

LIGHTING A FIRE

Walla Walla's Reid Reininger earns a bronze medal in patterns at the 2011 International Taekwon-Do Championships last month, and sets his sights on a second-degree black belt

By AMELIA VENEZIANO
of the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

WALLA WALLA — A block, a punch, a kick. Those three actions, plus another 41 moves performed sequentially with precise, crisp action, were enough to put a local Taekwon-Do martial artist on the podium at the 2011 International Taekwon-Do Championships in Broomfield, Colo., June 25-26.

Reid Reininger earned a bronze medal for third place in the patterns competition, making him the highest first-degree black belt to finish.

The 13-year-old Garrison Middle School student rivaled 12 other first-degrees and five second-degrees for the bronze.

Reininger also sparred, losing to the eventual second-place winner in the second round of full-contact continuous sparring.

He didn't get there by accident. Reininger spent nearly every day leading up to the tournament in the Centerline Martial Arts gym in Walla Walla, practicing his forms and sparring, his discipline and endurance.

He's been at it for seven years and competed in four tournaments, and he received his black belt in October 2010. He hopes to test for second-degree later this year.

"I want to stay in (Taekwon-Do) as long as I can, and go as far as I can," Reininger said.

He's not off to a bad start.

Reininger was the junior grand champion at a Kelso, Wash., national tournament, and the overall grand champion at a Walla Walla regional tournament as an 11-year-old.

The Colorado event was his



U-B photos by MATTHEW B. ZIMMERMAN

Putting his best foot forward, Reid Reininger (above) steps through a series of moves during a workout with fellow black belts at Centerline Martial Arts last week. Reininger recently came home with a third place in forms from international Taekwon-Do competition. Reininger's embroidered black belt hangs tied at his waist (left), with his name and information signifying accomplishments.



first international tournament, with competitors from Australia, Ireland, Scotland, Malaysia and other far-flung locales.

"It's fun to go and compete," he said. "I expected to do well when I went. It was a lot of fun."

There was also a glimpse of mastery in Colorado.

Four grand masters attended to observe and meet the students.

Reininger will have the chance to meet one of them again soon.

He will test for his second-degree black belt (in Taekwon-Do terminology, a belt level is called a "dan") in front of a grand master, and one of them will make his way to Washington in the fall, said Centerline studio owner Mike Glencross.

Usually, it takes about a year and a half to get to the second degree, and not many second-degrees are under age 14, Glencross said.

Reininger's dedication, along with the serendipitous visit, helped accelerate the process.

"We do make exceptions, and there are a few who are ready," Glencross said of his student.

Reininger is one of a handful of Centerline's more dedicated teenagers, Glencross said.

"A lot of kids would rather sit around and play video games,"



U-B photo by MATTHEW B. ZIMMERMAN

Flashing a smile mid-kick, Reid Reininger spars with a fellow black belt during a workout at Centerline Martial Arts.

✓Black belt already achieved by 13-year-old Reid Reininger

Continued from Page B1

Glencross said. "There's a discipline ingrained in his personality ... he goes the extra mile."

That's part of why Glencross handed a key to the studio over to 13-year-old.

And Reininger comes in.

He lives nearby and comes to practice alone a few days a week. In patterns, competitors are expected to end exactly where they begin, making practice on an uneven or unmeasured surface difficult. The dojo, located downtown, gives him better quality floor time.

The first-degree black belt form is called Ge-Baek and has 44 moves. That's the pattern he performed in Colorado.

In addition, Reinginger has had to learn 12 others as he's ascended the color belt ranks.

At competitions, he must perform two patterns — one of his choice, usually the most technically advanced, and the other as assigned by the judges.

It can be anything, from one he learned several years ago to more recently.

"It's a lot of memory," Reininger said of the work involved.

The forms get more advanced as the belts go up, so the second-degree black belts spend more time in the air — kicking, spinning, blocking and punching — than Reininger does.

Which makes beating a few of them all the more sweet.

"Lumping all of the first- and second-degree black belts together to compete puts the first-degree belts at a huge disadvantage," Glencross said. "I was a

little shocked to hear they did that."

But shocked or not, Reininger was the highest-finishing first-degree black belt in his division in Colorado.

"They do some crazy stuff," Glencross said of the second-degree pattern. "It's kind of like comparing apples and oranges for the judges. It's hard."

But the 13-year-old was ready to compete.

Reininger has progressed to a level where he can watch videos of himself and auto-correct, and Glencross will have him assist other students during lessons.

"It lights a fire under him," said Chuck Reininger, Reid's father, of when his son is anything less than technically correct. "He gets upset and he wants to try harder. I thought I would have to console him, but he goes to work fixing it and I have to console myself."

For Reid's part, the competition is fun.

"I like to win," he said.

He also ski races and will participate in a ski-race camp later this summer at Mount Hood.

It's coincidence that brought Reininger into the dojo. A babysitter's son was involved, and Reid's parents thought he might enjoy it.

Although Glencross is proud of his student, he knows the pressure can only go so far.

"I'm expecting big things, but I try not to put too much on him," Glencross said. "I've told him to just have fun with it."

But that hasn't stopped Glencross from noting that Reininger was exception-

ally strong when he tested for his red belt, which is one level below black.

Glencross has only made that notation for nine students.

"When the Masters see that, they expect to see a pretty good performance," Glencross said.

Which Reinginger is more than happy to give — and plans to keep giving for quite some time.

"Maybe a 16-year-old Grand Champion?" Glencross joked.

"Yeah, right," Reinginger said, but the energy with which he attacks his art speaks otherwise.