the take, bribes and favors being handed out like Halloween candy, all to encourage the International Olympic Committee to select Salt Lake City as the location for the 2002 Winter Olympics.

It is hard for even the humblest of men to escape the grasp of those obsessed with greed and power. That is the grip I was caught in, and that is where the demise of my trip began...

For the past several years, Dr. Un-Yong Kim, the president of the World Taekwondo Federation (WTF), has been widely regarded as a shoo-in as the next president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). But, unexpectedly, he did not come out the victor when the elections were held this past summer. Instead, he finished a distant second to Jacques Rogge of Belgium. Presumably, Dr. Kim lost the election because he had a minor involvement in the scandals of the Salt Lake Olympics selection. The IOC is trying very hard to let that black eye heal, and they wanted their new president to have a squeaky clean record.

Dr. Kim had expected to win the IOC presidency, and, presumably for that reason, did not put his name on the ballot to run again for the presidency of the World Taekwondo Federation. Seeing that no one was running for the position, one of the WTF vice-presidents placed his own name on the presidential ballot. That left an opening for his vice-presidential position.

Two people decided to run for the available vice-president's position. One was Sang Lee, the president of the United States Taekwondo Union (USTU); the other was Dr. Cha Sok Park, the president of the Pan-American Taekwondo Union (PATU).

Bored yet? Let me spice things up.

The election of officers of the WTF was to be held in Cheju, South Korea during the World Taekwondo Championships, and the above-mentioned Dr. Cha Sok Park was the host of my trip.

Unbeknownst to us, the group we were traveling with was looked upon as political posturing and a show of strength by Dr. Park. He enticed us by offering an instructors' training trip at (seemingly) a great price. He got delegates from North,

Central and South America to join his group. Many who attended were presidents of their own nations' taekwondo associations.

Each country, no matter how small, is allotted one vote. So, Aruba's vote is just as powerful as the United States' (or South Korea's, for that matter). There were a LOT of votes sitting on the bus with us!

According to inside information, in an attempt to undermine the trip, Sang Lee notified all of his U.S. people to boycott the trip. In addition, he used his clout in Seoul to bring a halt to the instructor's training program, which had been planned for us. This was to be only the third time the complete program had been offered.

It was virtually impossible for Dr. Park to get any of the Korean masters to assist him with our trip. None of them wanted to appear to be choosing sides and potentially jeopardize their political futures. One Korean master helped us arrange our hotel stay in Cheju. But, the next day at the tournament he told us, "good luck" and said he couldn't even risk being seen talking to us anymore!

Meanwhile, Dr. Park was off campaigning and unavailable to help us with any problems we encountered.

Dr. Park blamed all of our misfortunes during the trip on the LA travel agency that had setup the trip, and on the political greed of others. I will probably never know where the truth lies, but I did learn that you can't convince people to vote for you if you can't find a hotel within 3 hours of Seoul!

So, who won the election, you ask?

What election? After all that, they never even voted for new officers; they just decided to keep things exactly as they were!

Can you think of a more poetic ending?

- Alan Best