

5-foot-4 judo instructor at Offutt AFB is 73 — and also a 4th-degree black belt

By Lexie Heinle / World-Herald staff writer | Posted: Monday, February 2, 2015 1:00 am

The 73-year-old woman in the blue uniform twists her body in such a way she throws her teenage student to the blue practice mats.

“This is my passion,” said Judy Williams, sensei, or teacher, for the Offutt Air Force Base judo team.

The fourth-degree black belt’s teaching career began at the base 38 years ago. Williams describes judo as a martial art and sport with the principle of minimum effort and maximum efficiency. Judo students first learn how to fall safely, and then learn different throws to unbalance their opponents. Pins, chokes and strategy are also taught.

“Judo is a thinking game, but you can’t plan,”

Williams said. The countless repetition of throws and falls builds muscle memory that allows quick reactions during practice and competitions — or even on icy sidewalks. More than once, Williams has “judo fallen” during Nebraska winters, preventing injuries.

Williams first took up judo in 1959. She was working late at the time and was concerned about her safety.

“You learn to work with what you have,” said Williams, who is 5-foot-4. In judo, method is more important than strength. The throws were designed to use momentum, not brute force.

Williams’ method earned her a black belt 51 years ago. She stopped competing 30 years ago because her students were becoming her opponents. She liked coaching, so she decided to focus on that.

“I’m interested in keeping my sport alive,” Williams said. She serves as president of Nebraska Judo Inc., a statewide group with five clubs.

Jon Robinson, a student for two years, described Williams as demanding but encouraging.

“She’s great with kids,” said Robinson, who teaches a different martial art, jiu-jitsu, to children. “I take a lot of inspiration from her when I teach them.”

Raven Kearns, 9, started Williams’ class a couple of months ago. She described her sensei as nice and



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Judy Williams and her students after judo practice at the Offutt Air Force Base.

helpful. According to her father, Raven used to have problems with bullies before Williams took her under her wing.

“You don’t get that from coaches nowadays,” Rob Kearns said.

Although Williams is a retired administrative assistant, her judo retirement is more up in the air.

“I don’t plan on it,” she said. In addition to judo, Williams works out for an hour each day at the Lied Activity Center in Bellevue.

Arthritis has caused more damage to Williams’ body than judo. The only injury she ever suffered from judo was a torn ligament. But arthritis led to a knee replacement and a bad shoulder. She won’t have shoulder surgery, though, because afterward, she wouldn’t be able to take the impact from a fall.

“I’ve never been without judo,” Williams said. “This is like my cornerstone. I’ve something to look forward to.”

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