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[SEND TO A FRIEND](#)
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The student and the sensei

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As they pose for a picture with their gold medals, 11-year-old Roxanna Feraru and 48-year-old Ken Marchtaler seem worlds apart in personality.

Feraru is a bubbly little bundle of energy, talking with enthusiasm, a bounce in her step. Marchtaler - her sensei - is a quiet giant, almost whispering when he talks, a Zen look on his face.

But the two have many things in common. For one, they're both members of OMAC Martial Arts run out of the Braefoot

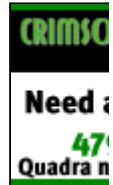
Recreational Centre in Saanich. They both just got back from the World Organization of Martial Arts Athletes (WOMAA) World Championships in Germany (July 15-17) where they competed for Canada, representing Victoria.

They also both won gold and are now considered world champions. Feraru won the Intermediate 11 & Under Weapons Forms, and Marchtaler took gold in both the Male 45 & Over Black Belt Traditional Empty Hand Forms and the Black Belt Weapons Forms.



Sharon Tiffin/Saanich News

Roxanna Feraru and Ken Marchtaler hold their medals they won at this year's WOMAA World Martial Arts Championships



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Aside from competing in the international competition, Feraru said Rosenheim, Germany - where the competition took place - was a cool experience.

"Germany was wonderful," said Feraru. "There was old time buildings that you wouldn't really see here in Canada. Everything was different, the car speeds were crazy. The guy (who was driving us) told us you can go whatever speed you want as long as you can see well."

Feraru said their driver reached speeds of 180 kilometres on the highway, brimming with excitement as she talks about the experience. Marchtaler on the other hand, said doing close to 200 clicks was a bit nerve-racking. "That was fast enough for me," he said.

As for the tournament, Feraru said the competition was pretty high-class. "I wasn't surprised to see people doing backflips and flips and stuff," said Feraru, who also took bronze in the Intermediate ages 10-11, Traditional Empty Hand Forms event. Marchtaler said he was impressed with the eclectic mix of people. "There was certainly a lot more range of people than I expected," said Marchtaler, also Team Canada's coach. "There was movie stars, actors, stunt people. There was a lot of high-class athletes."

Winning gold in their respective events means Feraru and Marchtaler also competed for Grand Championship status - which pits the winners in each age group (in each event) against one another. "Competing with all the Grand Champions was cool," said Feraru, who currently holds a green belt with a brown trim and should obtain her black belt within a year. "Standing on the podium with my gold medal was also cool." Marchtaler said the Grand Champion competition put him against some rather youthful competitors. "It was me, a 48-year-old man against an 18-year-old kid," said Marchtaler, who has four different black belts.

Now back home and enjoying their medals, Marchtaler was also involved with Feraru's integration into martial arts four years ago when she started. "I was just getting ready to do tap dancing on Saturday and I heard sensei's class," she said of seeing Marchtaler teach at Bravefoot. "They were making some loud noises and I just peaked around wondering what they were doing. Then he just asked me if I wanted to try it for fun and I ended up being late for tap class because I liked it too much."

"My mom saw me at home doing these karate kicks and she asked me what I was doing," continued Feraru. "I said I was doing karate so she put me in the class and I've loved it ever since."



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Having taught martial arts for 15 years, Marchtaler also recently became the Canadian director of WOMAA, receiving a numbered, hand-engraved Hibben fantasy knife from the president of the organization. With years of experience on the mat, Marchtaler's also learned carrying something as deadly as the fantasy knife around the world can be a double-edged sword - no pun intended.

"They always ask me when I go through (Canadian) Customs if I have any firearms and when I come back through American Customs they ask if I have any firearms - or other weapons. So I always have to declare all the weapons (swords, knives etc.) I have with me on the way back."

Marchtaler said a few years back when he was returning home from competing in California that things got a little hairy. When he approached the customs officer and declared that he had a bunch of deadly weapons, things got pretty tense.

"He perked up and was like 'okay just wait here please,'" said Marchtaler. "Then he came back with four other officers and then they took me to a room and it was about 45 minutes before I got out of there. Basically you get penalized for being honest."



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