

## Barcelona trip

By Erika Henderson and Anusiya Inthirarajah

### Day 1:

With the meeting arranged at 5:30am at Edinburgh Waverley Station, 5 sleep deprived people met up with their bogu bags and shinias. In the dark and gloomy morning, their emotions reflected with the rain that was pouring down. It was not a great start. Fortunately, the train journey to Newcastle went quite smooth. At Newcastle airport, they safely managed to check-in, not encountering any previous mistakes of being charged extra for shinai bag or exceeding size limit. The plane flight was scheduled to leave 10am, landing at 2pm (-1hour) in Spain. With the dazzling sun encouraging the group to take off their winter jackets, they left the train station and walked for half an hour to the hostel accommodation. As the plane arrived late afternoon, the gang was forced to miss the morning's session of the Kurasawa cup. After grabbing a filling plate of paella for late lunch, the group went to the evening seminar 6:30 to 9pm. The session was lead by Kenji Takizawa Sensei (8th Dan) and Yukuo Iwao and Masaya Takizawa (both 7th Dan) who helped out. During the session, nihon kendo kata 1 to 7 were covered, the session ended with keiko. Fortunately, for the Scotland teams and the other English speakers, there was a Japanese- English translator present who did a fantastic job.

### Day 2:

Today was the most important day to the 3-days event, the competition of Kurasawa cup. The morning session started from 10am with 150 competitors circled around the dojo for their warm up. Next Takizawa Sensei explained the rules and refereeing during a shiai competition. Hanging onto every word that was coming from the translators, everyone was interested in the rules that would able them to score an ippon in a shiai competition. A representative from each region was given an opportunity to be a shinpan for a mock shiai. Unfortunately, Koji who was chosen as the Scotland representative didn't participate in the end. With the feet of the competitors sore from standing for about an hour and half, the next activity certainly made their blood flow. In this exercise, the dojo was split into 3 courts, nidan, shodan and ikkyu (and below). In each court, 3 people would be in the circle whilst the others were queued around the court. The aim of this exercise was to be the first person to score a men point, whilst being watched carefully by a shinpan. As soon as a point was scored, the winner would stay on whilst the other 2 people would leave the court and the next 2 people from the queue would enter the ring. Chris described it as a game of "Star wars".

Lunch was very satisfying with tasty ham and cheese baguettes and yogurt, which filled stomachs of the competitors. After a quick break, individual teams gathered around and did a quick warm up as it was finally time for the actual competition to start. Captain of the Edinburgh club, Koji lead the

warm up for Edinburgh teams. His kiai getting louder and louder, encouraging the other 4 members to raise their spirit and determined to show the other competitors that the club was not going to back down readily. The competition starts off with about 16 pools games. Within each pool, there were 3 teams. However only one teams is allowed to enter in the next round, leading to quarter finals, semi-finals and to finish off the finals. The club first matches were in the 4th and 6th pool which was scheduled for two hours later. During the long and painful time, the gang watched the others teams compete. They had impressive players noteworthy of saying 1st dan 2nd dan which compromised about half the players.

Edinburgh-1 was up first. Koji, Matthew and Chris did a quick warm up after watching the Irish team fight before them. Edinburgh-1, first opponent were team Kajuki-3. An aura of pressure could be felt in the dojo as their opponents stood steadily on opposite side of the court to them as they all bowed in.

First up was Matthew. It was a difficult match to watch. His opponent was strong and kept Matthew on his feet. Matthew's football spirit came out unexpectedly as he was continuously pushed around the dojo by his opponent. However, this was not enough and he lost against 1 men and kote. Up next, Chris's opponent was as well-built and forceful as their previous member. Chris managed to draw his opponent, an impressive triumph. The final match with team Kajuki-3 was lead by Koji. Both competitors were exceptionally strong and Koji fought courageously unfortunately he lost to 2 men cuts. Edinburgh-1 did lose against Kajuki-3 but their pride recovered when they found later that Kajuki-3 got 1st place in the competition.

The next team opponents were team Barcelona 2. With an impressive effort from his side, Matthew won his match with kote followed by men. Chris tried to hold his ground but alas he lost. Unfortunately, the taisho of Barcelona-2 was absent and so Koji won by default. Even though Koji was upset that he was unable to give a free rein to his superior kendo abilities, the team had won the second match against Barcelona-2. Regrettably, Edinburgh-1 was knocked out of the pool.

Passing on Edinburgh-1's spirit, Edinburgh-2 rose up fight for their matches. None of members in Edinburgh-2 had fought in a competition before, and they knew that this opportunity to test out their skills. Edinburgh-2's first opponent was team Taikenkai-Sestao. Each side seized up their opponents as they bowed to each other. Only the two team's sempo remained in the court, and Erika was faced with her Spanish rival. As the matched started, for a few seconds it was stalemate, until the opponent was on the verge of getting the first strike, Erika went for men. He blocked, and started hitting men's and kote's that didn't score a point. He was clearly on a higher level, but the men's were defendable speed. There was a chance of scoring him, but eventually his kote got scored. Then after, as though he had gained his confidence, his clear cut men from a large opening ended the round. The next opponent was a large woman who twice the size of Anusiya. She forcefully pushed Anusiya towards the court line continuously, and Anusiya kept rebounding back and nearly obtaining a fowl. She managed to slip away, but the opponent gained ground to 2-0 win. The team entrusted our hopes on Jesus, their taisho, as he bravely walked onto the court towards the enemies' strongest member. Unfortunately, he quickly overpowered Jesus, and their first match ended.

The second match against Barcelona-3 was more ruthless, and in the first match the opponent took Erika out in less than a minute. Following up, Anusiya tried her best to defend herself as the

opponent was stronger than their previous teammate, but couldn't withstand for long as well. The team instinctively knew that Jesus was walking towards his execution facing the team's strongest opponent yet to come. As Erika and Anusiya nervously watched from the court line, their rival scored a men ippon within 30 seconds. In the next blink, another cut came down and the match was over. Even though it was Edinburgh-2's first shiai competition and they were not expected to get through the pool, they were still frustrated with the outcome. Both Edinburgh teams were knocked from the pools. Forgetting about the disappointing matches, the teams turned their attention towards the sayonara party. According to the guys, 40% of why they returned for the Kurasawa Cup was for the food in the sayonara.

As 10:30pm approached, the group went to the seafood restaurant and were chaperoned to their desk along-side other kendo competitor's desks. The chunk of salad and tomato spread on bread at the start was enough to please the stomach already, but this was just the beginning. Boiled prawns, fried squid rings, deep fried calamari, clam with salty sauce were carried one after another on large platters. They were full by the time their main meal came. Because Erika, Matthew and Anusiya don't drink alcohol, Koji and Chris had a bottle each to drink out of. Furthermore, one of the competitors from Japan went to all the tables with a huge jug of beer toasting with everyone. It was a perfect ending to the day.

Day 3:

At 5.30am, the sight of 5 tired and grumpy people who returned to the hostel woke up other innocent people who were unlucky to share a room with them. Having returned late and grabbing a few hours of sleep, the gang were in no fit to go to the morning session. As they left Spain, they managed to recharge as they all slept in their flight journey and immediately missed the weather in Barcelona when they stepped in Newcastle. They walked back to their respective flats back in Edinburgh in the cold. The Kurasawa cup was an event they would not forget soon.