

Family, hometown friends see Minkin win Olympic judo berth in San Jose

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Contact: Jody Meacham, 408 / 288-2934, jody@sjsa.org

SAN JOSE (June 5, 2004) – Charlee Minkin arrived at the U.S. Olympic Team Trials in Judo and Taekwondo as one of 10 athletes from the San Jose area hoping to win a spot in this summer's Athens Olympic Games.

She left the San Jose State University Event Center at the end of Saturday's historic competition as the only one to do so.

"Making the Olympic team here is like getting everything you wanted for in your whole life," said Minkin, who defeated Liz Burns of Scotia, N.Y., in the judo women's 52-kilogram weight class before a capacity crowd, which included her mother Carolyn and friends from nearby Half Moon Bay.

In all, eleven judo athletes and two from taekwondo were added to the U.S. Olympic Team in the first U.S. trials ever staged jointly by two Olympic sports.

"What a great way to continue the Olympic qualifying season in San Jose," said Dean Munro, executive director of the host San Jose Sports Authority. "First were the Olympic wheelchair track athletes in last month's Far West Games, then today's huge and enthusiastic crowds for two sessions of judo and taekwondo competition, and on June 19 we will wrap it up with the U.S. Olympic Trials in Rhythmic Gymnastics and Trampoline."

Minkin, who first took up judo from her mother, who also competed in the sport, moved to the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo., four years ago to pursue her Olympic dream. Saturday she went undefeated through two fights, knocking off Enid Rivera of Aguas Buenas, Puerto Rico in the afternoon preliminaries.

Two other local athletes advanced into the evening finals only to lose. San Jose's Tetsu Okano, whose father Isao won a gold medal in judo for Japan when the sport debuted in the Olympics at the 1964 Tokyo Games, lost to top-seeded Rick Hawn of Colorado Springs in the 73 kg final. Okano upset No.2 seed Aaron Cohen of Buffalo Grove, Ill., with an ippon – judo's equivalent of a knockout – in the first round.

"Tetsu did most of the attacking," his coach, four-time Olympian Mike Swain of San Jose, said of his match against Hawn. "He wasn't beaten by better judo but by better tactics."

Mike Barnes of San Jose upset top-seeded Rhadi Fergusson of Colorado Springs in the 100 kg final by an ippon, but because the first seed is protected, that forced a best-of-three match playoff between the two athletes. Barnes, a San Jose State police officer ranked second in the nation, lost the next two matches.

The taekwondo results ended the hopes of the Lopez family of Sugar Land, Texas that the U.S. team would be a family affair. Steven Lopez, the defending Olympic welterweight champion, defeated Tony Graf of Miami, Fla., 4-0. But sister Diana lost a sudden death overtime 1-0 to Nia Abdallah of Houston, Texas and Colorado Springs after forcing a 2-2 tie late in regulation of the women's bantamweight fight.

In one of the most emotional matches of the finals, heavy favorite Ronda Rousey, 17, of Santa Monica defeated Grace Jividen of Littleton, Colo., in the women's 63 kg judo class. Jividen, who competed on the same U.S. national team with AnnMaria, Ronda's mother, in 1987, turns 40 on June 12.

"Actually, this was kind of like fighting my mom," Ronda Rousey said after winning her final with an ippon.

The U.S. Olympic Team Trials in Judo and Taekwondo are among more than 120 sports events brought to the city by the San Jose Sports Authority.

U.S. Olympic Team Trials in Judo and Taekwondo results:

JUDO

Women 52kg

Charlee Minkin, Half Moon Bay d. Liz Burns, Scotia, N.Y.

Women 57kg

Ellen Wilson, Colorado Springs d. Valerie Gotay, Vista, Calif.

Women 63kg

Ronda Rousey, Santa Monica d. Grace Jividen, Littleton, Colo.

Women 70kg

Celita Schutz, New York City d. Christina Yannetsos, Colorado Springs

Women 78kg

Nicole Kubes, Fort Worth, Texas d. Molly O'Rourke, Oak Harbor, Wash.

Men 60kg

Taraje Williams-Murray, New York City d. Kenny Hashimoto, Thornton, Colo.

Men 66kg

Alex Ottiano, Lawrence, Mass. d. Justin Flores, Encinitas, Calif.

Men 73kg

Jimmy Pedro, Methuen, Mass. d. Ryan Reser, Colorado Springs

Men 81kg

Rick Hawn, Colorado Springs d. Tetsu Okano, San Jose

Men 90kg

Brian Olson, Boulder, Colo. d. Dariusz Mikolajczak, New York City

Men 100kg

Rhadi Fergusson, Colorado Springs d. Mike Barnes, San Jose

Men +100kg

Martin Boonzaayer, Hoffman Estates, Ill. d. Kirk Hoffman, Colorado Springs

TAEKWONDO

Women -57kg

Nia Abdallah, Colorado Springs d. Diana Lopez, Sugar Land, Texas

Men -80kg

Steven Lopez, Sugar Land, Texas d. Tony Graf, Miami, Fla.