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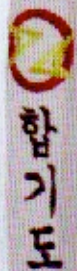
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The Incredible Journey of Jake Maloney

From Cerebral Palsy to Black Belt!

By Karen Eden



Jake Maloney was seven years-old when his mother took him to Mile High Karate in Denver, Colorado. "I didn't know if they (Mile High Karate) would take someone who has cerebral palsy," said Colleen Maloney. "But if they would embrace the challenge, I knew that Jake's persistence would take him far in the martial arts."

Mrs. Maloney was right. Now, almost four years later, she's holding her breath as her son prepares to test for his black belt. "Jake's ready," says his instructor, Amanda Christianson.

The test will consist of 48 hours of mentally and physically grueling activities with very little rest in between. There are 24 other black belt candidates who also will participate in six hours of intermittent sparring and an endurance test, which includes running over three miles.

The president and founder of Mile High Karate, Master Stephen Oliver, said training students with handicaps is commonplace at his seven Denver area schools. They have trained students with cystic fibrosis, autism, cancer, heart problems, deafness, asthma, ADD/ADHD, and even some students who are wheelchair-bound. More than one of the challenged students has gone on to become a black belt.



ABOVE: Executing a form during a testing.
LEFT: Getting closer to the black belt...



Jake takes part in many activities at Mile High Karate and at his school



Jake with fellow students of Mile High Karate in Denver, Colorado

"I'm not going to lie," says Ms. Christianson. "It takes a lot of patience, and not just on the instructor's behalf. You have to teach challenged students how to be patient with their limitations as well." Jake's instructor says she never cut Jake a break in class. "I felt I would be doing him a huge disfavor, not just in class, but in life," she says.

Jake Maloney's cerebral palsy has left him hemiplegic, which means one side of his body is paralyzed. Imagine being a tournament-winning fighter, but unable to do something as simple as tying your belt. That's the type of frustration Jake lives with on a daily basis. Nevertheless, his mother says his martial arts training has given him such a boost in self-esteem that Jake doesn't even view himself as different from any other student. She says she's grateful for his martial arts training which has taught Jake to think more positively in so many ways.

Jake has since pursued other activities, like soccer, and various school activities that most children with cerebral palsy would shy away from. And in case you're wondering, he's pretty good at this

Karate stuff. Jake has competed and even won in many tournaments over the years. "Never say never," Mrs. Maloney said.

Instructor Christianson's advice to others who may be thinking of taking on physically or mentally challenged students is cut and dry. "Don't be soft on them. Ride them even harder. They need to know that they have the potential to do this (martial arts) in spite of their disability, and you are that mirror of confidence for them," she says. As tough as Instructor Christianson may sound, she admits she'll be the first to cry when she sees Jake finally get his black belt.

If Master Oliver, the owner of Mile High Karate studios, has his way, many more, with and without disabilities, will now be able to train under his system. He and his board of directors are currently in the process of establishing over 50 new training centers across North America. This franchising system will include both business and marketing training for other martial artists who may be interested in joining their team. Anyone interested can find more information at MileHighKarate.com.