



[View area storm coverage and share your photos.](#)



Sat, July 12  
Today's high:  
84° F

NEWS SPORTS OPINION ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS COLUMNISTS GAMES & COMICS ARCHIVES  
SPORTS Brewers Packers Preps UW Sports Mallards Recreation

[email story](#) [print story](#)

## Heavy mettle: Paik's Martial Arts dominates, inspires at nationals

Ryan Mellenthin  
Correspondent for The Capital Times  
— 7/10/2008 5:28 am

Sure, Peter Paik was excited about his students' overwhelming success at last week's Amateur Athletic Union national taekwondo tournament, which was held in Madison for the first time.

And make no mistake, Paik's Traditional Martial Arts took home a bounty of medals: 54 in all, including 19 golds -- three of those going to athletes who repeated as national champions.

But Paik believes that the benefits of the martial arts experience can't be summed up by a medal or award.

"You can lose your medal in a move you're a kid and you win a medal, you move away, go to college and you don't know where you left your medal," Paik said. "I don't know where I've left my medals that I have won in years past.

"But it's not about that. It's more about the experience. You can take away the medal, but you can't take away the experience the medals that they win here, that's for the fan club, that's for your parents, your friends, your grandparents.

"So that's the point that I try to get across to all my students: Go get some experience, learn something -- it will make you a better person."

For the last decade, that has been Paik's mission at the Madison dojo founded in 1971 by his father, Sang Kee Paik. A grandmaster and eighth-degree black belt who serves as head instructor, Paik continues to spread the word about taekwondo, a modern discipline originating in Korea that is characterized by fast, high and spinning kicks.

Paik prides himself on teaching the intricacies of the sport, but also on impressing the notion of building one's character, of using taekwondo to overcome the odds both in competition and in everyday life.

Sometimes, the tables are turned, and the teachers are inspired by the students.

That has been the case with Rawan Alwari, a 16-year-old who used the inspiration of her master and taekwondo to make the most of her life after overcoming chronic myelogenous leukemia.



Mike DeVries/The Capital Times

[2 total images](#) | [view them here](#)

Paik's Traditional Martial Arts in Madison took home 54 medals, including 19 golds, at the National AAU Youth & Adult Taekwondo Championship.

### Other Stories

- Golf: Kelly will play in British Open, miss USBC
- Packers' Herron testifies in burglary case
- Update: Packers say Favre can return -- as a backup
- Wild pitches, errors doom Brewers in 6-5 loss
- Mallards return to the Duck Pond to topple Woodchucks
- Fox Sports report: Favre reversed field on previous retirement reversal

Alwari was diagnosed when she was 12 years old. "I was in the hospital for a while, and they thought I wasn't going to make it or whatever," she said.

The long battle with the disease sapped her of the desire to continue competing. But Paik wouldn't take no for an answer.

"I was going to drop out of taekwondo," Alwari said, "but my instructor kept me in, and everything went well after that 'cause taekwondo kept me focused."

Alwari isn't just competing, she is dominating. At the AAU tournament at the Alliant Energy Center, she claimed her third national title, winning in the forms competition in the girls 16-17 age group among second-degree black belts or higher.

Forms, one of three categories contested at the AAU nationals along with Olympic-style sparring and point-style sparring, is a competition in which competitors are judged on style. Sparring is a free-form type of fighting, with rules designed to minimize injury.

"It's the stories that develop like that, that make the experience unique -- the things that people overcome," Paik said. "Leukemia, are you kidding me? What can I say to her now? She's beaten leukemia. I am very humbled by the experiences that my students have brought home."

For many of Paik's students, the achievements aren't always that dramatic but are just as meaningful.

Wiley Leskinen, who won the boys 14-15 forms title among second-degree black belts or higher, is a firm believer that people should get involved in taekwondo.

"Taekwondo is a very good thing to get into," he said. "The competitiveness is really cool, but it's not the main focus of it."

"It's more about self-discipline and showing respect. It's just a great character-building activity to get into, but once you're in it for a while, competition is a fun thing to do, and I recommend it."

T

raining at Paik's Martial Arts is always intense; students typically practice every weekday. For the month heading into AAU nationals, the students trained an extra 12 hours per week, Paik said.

All the hard work paid off. Three athletes -- Trent Bartolf, Jacob Swe and April Swe -- successfully defended their national championships after claiming titles at last year's national tournament in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. And in addition to the 16 other champions, Paik's took home 16 silver and 19 bronze medals.

Next up is the Junior Olympics, which will be held in Detroit starting in late July. Several of Paik's students will compete.

The success at AAU nationals has been humbling for Paik, who has succeeded in his mission to resurrect his father's dojo as a national force after a downturn in fortunes in the 1990s.

"I want to say thank you to all the support I have got from our students and their parents. I want to say thank you to the help I have received from my family and all of the people that are around me," Paik said.

"I want to say thank you to God for providing us the opportunity to give us the confidence and the courage to bring back the prestige."

Ryan Mellenthin  
Correspondent for The Capital Times  
— 7/10/2008 5:28 am



### Most Popular

- Fans flustered by latest twist in Favre saga
- Lola car show takes another trip back in time (with photos)
- Update: Packers say Favre can return -- as a backup
- Fox Sports report: Favre reversed field on previous retirement reversal
- Arson caused town of Madison apartment building fire
- Slow, no-wake order back on for Yahara Lakes after storms
- A Smart way to do business
- Hellmuth among 189 players remaining at WSOP
- Bluephies Restaurant set to open expansion Wednesday
- Popular Sun Prairie supper club forced to close for now