

# 40 YEARS IN TAEKWONDO

## 1980

30<sup>th</sup> March – Took part in my first ever taekwondo class. It was at Great Sankey Forum in Warrington with Grandmaster Shin (Mr Shin at the time!). I was 18.

## 1982

Grandmaster Shin had started a class at Norton Recreation Centre in Runcorn. I took over as instructor in the summer of '82, I was a 2<sup>nd</sup> kup red belt at the time. When I took my 1<sup>st</sup> kup black tag grading later that year in Manchester, I had six of my own students taking their first grading.

## 1983

**20<sup>th</sup> Mar – Achieved 1<sup>st</sup> Dan Black Belt (BTCB - Cambridge)**

In March I won the British Team Selection Championships in Bury and was selected to represent the UK at the 6<sup>th</sup> WTF World Championships in Denmark.

I had only fought in 3 tournaments in the UK and the World Championships was my first ever international! It was a massive event, even back then. It was held at a huge venue in Copenhagen and there were 66 countries competing. I couldn't believe people did taekwondo in Tonga, Egypt and Japan! I lost in the first round 1 – 0 to Germany.

## 1984

Expanded my club in Runcorn and formed Halton Taekwondo. The club went on to be one of the biggest and busiest around. A few students went on to represent the UK at majors and we were always in the local paper showing off our achievements.

I lost out in the final of the selection event (against the same player I beat the year before – Martin Baker) and missed out on the European Championships.

## 1985

**20<sup>th</sup> Oct - Achieved 2<sup>nd</sup> Dan Black Belt (BTCB - Stevenage)**

Represented UK at the World Games. This event was for sports with Olympic recognition but not yet on the Olympic programme. It was held at Crystal Palace in London and covered by Channel 4. I fought at -54kg (I couldn't get in at -58kg as Mark Richardson had that spot - he was and still is a very well known taekwondo figure).

I was then selected for the 7<sup>th</sup> World Championships and had my first ever trip to Korea. I was selected for -54kg but Mark Richardson couldn't go, so I moved up to -

58kg. The team included Gary Hall (GB Taekwondo Performance Director) and Lyndsey Lawrence (Three times world medallist).

Korea was a very different place back then, quite poor and under-developed. I remember buying doboks for a pound! The country was preparing for the '88 Olympics and the Worlds were held in one of the venues in the Olympic Park. I'll never forget the opening ceremony! Literally hundreds of Korean kids kicking and breaking boards with absolute military precision. I had so many stories when I got home!

## 1986

Represented UK at European Championships in Seefeld, Austria (having beaten both Mark and Martin that year). There were only 3 players selected for GB by the new Korean team coach. (a junior heavyweight, Chris Sawyer and me). I came really close to a major medal! Had a great match against Spain, no electronic scoreboards in them days, so you had to wait for the ref to raise your arm at the end of the match. The coach and Chris both convinced me I had won before I went back in for the decision. I was devastated! Cried for days!!

## 1988

### **23<sup>rd</sup> Apr - Achieved 3<sup>rd</sup> Dan Black Belt (BTCB - Darlington)**

Graded alongside and partnered with Ian Leafe for sparring etc. Ian was Event Director for GB Taekwondo and is now the British Taekwondo CEO.

March - Did my first Dutch Open. Silver - after 5 matches. It was the first of 6 consecutive Dutch Opens (2 silver, 2 bronze and 2 quarters). Four times I had 5 matches – it was always my favourite event.

November – Couldn't afford to go to Parks Cup in Germany, so I sold my tele and went anyway. Drove with four of my students from Liverpool to Sindelfingen in a Fiesta 1.1! Took 23 hours! It was worth it – beat a player from Poland in the semis (he was just back from competing at the Seoul Olympics) and beat Thomas Myer from Austria in the final – he was one of the top players on the circuit at the time.

## 1990

In January I was appointed captain of the British Team for a GB vs Korea event in Manchester. The Koreans were all World and Olympic Champions. I managed to go the distance with two-time World Champion Kim Chul Ho. There is a video with commentary of the event still doing the rounds today.

## 1991

### **7<sup>th</sup> Apr - Achieved 4<sup>th</sup> Dan Black Belt (GM Shin - Manchester)**

I was invited to take a team to Minsk, Belarus by a Russian coach I had got to know at various internationals. We were really well looked after. We flew to Moscow and given a tour of the city (Red Square, The Kremlin and saw Lenin lying in state). Took an over-night train to Minsk. It was like going back in time. It was only a few years after Chernobyl and Minsk had been badly affected. We arrived early morning and went straight to the weigh-in. It was billed as GB vs Belarus and there were TV cameras there. The audience was entirely made up of military personnel. The only sound they made was to clap whenever the Belarus player kicked. It was all very surreal!

## 1992

The UTA left the BTCB in 1986. For a few years I wasn't eligible to enter any selection events and missed out on the chance of going to majors (including Seoul '88). We re-joined in 1992 and I was selected for the European Championships in Valencia, Spain. Just missed out on the medals again! Quarter final versus Sweden and I misread the manual scoreboard! In those days only every other kyongo was counted except in the event of a tie. It was 4 points each with seconds left, my opponent had the odd kyongo, do nothing and I was in the medals. I just saw 4 all and decided to go in for the winner. He countered and scored. I lost and spent the rest of the trip in tears!

I was working as a staff trainer in the Civil Service at the time and went to Sheffield for a training course in August '92. Angie was doing a similar job in Glasgow and we met on the course, kept in touch after it and the rest is history. The following year I left Halton Taekwondo to one of my senior students (Colin Madigan) and moved to Scotland.

## 1993

A team from Pakistan had attended a competition I had organised and invited me to take a team to Karachi for an international match between Pakistan, Afghanistan and GB. We had a strong team with many national team players involved, stars like Ian Willock, Dave Fraser and Gemma Jones (now Master Gemma - Head Coach for GB Poomsae). We had been promised a 5 star hotel. This wasn't quite what we got, in fact it was a challenging trip. We flew via Moscow and apparently having bags in transit in Moscow at that time was risky! By the time our cases arrived in Karachi, anything of any value had been removed! Lots of amazing experiences on the trip but 11 of the 13 in the group got ill and took quite a while to recover (including me!).

In March I fought at the European Cup in St Petersburg, Russia (the only time I ever fought above 58kg - it was 64kg at the time). Had 3 matches and it seemed like I was in the land of the giants!

Back to 58kg for my last ever competitive tournament in August 83. The 11<sup>th</sup> World Championships. Spent 8 days in New York and fought at Madison Square Garden.

Not a bad way to wind up my competitive career. My first and last matches were both at the World Championships.

I moved to Scotland on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov 93 and started Central Taekwondo on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

## **1995**

**1<sup>st</sup> Oct - Achieved 5<sup>th</sup> Dan Black Belt and became Master Bailey (GM Shin - Cumbria)**

## **1996**

First time back in Korea since the Worlds in 1985. UTA team trip. We trained at high schools, universities and private dojangs. Kicked until we could hardly walk and learned so much my head was spinning! Fantastic trip!

## **2000**

**1<sup>st</sup> Sep - Achieved 6<sup>th</sup> Dan Black Belt (Grandmaster Kim Soon Bae - Seoul)**

Having spent the previous 4 years having kids it was time to go back to Korea again. This time we ventured out of Seoul (after taking my grading there) and toured right around the country. Lots of travelling and very tiring but so many amazing experiences. The story about the university professors eating live seafood is still my go-to after dinner tale to this day.

## **2005**

After a few years building up Central Academy and helping bring up the kids (3 under 3 at one time!!!) back to Korea we went. Took part in the first ever Korea Open. My first international poomsae event. This was before the current scoring system was invented. Knock out system was used. Came away with a bronze.

## **2007**

**27<sup>th</sup> Sep - Achieved 7<sup>th</sup> Dan Black Belt (Grandmaster Kim Soon Bae - Seoul)**

I was preparing the thesis for my 7<sup>th</sup> Dan grading when I came across the details of the “Non-Korean Overseas Masters Essay Competition” being run by the Taekwondo Promotion Foundation (TPF). I re-jigged the thesis and turned it into more of a taekwondo life story – about how I had built up a big club in England and then moved to Scotland, started from scratch and did it again. I added a bit about the positive effect taekwondo had had on my life, sent it off to Korea and forgot all about it.

Later in the year I was back in Korea again! This time I organised the trip myself (no GM Shin!). A bit daunting, especially as was taking a dozen Central students over

with me! It turned out to be one of the best Korea trips I've done. Became 7<sup>th</sup> Dan, lived as a Buddhist monk for the weekend and generally had a great time. The day after we got home, I received an email from the TPF. I had won the essay competition! The prize was a VIP trip to Korea to receive the award from the WTF President. So, 3 weeks later I was back on the plane to Seoul. I was lucky enough to experience an unbelievable seven days as a guest of the TPF. One of the highlights was a visit to Muju to visit the site for the planned Taekwondo Park. It was just a valley in the middle of nowhere at the time. It was opened in 2013 and is now visited by thousands of taekwondo practitioners every year. Later I received a hard-back copy of a book which included my essay. Couldn't believe I was a published author!!

## **2008**

Had a proud dad day in October, when all three of my daughters became black belts at the UTA Dan Grading at Carronshore under Grandmaster Shin.

## **2009**

The standardisation of poomsae worldwide was kicking in and the new poomsae competition rules were up and running. I was selected for the European Poomsae Championships as part of the overs male team. Came 5<sup>th</sup> (just missed out to the Germans!). Close again but still no medal at a major!! Didn't cry this time!

## **2010**

Won the Masters 2 category at the British poomsae nationals and then partnered with the wife to win pairs too! (Did both individual and pairs again in 2012).

## **2011**

A very busy year started with the Commonwealth Championships in Chennai, India. I was there as Head of Team for Scotland. Most of the Scottish Team comprised Central members. My over-riding memory is travelling around the hectic streets of the city in Tuk-Tuks. It was like taking your life into your hands every time you ventured out!

Qualified as a poomsae International Referee in Feb in Sweden and was selected to referee at the European Championships in Genoa, Italy in May. Angie was competing for GB. At one point I was judging the Russian men's team whilst Angie was on the big screen at the back of my court, she was competing on the centre court. That was a difficult few moments!

I went on to referee at the World Poomsae Championships later in the year. It was in Vladivostok, Russia. A 12 hour internal flight from Moscow! A high pressure experience, particularly as the Chief Referee was a very strict Korean Grandmaster, who put the fear of god into all the referees! Angie was competing there too and was

so unlucky not to make the final. Referees and competitors are kept apart at the Worlds. We were restricted to a few secret liaisons in the corridors at the back of the venue!

British Taekwondo held the first ever veteran British Championships in Manchester. As I was due to turn 50 I decided to mark the occasion by making a comeback in the ring. I had 3 matches at -68kg and won it! It felt a bit like slow-motion taekwondo and the bruises took a bit longer to heal but it was a really enjoyable experience.

Also in 2011, after 9 months training and studying, I qualified as a Level 3 Personal Trainer & Advanced Fitness Instructor. It was hard work and quite expensive but the course was fantastic. I learned so much and it was all relevant to taekwondo training. It gave me a lot of confidence as a coach and so many things I could use in class.

## **2012**

Asia had just started to make her mark on the international scene. She was selected for the Junior World Championships. It was in Egypt and I went along to support her. She was meant to be there to gain experience. It was a memorable trip! She was amazing, winning dramatic games against much more experienced girls and became Junior World Bronze Medallist. This was the start of a few amazing years at the top of her game.

Both Angie and I were in London for the duration of the Olympic Taekwondo event. Whilst Angie was right in there with all the competitors as a Technical Official, I had a role as a volunteer Games Maker. Event Director, Mike McKenzie, gave me the best possible role. I was in charge of a small team of people in the Field of Play. I stood at the end of the control table (a few feet away from the court) and watched every single match, live and up close for four days! This included seeing Jade make taekwondo history. Thanks Mike!

## **2013**

I fancied getting back in the ring. The World Masters Games was being held in Italy. Veteran categories begin at over 35!! But here there was a further category for over 46. I gave it a go! Everything went my way on the day and I beat guys from Denmark, Iceland and Canada, who had all been ex-players like myself. The whole experience was fantastic and I was crowned World Masters Games Champion (still dining out on that one!!).

## **2014**

Asia had recovered from injury and was selected for the Senior European Championships in Baku, Azerbaijan. It was the first time Angie had travelled with me to watch Asia compete at an international. Asia was 16 and I think the youngest player at the event. She fought with some of the highest ranking players around and she was brilliant. She got bronze and was one of GBs "Magnificent Seven", which

included Lutalo, Bianca and Jade. To say we were proud would be the biggest understatement ever.

Later that year I was invited to be Event Director for the Commonwealth Taekwondo Championships. It was held at Meadowbank Stadium in Edinburgh and was by far the biggest event I've ever organised. There were massive teams from the home countries, Canada and Australia and many more players from all over the Commonwealth. As there were Olympic ranking points on offer some of the best players around were competing, including the likes of Jade Jones. Thanks to the help of hundreds of helpers and volunteers, it was a memorable event and a massive success.

## **2015**

This was the year Jordyn Smith really made her mark. We were in Strasburg, France to see her become Cadet European Champion and then followed her to Korea to see her become Cadet World Bronze Medallist. Jordyn has since followed in Asia and Hassan's footsteps and become a full time UK Sport funded athlete and is continuing to pursue her dream of Olympic glory.

The Cadet Worlds were held at the Taekwondo Park in Muju. It was the first time I had been back since visiting the area in 2007. It was incredible to see such a vast area dedicated to taekwondo. The Park houses the National Taekwondo Museum. It is a slick black glass modern building with 3 floors. We spent a couple of hours exploring during our visit. On the second floor we found extracts and pictures from my competition winning essay from 2007. It was a very humbling experience to find out I had a mention (albeit small) in the National Taekwondo Museum in Korea!

## **2016**

### **10<sup>th</sup> June - Achieved 8<sup>th</sup> Dan Black Belt (Kukkiwon - Seoul)**

It had been 9 years since my last grading. Arranged to meet Grandmaster Shin in Seoul. He had arranged for me to grade at the Kukkiwon. I had trained there many times but this was the first time I was eligible to take a grading there. Despite there being only a handful of candidates, it was all it was very formal and nerve wracking. It concluded with an interview with the Kukkiwon President in his office. It took 34 years to get to that point. It really felt like achieving something very special! The year was made even more special when Angie passed her 5<sup>th</sup> Dan grading in October and became Master Angie. And I was appointed as a High Performance Coach for BT Poomsae and started taking sessions for the National Poomsae Squad.

## **2017**

Went to Rhodes, Greece in April as British Team Coach for the European Poomsae Championships and then in October went Budapest, Hungary as one of the GB Team Coaches for the European Cadet Championships.

## **2018**

Went back to Rhodes in April as GB Coach for the World Beach Championships. Sun, sea and taekwondo. Brilliant!!

In November we celebrated 25 years of Central Taekwondo Academy with over 100 guests at the Millennium Suite, Beancross Farm. It was a great way to celebrate a very successful quarter of a century for the club, with great food, a few drinks and fantastic Scottish and Scouse entertainment.

## **2020**

Celebrated our 25<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary in February. We decided as we had spent our whole married life involved in taekwondo and taekwondo has been very good to us, we would try give something back. I have been doing taster sessions around primary schools for many years and the kids seem to really enjoy the experience. We found a charity that provides education for the street kids of Nepal. Through "Kids in Kathmandu" we organised some sessions at a school in the city. We combined this with giving a number of free seminars to local clubs. We then travelled from Kathmandu to New Delhi in India and did a similar thing there. It was great to share taekwondo knowledge and experience with students from a totally different cultural background. We will never forget the hospitality and gratitude we received. This trip was one of my favourite ever taekwondo experiences.

And finally ....

Looking back over the last 40 years, there are lots of things to be proud of, on a personal and club level. Taekwondo has been my way of life since as long as I can remember. I've seen a bit of the world (visited 37 countries) and met thousands of like-minded and fantastic people.

Not many people say they love going to work but I genuinely do. The over-riding emotion, after all these years, is one of feeling unbelievably lucky to still be able to practise the art I love and pass it on to others on a daily basis.

My ambition is to continue for another forty years. I'll consider hanging up my dobok after that ..... after all I will be almost a hundred!