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Two black belt members of Kirksville Taekwon-Do — siblings junior Megan Matheney and junior Matthew Matheney — competed in Boston this summer at the International Taekwondo tournament and contributed to the 29 medals earned by the Kirksville Taekwon-Do, with Megan Matheney also earning the title of grand champion.

The tournament had approximately 200 competitors in attendance, with Australia, Jamaica, Canada and the United States competing against each other, Megan Matheney said. She said Kirksville Taekwon-Do sent 11 competitors to Boston and brought back 15 bronze medals, six silver, and eight gold, in addition to her title as grand champion.

Matthew Matheney said he earned bronze in all the categories at the International Taekwondo tournament.

Matthew Matheney said the tournament focused on three areas — patterns, sparring and breaking. He said patterns typically are organized by rank and age. For each rank, the competitors learn a specific set of patterns. He said there are two people competing against each other in front of a panel of five judges, and the pattern each competitor performs has to be from their set.

Matthew Matheney said sparring is a continuous two-minute round with protective gear. There is a referee in the middle who makes sure things don't get out of hand, he said, and a judge occupies each corner, taking scores. He said they tally the score and declare the winner, who then moves up the bracket.

For breaking, Matthew Matheney said there is a series of breaks each competitor must complete. He said boards count as one point if the board is broken completely and half a point if the structure of board is gone but it didn't break completely. He said those are then tallied up.

Matthew Matheney said Taekwondo is a lifestyle, and requires a large amount of training time. He said starting young really helps build up character.

"Personally, I love the discipline," Matthew Matheney said. "And the confidence you get from that. Not overconfidence. That gets knocked out of you fairly quickly."

Megan Matheney, who will test for her fourth degree black belt during November, said she placed first in the patterns and sparring divisions, and third in breaking. Her performance in these categories earned her the title of grand champion, she said.

Megan Matheney said grand champion is earned by winning all or most of the events one competes in, but the judging varies from tournament to tournament. She said the patterns division carries a lot of weight on the scoring because it's supposed to demonstrate everything that you've learned up to this point. She said sparring also is a big contributor to earning grand champion, but breaking isn't always a determining factor.

"Breaking is the thing it kind of wavers on," Megan Matheney said. "If you get first in all your divisions, it's pretty much a given. But breaking doesn't have as much pull on whether you get it or not. You definitely want to get first in patterns and first in sparring in your divisions."

Megan Matheney said she and her brother train two nights a week on a regular basis, but going into the tournament they added extra two- to three-hour Saturday sparring sessions, plus any training they do during their own time. She said they began intensifying their training for the tournament approximately a year before the event.

Photos submitted by Brent Orton

Megan Matheney said she has been training at Kirksville Taekwon-Do since she was 8 years old, and her brother has trained there since he was 9. She said Kirksville Taekwon-Do has become like a family to her.

"Our mother used to [Taekwondo] with us, and dad still does it and our little sister does it," Megan Matheney said. "It is really nice to get a group of people going so you have a support group to go with you."

The word Taekwondo can be explained by dividing it into several parts, Megan Matheney said. She said 'tae' means to kick or destroy with the foot, 'kwon' to smash or destroy with the hand and 'do' the art or way. She said the martial art consists of the mental and physical conditioning of your body.

Taekwondo is a martial art for unarmed combat created by General Choi Hong Hi, Megan Matheney said. She said he didn't just develop a martial art, he created a philosophy of life.

Megan Matheney said the five tenets of Taekwondo are perseverance, integrity, etiquette, indomitable spirit and self-control.

"[I'm] attracted to the indomitable spirit because it's basically like you don't ever stop going," Megan Matheney said.

Since Megan and Matthew Matheney started training at a young age, they have had the same instructor, Master Dustin Stephenson, who traveled with them to Boston during the summer. Stephenson said they trained for internationals four to six months ahead of time.

Stephenson said he was proud of how well the siblings performed at internationals, but he wasn't surprised by it. Because the tournament was at the international level, he said the level of contact was a little more intense. He said they fought a little more and a little harder.

"Matt and Megan are prime examples of black belt integrity and what black belts should be," Stephenson said.