



German demonstrates fighting spirit

LIFELONG PASSION: Hisham Al-Haroun came to Taiwan 13 years ago to deepen his knowledge of Wing Chun and was fascinated with Chinese martial arts as a child

BY **SHELLEY SHAN**
STAFF REPORTER

When German national Hisham Al-Haroun fought in the Ming Wu Mixed Martial Arts competition in Hsinchu earlier this month, the odds seemed stacked against him.

During six months of training for the competition, Al-Haroun caught cat scratch fever, which caused him to lose 5kg. He also did not have a sparring partner.

Fearing that he was not fit to fight and could be injured, his wife tried to talk him out of participating.

But he insisted on joining the competition.

"I didn't want people to think I am a chicken, because they didn't know what's going on behind the scenes," Al-Haroun said in an interview with the *Taipei Times* few days afterwards.

The first five minutes of the round was his moment to shine. With just three weighty kicks, he knocked his Russian opponent to the ground.

Al-Haroun recalled hearing spectators shouting his Chinese name, Chiang Yu-shan (江玉山), and cheering him on.

"In the second round, however, I began to feel the [effect of the] antibiotics I took," he said.

"[Toward the end] I thought I could turn the match to my advantage in just 10 more seconds, but it was too late. I couldn't raise my hands and I was out of power. My opponent, also out of power, knocked me out with one punch and I lost," he said.

But the setback did not daunt the 37-year-old Berliner, who wanted to set a good example for his students. Al-Haroun said he was already prepared for his next fight.

"If a martial arts teacher never had the experience of joining a fight, whatever he taught his students [would only be] theory," he said.

Everyone loses some time, Al-

Haroun said.

"The point is how to stand up and continue. It's a philosophy of life," he said.

Now a permanent resident, Al-Haroun first came to Taiwan 13 years ago to deepen his knowledge of Wing Chun (詠春拳), a Chinese martial art he learned while serving in the paratrooper special forces of the German Federal Army.

His fascination with Chinese martial arts, however, began in childhood.

"My father was a Syrian from Damascus and owned a movie theater in Berlin," he said. "It was in the 70s and the theater was the only one in the city that played Kung Fu movies from Hong Kong, which were all dubbed into German of course."

As a boy, Al-Haroun would watch films starring Hong Kong action stars Ti Lung (狄龍) or Chen Kwan-tai (陳觀泰) and imitate their moves.

Sometimes, he would invite his friends to watch and they would act out parts of the movies.

After completing his military service, Al-Haroun spent 12 years exploring different martial arts in Asia.

In addition to Wing Chun, he has also studied southern Shaolin-style martial arts like Lohan Quan (羅漢拳) and Wuzhu Quan (五祖拳), as well as Xing Yi Quan (形意拳) and Bagua Quan (八卦拳) in Taiwan.

Al-Haroun recalled an experience he had practicing monkey boxing in Tainan's Wufu Temple, which is dedicated to the Monkey King.

"I was meditating in the temple before I started practicing one day," he said. "All of a sudden, I felt that my body was not mine and I kept asking myself: 'What's happening to me?' The next thing I knew, I saw a clear sky and monkeys jumping from one cloud to another. And I started doing moves that I have never learned before."



German Hisham Al-Haroun, right, kicks his Russian opponent Vova during a Ming Wu Mixed Martial Arts cage fight in Hsinchu last month.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HISHAM AL-HAROON

“So you need sponsors to help train the fighters and provide the rewards.”

— Hisham Al-Haroun, martial arts teacher

Four years ago, Al-Haroun married a Taiwanese woman and the couple opened a martial arts institute in Tainan. As an expatriate certified to give martial arts lessons in Taiwan, he teaches his own combat system, which incorporates his previous trainings in free-style wrestling, taekwondo, karate, monkey boxing and other martial arts.

His students include school-age children, officers of the Tainan City Police Department and members of the Marine Special Forces.

Al-Haroun also participates in martial arts competitions or sometimes coaches participants.

He won the 2007 International World Cup for Sanda in Kaohsiung by taking down his opponent in 23 seconds, although his rival was a head taller than him.

Last year, Al-Haroun coached members of the Marine Special Forces, helping them win four gold medals in the Sanda Championship in Taipei.

When the film *Ip Man* (葉問) premiered in Tainan last month,

Al-Haroun was invited to demonstrate Wing Chun for the audience. Ip was a master and teacher of the martial art.

With the rising popularity of games like Japan's K-1 Grand Prix, Al-Haroun said many young people had started training themselves to fight in mixed martial arts competitions. But more resources are needed to promote the sport, he said, whether from the government or the private sector.

"The [competition this month] in Hsinchu was a good experience, but that was only one game," he said. "The payment for fights isn't much and the risk of getting injured is big. And the winner does not have a prize or anything. So you need sponsors to help train the fighters and provide the rewards."

Al-Haroun said he wanted to

train young and ambitious people in Taiwan to join in international tournaments. He even suggested the possibility of members of the military competing in wrestling or judo competitions overseas.

"The best Russian fighters in the Olympics, for example, are all from special forces in the military, because through fighting competitions they help reflect how strong the country really is," he said.

He said the Taiwanese had great potential, as seen in the performance of Taiwanese athletes in taekwondo and weightlifting.

"The government needs to make sure the budget goes directly to the athletes and the training. They also need to have the right methods to train the athletes," he said.

They need support to develop in the right direction, Al-Haroun said.

South Africa office welcomes public to mark National Day

FOR THE FAMILY: The all-day event will include something for everyone, from a jumping castle for children to a beer hall and South African barbecue

BY **JENNY W. HSU**
STAFF REPORTER

The Liaison Office of South Africa is inviting the public to its first South Africa Day on Saturday to celebrate the country's National Day on Monday and learn about the country's culture, South African Representative Petrus Meyer said.

"We invite all Taiwanese people to come to the event," said Meyer, who has been in his post for more than three years.

The day will include activities for the entire family, the office said.

It will also be an opportunity for South African expats to meet people and for Taiwanese to learn about South African culture, food and music.

Etienne Maré, a native of Pretoria and one of the event's organizers, said the festivities would include live bands, a South African comedian and a South African must — barbecue.

"Barbecue is absolutely crucial to the event. Just about every family in South Africa has barbecue on Saturdays and Sundays," he said.

“Barbecue is

absolutely crucial to

the event. Just about

every family in South

Africa has barbecue

on Saturdays and

Sundays.”

— Etienne Maré, one of the organizers of South Africa Day

PIGEON POST

Golf players sought

CHARITY

The European Chamber of Commerce Taipei (ECCT) and International Community Radio Taipei (ICRT) are looking for players to participate in the 2009 ECCT/IRCT International Charity Cup on April 30. The annual tournament will be held at the Miramar Golf and Country Club. The cost is NT\$24,000 for a team of four. The cost covers green fees, caddies, prizes and an awards dinner at the American Club. Players of all levels are welcome. The fee for attending the dinner without competing in the tournament is NT\$1,000. More information is available on the ECCT's Web site at ecct.com.tw or by phone at (02) 2836-8134, or call Ms Elaine Liu at the ECCT on (02) 2740-0236 ext 17. Proceeds from the tournament will go to the Community Services Center.

Taipei school to hold gala

SOCIETY

Taipei European School (TES) welcomes members of the international community to attend its Black and White Gala Evening on Saturday. The annual dinner will feature live music by a jazz band from the high school, an auction and a silent auction of items including works by artists Yang Tze-yun, Patrick Lee and British sculptor Martyn Barratt. Gala goes can also take part in a raffle. The champagne reception begins at 6:30pm and the bar opens at 8:30pm. For more information, e-mail Lyndall Taylor at lyndall.mtaylor@gmail.com. The fee is NT\$2,500 per person and NT\$25,000 for a table for 10.

Cultural center arranges lecture on Freud

LECTURES

The German Cultural Center and the Lung Ying-tai Foundation are inviting the public to a lecture on Saturday with Jane McAdam Freud, great granddaughter of psychiatrist Sigmund Freud. She will discuss Freudian psychoanalysis and art. The event will be held at Zhongshan Hall near Ximending. The lecture will be in English, with interpreters available for Chinese speakers. More information is available at www.civictaipei.org or by phone at (02) 3322-4907.

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA

Animals Taiwan spreads the word

BY **JENNY W. HSU**
STAFF REPORTER

Educating the public on responsible pet ownership and animal welfare is one of the main goals for Animals Taiwan (AT) this year, the organization said on Saturday, urging the public to help solve the problem of stray animals by adopting homeless animals rather than buying pets from shops.

AT was established five years ago and last year, the organization, which relies mostly on the work of volunteers from both the local and expatriate communities, became a government-registered non-profit group.

ANIMAL CARE

"What we would like to do this year is hold more classes at our rescue center to educate pet owners on how best to interact with their pets, how to handle their pets' various emotions, animal nutrition and other topics," AT secretary-general Rosa Huang (黃福茹) said.

Huang said that in addition to rescue work, promoting the catch-neuter-release system of dealing with the stray population, and

matching strays with new homes, the organization hopes to expand its education program by reaching out to schools from kindergarten to university level.

College teacher Kim Philips and other volunteers have designed a curriculum to teach students about responsible pet ownership, reasons to adopt rather than buy pets, and the problems with mass dog producers known as puppy mills.

The project also aims to inspire youths to volunteer.

Several schools, including Taipei American School and Taipei European School, have worked with AT in the past, with students visiting the center to volunteer and learn to care for animals.

Philips said the organization hoped the Ministry of Education and Council of Agriculture would help distribute information on animal welfare.

LEGISLATION

Huang said one of AT's long-term goals was to push for legislation requiring all would-be pet owners to complete a course on pet handling



Victoria DuBois, a Taipei European School student, holds up a sign at a fundraising event for Animals Taiwan in Tainan last month.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ANIMALS TAIWAN

before being allowed to care for an animal.

"But we know that would be a very difficult goal to accomplish. So for the moment we hope to expand the education aspect [of our work] to tell more people how they

can help reduce the stray animal population," she said.

Information on animal welfare, volunteering for AT and inviting an AT speaker to your school or organization can be found online at animalstaiwan.org.

Embassy marks fourth anniversary of pope's election

BY **JENNY W. HSU**
STAFF REPORTER

The Republic of China (ROC) and the Holy See share a strong commitment to the values of freedom, peace and human rights, Monsignor Paul Russell, charge d'affaires of the embassy of the Holy See, said on Sunday at a reception in Taipei honoring the fourth anniversary of the election of Pope Benedict XVI.

Speaking to more than 300 guests, including President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) and two cardinals, Russell passed on a message of love and gratitude from the pope to the people of Taiwan.

Quoting the pope, Russell said "frank and constructive dialogue is

the key to the resolution of conflicts that threaten the stability of our world. In this regard, the Holy See welcomes the recent positive development in the relations between Taiwan and Mainland China."

"The government of Taiwan has a keen sense of belonging to a world community, a global human family. This is expressed in many ways, not least in the generosity with which aid and emergency relief is supplied to poorer nations... The Holy See is pleased to work together with all those who seek to promote peace, prosperity and development, and appreciates the ROC's commitment to that noble cause," he quoted the pope as saying.

The president commended the

country's only European ally for its dedication to performing charitable deeds worldwide and for the services that Catholic missionaries have rendered in Taiwan. Ma vowed to continue the country's partnership with the Holy See to promote important values internationally.

"As a child, I learned about Catholicism and was inspired by Reverend Remi van Hyfte of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. At that time, I learned much from the nuns that taught our English classes as well," Ma said.

Ma said Taiwan shared the Holy See's emphasis on peace and freedom internationally, citing the

recent ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as examples.

This November, the Catholic Church will celebrate 150 years of history in Taiwan.

That history, Russell said, demonstrates the "deep, abiding and unbreakable commitment which the Catholic Church has to Taiwan and its people."

The pope is expected to name a special envoy at the cardinal level to attend the November event.

In September, the first Asia Regional Pontifical Council Cor Unum will also be held in Taipei, he said.

IF YOU HAVE SUGGESTIONS FOR EVENTS, INTERVIEWS OR TOPICS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE COVERED ON THIS PAGE PLEASE SEND YOUR IDEAS TO: community@taipeitimes.com

