



Eric Gregory/Daily Nebraskan

Cornhusker State Games competitors go hand-to-hand and foot-to-foot in the 13 to 14-year-old girls' sparring division of the taekwondo competition at Union College Sunday.

Nebraska youngsters get their kicks participating in taekwondo competition

By Sara Bauder
Staff Reporter

With spinning kicks and quick punches, 15-year-old black belt Felipe Ramos tried to find a way to beat his larger opponent in sparring competition at the Cornhusker State Games Taekwondo Tournament Sunday.

With Felipe on his way to a silver medal in sparring, his grandfather stood outside the ring, videotaping the matches. His father had a camera and was taking pictures, and his cousins were cheering him on.

Felipe's 12-year-old brother Victor was competing in his own age group at the same time, so the family split cheering time between the two boys.

Felipe, from Omaha, said he was the smallest competitor in his age group, but that did not bother him.

"I like to spar with people who are bigger than me," he said. "You have to learn a lot more and be more aggressive."

"If you don't intimidate a bigger person, they'll intimidate you and you'll get slaughtered."

Felipe said the most important thing he has learned from taekwondo is self-esteem.

"Before, I used to be very timid," he said, "but now I'm not."

According to Felipe, the support of his family has been very helpful.

He started taking taekwondo lessons when he was 6, but quit because his dad did.

"My dad got a night job, so I didn't have anyone to drive me to lessons anymore," he said. "I started going to lessons again with my friends Tony and Todd."

"My whole family gets behind me. Dad is there to make sure I don't slack off, which I try not to do anyway. My family is pretty proud of me."

Many of the 180 competitors at the

tournament, ranging in age from 5 to 48, have family connections with taekwondo.

Twelve-year-old Shana Smetter of Lincoln, who won gold medals in both sparring and forms competition Sunday, said she took her first lesson because her younger brother was involved in the sport. She said she loved taekwondo from the very first night.

Shana has transformed that love into some very successful seasons on the taekwondo circuit. In both 1988 and 1989, Shana was named Grand National Champion of her age group (both boys and girls). To receive that honor, she had to earn more points than anyone else in the nation in seven tournaments.

Shana's brother Sean also went to Nationals the last two years. He finished ranked 10th in 1988 and 3rd this year.

Jan Smetter, Shana and Sean's mother, said taekwondo teaches her children respect, self-defense, confidence and self-esteem.

"Taekwondo teaches them things that carry over into many other areas of their lives," she said.

John "Rick" Riddle, director of the taekwondo competition at the State Games, said taekwondo also teaches participants self-control and perseverance.

"When you're tired, you learn to keep going," Riddle said. "Even when an opponent kicks you and it hurts, you keep going."

Riddle said taekwondo is the most popular martial art form today. Taekwondo became an Olympic sport in 1988. That was also the first year taekwondo was part of the State Games.

"Taekwondo involves a lot of showmanship," Riddle said. "It is more flamboyant than some of the other martial arts."

Justin Miles, 8, decided to take up

taekwondo when he was 5, after he saw the movie The Karate Kid.

Justin, a red belt from Lincoln, won 3rd place in the forms competition. Competitors are judged on their techniques on an individual basis in forms.

Justin's mother, Karla Miles, said she was happy with Justin's desire to learn taekwondo.

"He has developed a lot of attention skills, self-control and self-esteem," she said. "The more they learn, the more they are in control."

Although Justin broke an ankle last May during testing for his red belt, he didn't let an injury slow him down. He goes to lessons four or five days a week and loves competitions, his mother said.

Although injury is possible with taekwondo, the sport also has health-related benefits, Riddle said.

"A lot of people take it for the aerobic aspects," he said. "It also helps keep you flexible."

Omahan Juanita Harriman said her son's pediatrician and neurologist recommended taekwondo as a way to improve 11-year-old David's coordination.

David has been taking lessons for a year, and his mother said she can see the sport has already helped him develop better coordination.

Another aspect of taekwondo is the self-defense it offers. Riddle said taekwondo is a better defensive sport than boxing because it uses both the hands and the feet.

"Seventy percent of taekwondo is use of the legs and feet and 30 percent is use of the hands," Riddle said.

Bruce Gipson, a 24-year-old black belt and taekwondo instructor from Omaha, said he started taking lessons in 1978 because he was small and felt self-defense was something he needed to learn.

"I knew I'd need something else, other than just being able to outrun people," he said.

NFL conflict unresolved

SCHAUMBURG, Ill. (AP) - There were few signs Tuesday that the man to replace the retiring Pete Rozelle as NFL commissioner will be selected soon.

While members of the dissident group that blocked the election of New Orleans Saints president Jim Finks met with members of the screening committee that chose him, one of the principal dissidents, Edward DeBartolo Jr., of San Francisco, left the meeting, saying he had business elsewhere.

Earlier, DeBartolo had said he anticipated no end to the impasse, at least for a while.

"We've got training camp to go to and we've got a game coming up in Japan. We have a lot of other business to attend to," he said.

The latest developments took place at an NFL owners meeting originally called for a progress report on the new international league, now called the World League of American Football.

But that was overshadowed by the dispute over the commissioner's job, denied two weeks ago to Finks when 11 owners abstained in the voting. Though referred to as the "new guard," the group includes Miami's Joe Robbie, 73; Tampa's Hugh Culverhouse, 70; Indianapolis' Robert Irsay and Houston's Bud Adams, both 66, and Seattle's Ken Behring, 60.

To be elected, the new commissioner must get the votes of 19 owners.

Finks was present Tuesday, representing the Saints along with owner Tom Benson for the WLA meeting.

He ran a gauntlet of television cameras, greeted a few reporters, but otherwise said nothing.

Later, during a break in the meeting, Finks said, "A terse no comment."

He remains the favorite, although Jerry Jones, the Dallas owner who was one of the three dissidents on the negotiating team, said it was possible that the three would recommend new names.

Jones and Behring, both of whom have been in the league less than a year, represented the antis along with Patrick Bowlen of Denver. The selection committee was represented by Wellington Mara of the New York Giants; Dan Rooney of Pittsburgh and Robert Parins of Green Bay.

Mara said the selection group would turn over to the dissidents any information they wanted about the process that went into recommending Finks as the only possible choice. That would include information compiled by Heidrich and Struggles, the consulting firm that helped the committee in its search.

As for the international league to be run by former Dallas president Tex Schramm, the owners were agreed on a 12-team league to include six teams in the United States, four in Europe and one each in Canada and Mexico. Schramm has said he hopes to begin play next spring.

The European cities are expected to be London, Frankfurt, Milan and either Barcelona or Paris.

Montreal and Mexico City also will have franchises.

One of the U.S. teams will play in New York with another in California -- either Sacramento or San Jose. The others are expected to come from a group that includes Nashville, Orlando, San Antonio, Charlotte, Jacksonville or Birmingham.



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