

SPORTS

# Judo teacher joins elite Canadian company

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Aartje Sheffield accomplished something recently few women judokas from across Canada can lay claim to.

What the Stouffville resident and co-owner and instructor for the Sheffield Judo Club did was earn her sixth degree black belt.

Steven Sheffield, Aartje's husband and co-owner and instructor at the Stouffville-based club, noted his wife is among fewer than 10 women from across the country who have accomplished this high grading.

Aartje did this after being put forward by the provincial grading board to attend Judo Canada's national grading board in Ottawa.

The process, she said, is relatively new.

"In the past it was managed by the provincial grading board. But this time around the provincial grading board makes sure you have the proper criteria and you then have to perform before the national grading board," she said.

A student for 38 years, part of Sheffield's credentials include being a three-time national cham-

panion, a two-time competitor at the World Championships for Canada in which she finished ninth in 1989, a gold medal Commonwealth championship, a Pan-American medallist, a provincial coach and manager during a national championship and serving two terms as technical vice-president with Judo Ontario.

*While her grading took little time, the preparation involved three to four months of diligent practising under the supervision of her husband.*

As one of six judokas in attendance with some going for their seventh or eighth degree black belts, Aartje was the lone female.

Required to do two Katas — detailed patterns of movements — before a panel of six board members, Aartje said her performance

took 20 minutes.

While her grading took little time, the preparation involved three to four months of diligent practising under the supervision of her husband.

"Steven knew the Kata that was needed to be performed so we would practise a couple of days a week while at the same time teaching our judo classes and maybe for an hour or so we would practise once we finished teaching," she recalled.

Acknowledging she was a bit nervous before performing her required Katas in large part since the grading process was revised, Sheffield was informed right away she is now a sixth degree black belt.

"It was nice that they told me right away. But to get it, it feels so strange, so surreal almost," she said of her feat.

While earning her sixth degree black belt, Sheffield wouldn't mind taking things a step further by getting her seventh.

But to do that, she noted, will take time.

At least 10 years.

"If I'm healthy enough I will stay the course," she said.



Aartje Sheffield earned her sixth degree black belt with the assistance of her husband, Steven. They own the Stouffville-based Sheffield Judo Club.

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