

Champs gave a night to savor

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Tyler Weaver gave a dynamic display.

A group of world champion karate athletes returned to Cayman after 16 years to give a demonstration in Camana Bay on Saturday and had the audience and participating Cayman kids in rapture.

The world renowned Team Paul Mitchell held their annual training camp here instead of at Disney World in Orlando, Florida, and had no regrets in changing the venue.

The team trained in the sea on their first full day here, finding the setting of Public Beach mesmerizing.

They gave a sneak preview demo Friday on the Crescent on Camana Bay, where the public watched the 12-member team perform.

The Night of Champions was certainly that at the Arts and Recreation Centre, with demonstrations by some of the biggest names in the sport, including Tyler Weaver, Caitlin Dechelle and Jackson Rudolph.

The event was organized by Bob Daigle, founder and chief instructor of the Cayman Karate Academy School, who enticed Team Paul Mitchell's head coach Don Rodrigues to come over.

In addition to local media coverage, specialist coverage was guaranteed as Maurice Elmalem, editor of Budo International martial arts magazine, flew in from New York.

A former multiple world champion, glass-smashing world record holder and Olympic silver medallist in taekwondo, Elmalem also displayed his skills, jumping over two chairs to smash a block of wood.

The night started with a demonstration by Daigle's students from Cayman Karate Academy School at Prospect Primary and his other club at Body Sculptor Fitness Centre. Some of the children were as young as 4 years old and had been in the program only a few months, yet they made a huge impression with their forms and even broke blocks of wood.

Dechelle, who was recently in Jackie Chan's "Chinese Zodiac" movie, performed her signature sword demonstration.

Weaver, 18, included acrobatic moves in his repertoire. He is already one of the sport's biggest names and seems destined to transcend karate and become a Hollywood A-lister. Jackson did amazing moves spinning and throwing a pole.

Daigle said all the months of preparation and hard work were entirely worthwhile. "To see the excitement in the kids, watching these world champions perform, doing incredible demonstrations, they loved it.

"I'm also very proud of the way they did their demonstration. They weren't scared, were powerful and did exactly like they did in the classroom, and we saw some very proud parents."

Daigle was especially pleased with the progress of his tiniest students, some of whom received belt upgrades.

"Three months ago, those youngest children were shy, they were afraid, and now they've performed in front of hundreds of people perfectly," he said.

"It just shows what martial arts do for a child. If you gain confidence as a 4-year-old, imagine what you'll be like at eight."

Team Paul Mitchell thoroughly enjoyed every aspect of their five days training camp, particularly a kids clinic on Saturday morning that included forms, sparring and weapons training.

"They fell in love with the Cayman Islands," Daigle said. "They went to Stingray City on Friday, and within six hours one of them on their Instagram account had 1,000 likes from a picture of them holding a stingray.

"Images of this team have gone viral all around the world. Cayman Islands is getting a lot of publicity right now, and they can't wait to come back here.

"With the support of the business community and everyone involved, we'd like to have this as an annual event."