

LOCAL JUDO INSTRUCTOR HOPES FOR YOUTH MOVEMENT IN SPORT

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Around the globe, soccer might be the most popular sport. The second most popular might surprise you. It isn't basketball or hockey, it doesn't require a team—just quick reflexes and self-discipline. That sport, unknownst to most Americans, is Judo.

But despite its longstanding hold on the rest of the world, Judo hasn't truly caught on in the United States. Sauveur "Chris" Soriano, owner of Westchester Judo and Evolution Fitness Club in Scarsdale, is hoping to change that.

Westchester Judo, with 75 students of all ages from the Lower Hudson area, has been recognized by the USA Judo Association as one of the top 20 schools in the country. Soriano instructs on every level from top-flight international students to youths, and is hoping that through his work, especially with younger students of the sport, Judo can catch on here in the states.

Soriano, a native of Lyon, France, started practicing Judo at the age of four. "I don't know why I really started, actually," he said. "My other brothers all played soccer, and one day, I was walking from school to soccer and was watching [Judo] through a window and said, 'I want to do this.'"

After entering his first competition at age seven, Soriano's career has spanned some 40 years and seen him reach the heights of the international Judo world. In 1992, he served as an alternate on the French Olympic team, and was recently named the international coach for the United States of America Judo Team. He hopes that some of his charges will have similar success.

But as a teacher, Soriano is sometimes frustrated by a lack of awareness—in America at least—for his sport. Soriano, who earned full certification as a Judo instructor from the French Judo Federation, believes that a dearth of true teachers is one of the obstacles in helping the sport catch on.

"Here if you want to teach a martial art, you don't need any requirement," he said. "But Judo is a sport organized by an Olympic committee—you cannot pretend. From there, everything follows. Judo people don't do much advertising, but we're trying to do more now."

"America will always have Olympic medalists and world champions," he continued. "But hopefully if these kids have the right people teaching them, they can be amazing."

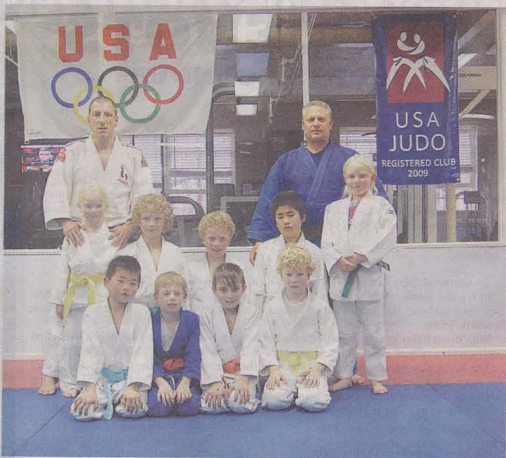
Even if his young students never make a splash on the international scene, Judo has other benefits. Soriano's partner, New Rochelle resident Stephen Moliterno, has practiced many forms of martial arts over his life, but did not hesitate to introduce the sport to his young son and daughter—both of whom study with Soriano.

"As far as Judo is concerned, it's a sport," explained Moliterno. "With other martial arts, there is punching and kicking and I think a lot of parents don't want their kids taking those insults to the body. It's aggressive in the regards that it's a competitive sport, but not too aggressive to the point where somebody can get really hurt."

"And the exercise is also important," he added. "Especially today when kids just sit around the computer all day."

While the sport of Judo can be demanding and requires great discipline, Soriano says it's his aim to keep things light during practice, especially with his younger students.

"[Judo] is hard work," he says. "But humor is important. Without fun, it's nothing."



Soriano (left) and his partner Stephen Moliterno (right, in blue) are hoping to put Judo on the map for young athletes in the United States. Photos/Mike Smith



Soriano shows WVOX radio personality Bob Marrone a few moves—much to Marrone's displeasure.



Judo instructor Chris Soriano is taken to the mat by a young, eager student.