

# Karate students earn top honours

Masaya Toyanagi and Aidan Cartwright collect first-degree black belts, Calvin Pittet earns fourth-degree black belt

by James McCarthy  
Northern News Services

Any athlete will tell you they want to be the best at what they do.

In karate, being one of the best means you have achieved black belt status, something very few people in the world can lay claim to. Two Yellowknife karateka reached that status late last month.

Masaya Toyanagi and Aidan Cartwright of the Yellowknife Wado-Kai Karate Club are the newest black belts in the city after being promoted to shodan, or first-degree, on May 31 following a grading session at Diamond Jenness Secondary School in Hay River. Calvin Pittet, also with the club, was promoted to yondan, or fourth-degree black belt, at the same ceremony.

Patrick Clancy, who runs the Yellowknife club, said it was a very big event for the club and it gives him a sense of pride knowing two of his senior students have achieved such status.

"Getting a black belt is a very big achievement," he said.

"We're very proud to have produced our first two black belts. They're both excellent students of karate and their black belts are very well-deserved."

Every style of karate has their own way of grading for black belt and Shintani Wado-Kai is no different. To begin with, Sensei Denis Labbe, president of the Shintani Wado-Kai Karate Federation of Canada, flew in from Welland, Ont., to lead the grading and he was assisted by two black belts who hail from Hay River, Sensei Santiago Lau-a and Sensei Andy Pinto.

The testing included work done on the floor, where those being tested must show knowledge of the basic moves up to black belt, as well as knowledge of all kata, or forms, up to black belt, which must be done three times consecutively to the graders' satisfaction.

Cartwright and Toyanagi were expected to perform six kata, while Pittet, whose grading lasted much longer, had to perform 10 kata.

Knowledge of advanced techniques are also a must, as is randori, or mock combat, where a karateka moves quickly to fight an opponent, making only slight physical contact. This is done to show

body control and must be done uninterrupted. At the end, kumite, or controlled full-contact fighting, is done.

There is also a written test which must be completed before the grading begins and that goes over the basic knowledge of wado-kai.

Cartwright said there were nerves before he hit the floor but it was the same sort of nerves he's felt before when heading down south for competition.

"It's very much like a winning or losing situation but you're trying not to worry about that," he said.

"You're trying to keep in mind that it's the experience that's important and you're trying to do your best. I did find it fairly easy to relax leading into it. There was that nervousness of driving up to the building and thinking that this was a fairly momentous weekend for me."

Cartwright could have gone through grading last year but he said he wasn't sure about it at the time.

"I spoke to a few other senseis I knew and respected and

the consensus was if I wasn't sure, wait a year," he said. "I waited the additional year and I found it very beneficial. By the time grading came around this time, it wasn't a case of hoping to be ready but I knew I was ready."

The session wasn't just for black belts as Cassandra Kaminski, who is currently a blue belt, took part in the exercise portion and even demonstrated her abilities to Labbe.

Clancy said after it was all over, Labbe paid per perhaps the best compliment he could have given.

"He said he wished he could have taken her back to Welland and have her train there," he said. "He was quite impressed with what she could do."

Cartwright said having two new black belts at the club will also serve as a chance to show the younger kyu belts that they can get there with a little effort.

"Being able to remind kids if they're having a tough time that I was just like them once," he said. "I started out in a small gym, just like they did, with a white belt. I think I had a bit of an advantage of starting in my 20s because I made the decision to not be told to go to karate but I was going to go to karate."



Masaya Toyanagi of the Yellowknife Wado-Kai Karate Club shows off his certificate proclaiming his promotion to shodan, or first-degree black belt, on May 31 in Hay River. With him is Sensei Denis Labbe of Welland, Ont., president of the Shintani Wado-Kai Karate Federation of Canada.

**"Getting a black belt is a very big achievement."**

Patrick Clancy

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