

Hee Il Cho, Cynthia Rothrock, Fumio Demura

01044 JUNE 1998

karate
kung fu

Karate Kung-fu

ILLUSTRATION

Team Paul Mitchell

Sport Karate's Best?

DRAKA

Death of a Kickboxer

TAI CHI

The Ultimate Internal Art?

AIKIDO

Ancient Strikes Current Concepts

SPARRING

8 Ways to Become an Elite Fighter

MIXED ARTS

Tony Blauer's Fear Management Skills

TAEKWONDO

Bolster Your Arsenal With Multiple Kicks

CHINESE ARTS

Kung Fu Grappling Strategies



Free Magazine Inside

BLACK BELT for KIDS



U.S. \$2.95 • Canada \$3.25
Printed in USA

Simply the Best

by Jim Perkins and Douglas Jeffrey

P

rior to the USA Nationals in Las Vegas, the members of Team Paul Mitchell are scattered around the Cashman Field Convention Center conversing with friends, competitors, team members and family members. Relaxed and smiling, you'd never expect they're about to participate in the first North American Sport Karate Association AAA-rated tournament of the year.

The conversations are interrupted when the announcer warns the forms and weapons competitors to report to their appropriate rings. The members of Team Paul Mitchell quickly make their way to the ring, report, go through a few warm-ups and wait their turn.

After competing, the team members again wander off, searching for more conversations with friends or fellow competitors who they have clashed with over the years.

A few hours into the tournament, the sparring begins. Like all of the tournaments they compete in, Team Paul Mitchell, which is sponsored by John Paul Mitchell Systems, has brought their big guns. Pedro Xavier. Mike Pombeiro. Steve Babcock. Brian Ruth. Kevin Thompson.

Now, like lions surrounding a kill, many of the non-sparring members of Team Paul Mitchell gather around the ring, standing behind their coach, Don Rodrigues, who is positioned perfectly so he can yell encouragement to his fighters.

First up is Xavier.

"Let's do it Pedro!" one shouts.

"Take it to him!" another yells.

The 27-year-old *taekwondo* stylist from Boston convincingly mows down one opponent after another. As usual, Xavier advances to the grands.

Meanwhile, as usual, several of Xavier's teammates advance to the finals as well. Mike Chaturantabut and Jon Valera go head to head in the forms grands. Each gives a spectacular performance, and Valera pulls off a close victory. And as usual, Xavier wins the sparring grand championship. It's just another typical tournament for Team Paul Mitchell.

"They have some very talented people," says Stan Witz, the

The story behind the rise and development of Team Paul Mitchell. And the prestige and pressure its members carry into competition.



promoter of the USA Nationals and the USA International World Championships. “Don [Rodrigues] has a knack for finding people. And these guys truly are the best. Some people say they only win on the NASKA circuit, but that is a bunch of bull. They win everything they go to.”

It All Began

It all started in 1987. Rodrigues, Xavier, Mike Conroy, Cheech Luzzi, David Collins, Babcock and Paul Garcia were looking for a sponsor, and they found one—Spider Brand Martial Arts Equipment. Thus, they became known as the Spider Brand Team. This was a limited sponsorship, however, and it became

quickly apparent that there would be problems.

"On a couple of occasions, we had to wait outside the arena because our equipment did not arrive," says Rodrigues. "That was embarrassing. The guy had good intentions, but he could not deliver what we wanted."

Attempting to avoid this type of problem in the future, Rodrigues and Babcock called a team meeting.

"We wanted to see if anyone had any ideas to prevent this type of problem or if anyone knew of a different sponsor," says Rodrigues, who owns the Don Rodrigues Karate Academy in Warwick, Rhode Island.

As it turns out, someone did. Conroy and Babcock said they knew someone who worked for John Paul Mitchell Systems. Anxious about the possibility of getting a bona fide sponsor, the team sent a proposal to the hair care company.

"In 1988, we sent a proposal to Paul Mitchell for a seven-member team to compete in national tournaments," Rodrigues says. "The initial proposal was for \$20,000. That money was supposed to take care of flights, hotel and entry fees, and uniforms and jackets."

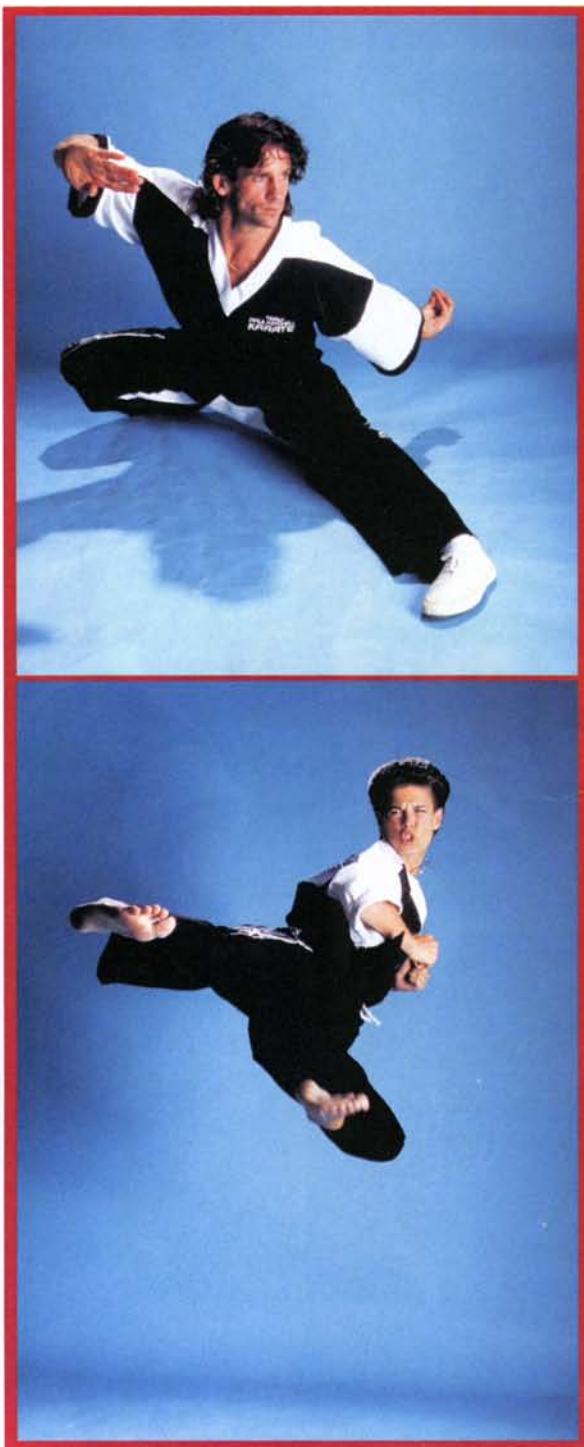
Two weeks later they had their sponsor.

"We were jumping up and down," says Rodrigues. "We were really excited."

Ten years later they are still jumping up and down.

"After 10 years, it is apparent he [John Paul DeJoria] has faith in us to do the right thing," says Rodrigues. "That means a lot to us. I love being part of this team. It has been a great 10 years, and I hope it continues for another 10 years."

The association also means a lot to DeJoria, the chairman of the board, chief executive officer and co-founder of John Paul Mitchell Systems, which has offices in Beverly Hills and Santa Clarita, California.



武 *Richie Branden (top photo) shows off his championship-winning form. Christine Bannon-Rodrigues (below) nails a flying sidekick.*

"Our relationship with the team has been exceptional," says DeJoria. "They are wonderful people. Besides being good athletes, they have a positive attitude."

In addition to sponsoring the martial arts, John Paul Mitchell Systems also sponsors teams in a variety of other sports, including volleyball and skiing.

"We feel it is our responsibility as a

company to give something back to the community," says DeJoria. "One of the best ways to do that is to sponsor a sports team. This gives kids and adults something fun to do and something good to do. Sports take people away from things in life that can get them in trouble on the streets."

Choosing the martial arts was an easy and natural choice, says DeJoria.

"I feel the martial arts give you more confidence than anything else," he says. "The arts also give you self-esteem and teach you how to focus. I think focus is what we all need to go into business with. If you can focus while on your job and give full attention, you'll be twice as good. Besides, the martial arts are a great sport."

Adults and Juniors

Team Paul Mitchell, which has 30 members, is comprised of two teams—the adults and the junior team. There are 25 males and five females. The junior team, which has 15 members, is for those who are younger than 17.

The team, which has a budget of \$75,000, competes together about 10-12 times a year, usually at the top-rated NASKA tournaments, such as the Battle of Atlanta, the U.S. Open, the Blue Grass Nationals, the Diamond Nationals, the Ocean State Nationals and the USA Nationals. All of the expenses—including airline fees, entry fees, food and hotel accommodations—are covered by John Paul Mitchell Systems.

The competitors can also compete independently of the team. And some members even have their own teams, such as Mike Chaturantabut's Team Chat.

Team Paul Mitchell features an equal balance of forms, weapons and sparring competitors, and they feature extremely talented competitors. For example, Jon Valera won the forms grands at 11 of 12 tournaments in 1997. Babcock has six heavyweight