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Trafford's Paul Bova throws his weight around in winning judo gold medal

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Paul Bova, 61 years young, spends three days a week training with men who are nearly 40 years his junior. His body can be seen twisting and turning at his gym in Trafford, sometimes in directions that he did not plan for.

It is all done for the love of judo, a sport he has competed in since the young age of 7.

“After a workout, I’m usually limping for two days, my joints hurt,” said Bova, a 1975 Baldwin High grad and a longtime resident of Trafford. “My age creeps up on me. You don’t find many people in the United States doing what I’m doing at this time in their life.”

And you don't find many standing proudly on a podium, sporting a gold medal, at the International Judo Federation Kata & Veteran World Championships in Cancun.

Yet, that's precisely where Bova was in mid-October, when he defeated three opponents en route to the 145-pound championship in the 60-64 age division.

In many ways, capturing the title was redemption for this sixth-degree black belt, who serves as the vice president of the Trafford Commerce Center by day and runs his Trafford Judo Club by night.

"The last time I was there, three years ago, I lost to everyone I faced; four guys," Bova said of the 2015 competition in Fort Lauderdale. "I couldn't win. I wondered if I was done. But I guess its determination and not wanting to quit. I worked hard to get back there again. And it was great to win it all."

In master's judo, a sport that is similar to Greco-Roman wrestling, the goal is to earn a point during a 2½-minute match. This is achieved by "throwing" an opponent on his or her back with considerable force or speed. A half-point is awarded when a contestant is held down for 10 seconds. A full point is awarded when both shoulders are held down for 20 seconds, similar to a pin in wrestling.

One can also win if an opponent submits, or if he or she is assessed three violations. Bova won each of his three matches in Cancun by points.

Not that it was easy. The best in the world convened at the world finals, which featured nearly 800 competitors from 45 countries.

"And they're all talented, all black belts," Bova said. "You can't make a mistake. If you make one step in the wrong direction, you can lose fast."

Bova and his coach, Gary Goltz (originally from Pittsburgh), took an aggressive approach to the world championships.

"Attack, attack, attack," Bova said. "Then, you try to throw them. You want to get your point and move on to the next one."

Bova was one of three competitors from Pittsburgh at the five-day event, which featured fighters ranging in age from 30 to 80-plus. Julian Levy, 30, of Turtle Creek, was defeated in the bronze-medal match at 145 pounds and Mike Ferguson, 55, of Trafford, competed at 190 pounds.

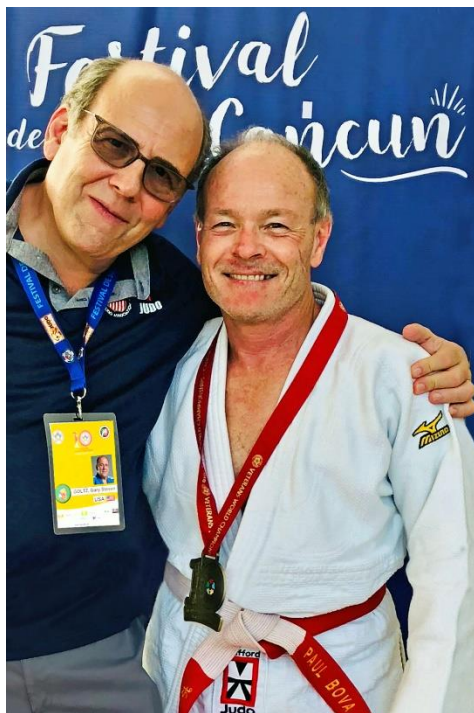
Also, 84-year-old Andor Jobb, who resides in Clarion, was recognized for his many years as a competitor.

“What’s impressive about these events is that you see so many people, of all ages, from so many places,” Bova said. “And when you’re sitting and watching, a match can be over in a split second. Somebody is flat on their back. But then both competitors get up and shake hands. There’s a lot of good sportsmanship. To me, that’s probably what’s most impressive about this sport — the sportsmanship.”

After winning the world title, Bova barely took a break. He rested for two weeks before hitting the mat again, testing his limits against younger competitors. His mission is to pull off a repeat next year when the world championships move to Morocco.

“I’ll have a target on my back now,” he said.

The way Bova sees it, he’ll continue following a path that began when his father, a fifth-degree black belt, introduced him to the sport in 1964. He has since won 20-plus national and international events and too many regional tournaments to keep track of. In 2009, he placed third at the world championships, while winning the Canadian-American Games and placing second in the Pan-Am Games.



“I called it my hat trick,” said Bova, who, as a sixth-degree black belt is viewed as a “PhD” in the judo world.

He would like to pull off another world title — at 62 years young.

“When I tell people my age and what I do, I usually hear, ‘Wow,’” Bova said. “This sport is keeping me young.”

Paul Bova of Trafford (right), poses with his coach Gary Goltz an eighth-degree black belt, after winning at the Veteran’s World Judo Champions in Cancun

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