



On course in Switzerland: Master Abdenbi Amhand *(by Erica Linthorst, Taekwondo Times, New York – 07/2009)*

In the small, old town of Vevey, Switzerland, on Lac Lemane (known to many of us as Lake of Geneva), I found Master Abdenbi Amhand in a school gym with 37 students. With warm sunlight streaming down through the windows and France looming large across the water, students appeared oblivious to the Swiss landscape and beautiful blue skies, totally focused on their master's sparring drill instructions and the effort required to find out how to implement them. Extremely disciplined, they labored on while Master Amhand moved among the sets of partners. They attended solely to his gentle voice and earnestly persisted in trying to accomplish his goals.

Belts ranged from yellow to second-dan and from 6 to 22 years old. In traditional (WTF) fashion there were no orange, purple, or even camouflage belts. Testing occurs one to two times yearly and all black belt testing is but once a year and held for all applicants in the same location, Fribourg, in front of a panel of five WTF Swiss Federation experts.

As class continued, I noticed that Master Amhand would ask quickly-answered questions after each round of exercises. They were designed for members to learn and recall more about techniques, how to protect oneself, rules of engagement and counterattack, and so forth. Odd student out would proceed to perform push-ups and sit-ups without prompting. There were smiles and encouraging words partner-to-partner, yet continuous effort and application of skills throughout the lesson.

Traveling the World to Find TKD

At the age of 15, Master Amhand moved with his family from his home country of Morocco to Germany, where other family members resided. Although not a participant, he had always admired and loved martial arts. His cousin was practicing TKD and so that's how Master Amhand's story begins. When asked why he became involved, he said he loved "the discipline, the techniques, and the sport of it."

Twelve years after arriving in Germany, he met a wonderful young Swiss woman living there too and shortly thereafter they married and moved to Switzerland. He remained actively engaged in Tae Kwon Do and as time went on, he specialized in sparring and joined the international competition circuit as well as competing nationally.

With passion and determination, he began a TKD program. Relatively unknown in his adopted country, he says it took about ten years to gain a strong and avid following through his school—TaeKwonDo Riviera. Throughout these years, he has remained true to his purpose, stayed the course, and has built not only his own practice but has seriously promoted TKD across all of Switzerland. A soft and determined nature guaranteed that he could promote his players to European and World champions.

What makes Master Amhand the success he has become? His strength is that he wants to, can and will teach anyone and everyone who enters through his doors, making certain to adapt his program to each person.

With great pride, he was elected to become President of the Swiss TaeKwonDo Federation, following his many years as a competitor, WTF certified instructor, head coach and professional trainer of the national Swiss team. He happily responds to the question about TKD participants throughout all of Switzerland: "There are 3,000 players. Since last year, there are eight new dojangs that have opened. In total, the country boasts 300 competitors in both poomse and kyorugi."

Although modest by all accounts, it becomes clear that due to his courage, patience, and ability to stay on course, Tae Kwon Do has had a remarkable growth rate in Switzerland due, in no small part, to Master Abdenbi Amhand.