

## News



# Family bonds over high kicks

**Mum, 41, and son, 10, both won medals as part of S'pore taekwondo team**

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WHEN Russell Seow, 10, won a bronze medal in the 2nd International Taekwon-Do Federation (ITF) Asia Championship in Kuala Lumpur earlier this month, he was not the only winner in his family.

His mother won a silver in the "Individual Pattern Senior Female 1st Degree" category and a bronze in the "Team Pattern Adult Female" category.

Six years ago, Madam Carnation Chai, would never have imagined taking up taekwon-do, let alone competing in international tournaments.

The 41-year-old, who works in an investment bank, said that initially, the classes were just for Russell.

"When he was four, I noticed he was hyperactive and needed something to do. So I signed him up for trial lessons and he liked it," she said.

Worried that he was too young to understand the training and exams, she joined the class temporarily until he would become familiar enough to attend classes by himself.

"Two months into the classes, the coaches encouraged me to join a local taekwon-do tournament. I thought, why not, and in the end, I actually won a medal.

## Thankful

"From then on, I became more interested in taekwon-do. I'm thankful that I stuck with it," she said.

Now Madam Chai has a second-degree black belt and Russell a junior black belt. They go to the same school twice a week. The school takes in students of all ages.

The Singaporean team of 11 members took home a gold, two silvers and 15 bronzes from Kuala Lumpur.

Russell, who won his bronze in the "Individual Pattern Under 12 Male 1st Degree" category, was the youngest member while Madam Chai was the sec-

ond oldest.

Mother and son were excited watching each other in their bouts during the three-day tournament.

Madam Chai said: "I was so nervous watching Russell, hoping he wouldn't make any mistakes. And I was so proud when he won a medal."

Russell was equally happy when his mum won, saying that he "felt proud".

Madam Chai said that taking up the martial art has improved her health.

"I like being active and I've felt fitter since I started," she said.

But its greatest benefit has been its impact on her relationship with her children.

Her seven-year-old daughter, Hazel, is also taking classes while Amber, who is four, will join them when she turns five.

Said Madam Chai: "When we go for training, that's my chance to have one-on-one time with them."

Russell chipped in: "Yeah, it helps the mother-son bonding."

Madam Chai said her engineer-husband admires what she has done and tells her that she is setting a good example for their children.

She added with a laugh: "He said he feels very safe with us around."

She has asked her husband to join them, but he says taekwon-do is not for him. But Madam Chai and her children have inspired others.

"My ex-colleague also started lessons with her son three months ago. She told me the bonding between them has been very good," she said.

Asked if he wanted to do taekwon-do for the rest of his life, Russell answered: "Yup."

He added: "I'd feel lonely if my mum left."

But he needn't worry.

She said: "I'll keep doing taekwon-do as long as my children do."

## HIGH KICKS:

Madam Carnation Chai, 41, and her son Russell, 10, have been learning taekwondo for six years.

TNP PICTURE:  
ARIFFIN JAMAR