

# Island Sports

## Local siblings are national Judo champions

By Adrienne Downing

Siblings Sofia and Marco Greco-Byrne have to get along well with each other at home, because if they do not, the temptation to retaliate against each other on the Judo mat may be too much for them.

Sofia, 11, and Marco, 8, have been practicing Judo, which means gentle way in Japanese, for four years, and because they are close to each other in size they often spar against each other in practice.

"We are not allowed to practice at home because we don't have mats, but sometimes we try to get each other back on the mats," Sofia said.

Fortunately for them and their parents, Judo, unlike Karate, does not involve kicking or punching.

"Judo is more like wrestling with heavy clothes on," their dad, John Greco, said. "Having the heavy-gauge cotton on gives them more leverage than you would have in wrestling, but they are similar."

John is a black belt and Master's champion and said that it is good the kids have started at a young age.

"I did not start until I was 18, but they were coming to the dojo with me when they were very



Marco Greco-Byrne, 8, cannot help smiling as he gets the upper hand on his sister Sofia, 11, while demonstrating a Judo throw.

Photo by Adrienne Downing

young. It is a natural fit for kids because they pick things up a lot easier and they don't have to fall as far," he said.

Sofia likes that the sport is a family affair, and that her dad is an active participant.

"My dad works out at the same

time we do, so on the way home I can talk to him about how I can do something better or ask him a question and he understands and can help me," she said.

All three practice and compete out of the Mayo Quanchi Dojo in

West Warwick.

"When we moved here from Connecticut, we started there because it was the closest one that we knew of," John said. "I didn't realize at the time that they had such a winning reputation."

Sensei and owner Serge Bouyssou made bold predictions early on about the siblings, and they recently proved him correct, coming home recently from the Junior Olympics in San Antonio as national champions.

"The minute I saw them on the mat, I knew they were going to be great. I told their dad, 'these kids are going to be something special,'" he said, adding, "Sofia was this shy kid with a ton of ability. I just saw a spark in her. She was not intimidated by things and once she decides what she wants to do, she sets her course and goes with it."

Bouyssou also noted how Sofia has a unique gift for her young age, which has served her well in Judo tournaments.

"She is really a very smart, cerebral learner on the mat. That is a hard thing to teach a kid her age," he said. "I can explain to her from the sideline how to do it and she can understand what I am telling her."

In Marco, Bouyssou saw sheer tenacity and incredible talent. "He does not like to lose one bit and he takes that drive, combined with a heavy dose of ability, and wins with it," the sensei said.

This is not to suggest that either one had an easy road to their

championship. Both had to overcome obstacles on and off the mat to win.

After a week of having to eat very carefully to make her weight division, while watching others enjoy the many restaurants San Antonio had to offer, Sofia had to move to a heavier division anyway when her division went uncontested.

"She also had a hard time last year adjusting to the way the Hawaiians fought, but this year she was able to overcome the mental block and take care of business," Bouyssou said. "She takes coaching like very few kids, but because of that she was able to overcome the odds and win."

Marco found himself in the double-elimination tournament with one loss after his first match.

"He was facing a kid from Oklahoma who gave him a hard time in the first round, but he had to pull it together and beat that kid two times in a row to earn the championship," the sensei said. "It just made it that much sweeter for him in the end."

Their mom and biggest cheerleader, Liz Greco, said although the family has enjoyed traveling to the national tournaments and have had a lot of good experiences, she is looking forward the championships being a little closer to home next year.

"The Junior Olympics are supposed to be in Boston, so that will be great," she said.

Both Sofia and Marco are orange belts, and now that the national competition season is over, they will focus on local competitions and attaining their green belts.

"To get promoted we have to win, and to win, we have to practice, so that is what we are doing right now," Marco said.

## Ladies tennis tourney results

The ladies intermediate tennis class held a round robin tennis tournament on Aug. 7. Winners were Pat Cook and Keleigh Sabourin. The runners-up were Alexa Furtado and Jackie Woodside.

Awards were also given out for the Summer Sizzler weekly challenge. The winner was Jackie Woodside and the runner up was Keleigh Sabourin. The recreation department program runs each summer under the direction of Kathy Brownell.

Members of the beginner class will have their tournament on Aug. 20.

## Cross country team hosts alumni race

The North Kingstown High School cross country team will hold their third annual Alumni Cross Country race on Friday, Aug. 24, at Goddard Park in East Greenwich.

The race will start at the second public bathroom facility and follow the Brown Invitational course route.

The one-half mile kids race will begin at 5:30 p.m. and the 5K race will start at 6 p.m.

There will also be a team

championship to see who has the best alumni/combined team. An alumni/combined team may be comprised of three runners in any combination of alumni and undergraduates with at least one alumni runner, and must be declared at registration. This fun event is open to all runners.

At the conclusion of the race there will be a flickerball game and a cookout for all participants.

The race is held as a fund-raiser due to recent budget cuts and will

help support the NK cross-country program.

Donations for the race are \$15 for the 5K, and \$5 for the kids race. Pre-registration can be mailed to Keven O'Neil, 141 Prospect Ave., North Kingstown, RI 02853; called in to 294-6086/295-1805; or e-mailed to keven\_o'neil@nksd.net or coachjpt@cox.net.

If unable to attend, donations to the North Kingstown High School cross-country program are appreciated.

**Craft Show**

**August 18**  
10:00 - 4:00

Jamestown Community Center  
East Ferry

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Jamestown, Rhode Island 02835  
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