

DCs Treat US Karate Team at Goodwill Games in Venezuela

Editorial Staff

PUERTO LA CRUZ, Venezuela -- DCs George Scordilis and Demetri Meimaris' first experience in treating karate competitors on foreign soil was in Nov. 1994 at the International Karate Championships in Athens, Greece. That experience opened the door for Dr. Scordilis to be named chief medical officer for the US Karate Federation and the US Karate team, and Dr. Meimaris to be named a team doctor.

So it was with great anticipation that the doctors joined the US Karate team in Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela for the Onishi Cup International Goodwill Games. But the karate competition got off to poor start when the karate venue was moved from an air-conditioned indoor, wood-floored arena, to the Lumumba Arena, a curious open-air facility with a corrugated tin roof, a filthy cement floor, and temperatures hovering at 110 degrees, and ... humidity.

To add to the general consternation was the ominous news that the night before a hostage drama was played out at the Lumumba Arena, ending in the deaths of hostages and the perpetrators.

Trying to overcome these environmental and psychological obstacles, the athletes set their minds on the business at hand. And the DCs reacted quickly to what would surely be heat-related problems, distributing a memo to the US team members on the extreme importance of constant hydration, and some facts on competing in a foreign country. There were only two cases of heat exhaustion on the US team.

When the competition began another problem arose. The officials refused to allow the athletes to tape their feet and ankles, a customary practice to stabilize the ankle and protect bare feet. Minutes into the first matches, the feet of some athletes were being unnecessarily injured. After several tense minutes of negotiating with officials, the doctors were given the OK and began frantically taping 130 athletes.

The DCs also had trouble when referring injured athletes to local hospitals for emergency care. The hospitals ignored some conditions; some were incorrectly treated; and one injured black belt competitor overhead the emergency doctor tell the nurse, "Tell him to go back to the U.S. and have his rich doctors take care of him."

"So much for the 'goodwill' at the games," Dr. Meimaris thought. After a few of those instances, the DCs felt they were on their own concerning medical care, and often worked 13 hours non-stop on competition days.

Injuries for the US team included fractured ribs; a broken metatarsal; a broken nose; possible sinus and orbit fractures (the x-ray equipment wasn't working in the ER); and a mallet fracture of the index finger.

Drs. Meimaris and Scordilis also treated family members accompanying the athletes. Not surprisingly, their chief complaint was traveler's diarrhea.

"I was inspired by the dedication and knowledge of both Drs. Scordilis and Meimaris," said Walter O'Neill, national vice president of the United States Karate Federation. "Their performance in an international event gave me an even greater respect for chiropractic and its role as a primary provider in the field of sports medicine." Mr. O'Neill invited both doctors to accompany the US Karate team next year on trips to Greece, Germany, Belgium, Australia, and Ireland.

Dr. Scordilis has been appointed executive director of the USKF Sports Medicine Society, and Dr. Meimaris, vice president. The mission of the society is to create a multidisciplinary team for national and international USKF events.

Anyone seeking information or an application for the USKF Sports Medicine Society should write to Demetri Meimaris, DC, CCSP at the following address:

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