

Young Mincovitch showed great potential in judo right away: instructor

51 Walking past the Kaizen school seven years ago with father Corey, Jake immediately found himself drawn to the sport.

He recalled, "I loved it right from the get go. To me it's the best sport. It's my main passion." The Craig Kielburger Secondary School ninth grader has been a highly-committed — and accomplished — student since day one.

"Jake showed a lot of potential the first time I saw him," noted Sensei Bob Zettl, a 7th Dan

(black belt). "He's a natural."

The most recent evidence of that came a few weeks ago, when Mincovitch earned his brown belt.

That's quite the rare achievement for someone his age, given that under Judo Canada guidelines a student has to be at least 16 years old to even be considered for a black belt — which is just one level up from brown. Mincovitch's martial arts prowess shouldn't

come as much of a surprise, given that dad is a fifth-degree black belt and former world champion in taekwon-do.

"It's a good motivator," said the local teen of his father's past successes and love of martial arts, which has served as the catalyst for plenty of father-son bonding during trips to competition and the 45-minute commutes to Kaizen that are made three or four times a week. He also travels to Ajax once a week to train with the provincial team. "I'd like to live up to what he's done."

He began doing so right away, going unbeaten in his first 20 competitions. And while his perfect record would eventually come to an end, Mincovitch has reigned supreme at recent events in Michigan, England and Germany.

He takes that momentum to Quebec this weekend for the Canadian Judo Championship in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, where he'll face the country's best practitioners in the Under-16, 60-kilograms and under class.

Particularly effective with his throws and winning the majority of matches with controlled takedowns, Mincovitch heads to the nationals with ample confidence.

"I want to win," he said succinctly.

That may be an ambitious goal, but one that his instructor feels is well within reach.

"Jake has the potential to be a world-class competitor on the international scene," said Sensei Zettl.

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Alexander feeling good about decision

51 "I'm feeling confident and happy with my decision. I talked to my family about it and they're all happy for me," said the towering power forward, who visited four NCAA Division 1 schools before deciding on the Volunteers. "It's (UT) a little closer to home than some of the other schools and Rick Barnes is a hall of fame coach with a great record of recruiting and developing Canadian players."

Urged by dad about two-and-a-half years ago to "use his size", Alexander would enroll in the Bobby Allen Skills Academy in Mississauga.

Training four or five times a week throughout the summer, he'd slowly but surely develop some much-needed fundamentals — and just the right exposure.

"The coach (at academy) called up Larry Blunt (at Orangeville Athletic Institute) and said 'I've got this raw talent for you to look at,'" recalled Alexander.

The rest is history.

"My mom thought it was too late (to join Orangeville), that it would probably be a waste of time, but my dad had faith in me and playing with Orangeville has helped me so much," said Alexander, who with an especially strong rebounding and transition game is ranked sixth nationally for the Class of 2015 by North Pole Hoops. He was named to the 24-player

roster for last month's BioSteel All Canadian Basketball Game in Toronto, but missed the inaugural showcase as he was still recovering from a fractured wrist. "Going from playing against 5-foot-5 guys without a lot of skill to some of the best players in the country definitely forces you to pick things up and get better."

"I've had a short time to develop, and I'm not done yet."

His Orangeville Prep mentor agrees.

"He's just continued to develop each and every day which is kind of exciting," Tweeted Blunt. "I'm not saying he's Joel Embiid, but (it's a) similar fashion where he started really late and kind of snuck up on people late. And I think that's what Kyle's going to do as well."

Part of Alexander's future progress may well include some guidance from Kayla, who's now playing with the WNBA's San Antonio Stars after a stellar tenure with the Syracuse U. Orange.

"I didn't ask her advice as much as I should have (during recruitment period)," said Kyle.

"I'll probably pick her brain more once I start down there."

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