

BRING IT HOME

Avery Basto, 13, from Summitview Public School finishes second in a 400-metre event during the York Region public elementary schools track and field finals at the Connell-Franklin Track on Stouffville Arena grounds last week.



STAFF PHOTO/SUSIE KOCKERSCHIEDT

Taekwondo pair kicks it up a notch

BY MICHAEL HAYAKAWA
mhayakawa@yrmg.com

Just call Justina Li and Brian Lam champions.

In the martial arts discipline of taekwondo poomsae to be precise.

The pair, who train at Stouffville Taekwondo, made their presence felt at the recent 2016 National Taekwondo Poomsae championships in Calgary.

Yu, a 15-year-old Markham resident, claimed top honours in the junior female individual division.

A 15-year-old Richmond Hill resident, Lam accomplished the same feat in the junior male division.

The pair also combined their talents to lay claim to the junior pairs division championship.

The two earned the right to represent Canada at the 10th World Taekwondo Poomsae Championships to be held in Lima, Peru, from Sept. 30 to Oct. 3.

Anything less than a win would have been disappointing, said Yu, a Grade 10 St. Brother Andre Catholic High School student.

Both the young athletes were quick to credit their Stouffville Taekwondo head instructor Master Bhajan Mann.

"I expected to win because my coach always tells me 'you go there to do your best and win at the same time'. This is a very important mindset to have if someone wants to excel and be successful in competition," explained Yu. "I always try my best in everything I do and my coach has made sure that

both my physical and mental states were prepared for this competition.

"I went to Nationals trying to beat personal bests and put my new skills and training to the test. I am very happy about winning National and I am honoured to have received the Best Up and Coming Junior Female Poomsae Athlete recognition award. This really tells me that all my hard work has been worthwhile and has paid off."

A Grade 10 student enrolled in the International Baccalaureate program at Bayview Secondary School, Lam added the two titles he returned home with are a definite confidence booster in his budding martial arts career.

"I previously won these two titles back in 2012," he said. "Being able to repeat this feat proved to me that all my training and commitment had paid off and is steering me in the right direction for further success."

"As well, my goal of being able to make the national team in both individual and pairs was achieved, so I couldn't be happier. I am especially proud that my brother, Eric, competing in the cadet age division, also qualified for the national team for the pairs event."

Working as a tandem since 2011, Yu and Lam were quick to point out a vital ingredient with what success they've attained in pairs competition stems from the chemistry they've developed through the years.

"We feed off of each other's energy and motivation," added Lam. "We've been friends for a long time, so it's really great to compete alongside someone who I have a profound respect for and feel comfortable with."

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