

Aurora's Basalic represented Karate Ontario for third year in a row, hopes to keep that going

He has a very famous name, with a different spelling, but this Aurora native isn't a boxer by trade. He's a very talented fighter in karate, who is making headlines in his age groups.

Muhamed-Ali Basalic, who will be turning 15 in the coming months, represented Karate Ontario at the 2022 National Championships in St. John's, N.L. this past summer in the 1st Elite Cadet category. He finished in seventh place.

In his third year with the provincial team, COVID-19 led to the cancellation of the competition last year. It was an honour for Basalic to represent the province at nationals and he keep this streak going next year.

They will have four open tournaments and one elite throughout the season, that's how it goes. With those points and qualifications, if he's anywhere in the categories of first and third, he will be able to qualify for Team Ontario and represent nationals again, Basalic's mother, Sanja, told The Auroran.

At eight-years-old, Basalic initially joined the karate program at Senshuken Martial Arts Academy in Newmarket because other family members got involved.

In the beginning, I joined because my cousin and two of my sisters all started karate. Because they started, I thought I might as well give it a try, Basalic said.

Without any intention of ever competing in high-level competitions, between the ages of nine and 10 Basalic developed an immense amount of skill on the mat. He showed an aggressiveness that had every Sensei in the dojo turning their heads.

He excelled really well. That's where we had our eyes on him and thought he can do well in competitions provincially and nationally, said head instructor Sensei Saeed Baghbani.

First thing we always look at is the attitude of the individual. So, the discipline aspect, how well they listen and they follow instructions. Muhamed was able to do that since day one. There's a lot of criteria that we look at, whether it be strength, or speed. They have lots of different types of training; lots of kicking drills, punching.

As he continued to train and master his craft, Basalic was entered into his first official competitive tournament. Heading in without any expectations, Basalic won the gold medal. He carried that momentum into other competitions and continued to win more first-place medals.

That's what kind of boosted my confidence and everything and that's how Team Ontario noticed me, he said.

Currently a black belt, Basalic moved up to compete in elite-level competitions. He has been doing so for the past two and a half years minus ones cancelled due to COVID competing in five elite competitions and open competitions along the way.

The most interesting fighters, he said, were at the national championships. He hasn't seen anything like it.

I learned a lot of new things while competing in Newfoundland. There were a variety of fighters, such as Quebec, who were extremely aggressive. There was B.C., a passive-aggressive group. There was a small amount from Prince Edward Island. Through it all, I learned how to adapt, which I will incorporate into the next nationals, Basalic said.

There's a lot more work to do for Basalic as his young fighting career continues to go on. He has volunteered and taught young 10-year-olds at the dojo some fighting moves and how to count to 10 in Japanese. He is an advocate for the sport and has high

aspirations one day of potentially owning his own dojo. Sensei Baghbani said Basalic is a great young man and he is very happy to have him at his academy.

Next year, national championships will be held in Quebec. Basalic anticipates it will be sometime in June. In the meantime, he will continue to prepare for the event as best as possible and is excited for what might lie ahead.

By Robert Belardi