

Former world-class runner is on his best journey



John Stayton, a former world-class runner, has taken an exhilarating and exciting journey over the past two-and-a-half years. He always has participated in sports, but because of physical setbacks, his selection of activities has become less and less. Now, he's on a quest to earn a black belt in karate as he nears his 79th birthday.

Stayton showed his running prowess when he was the nation's top high school miler in 1949, notching the season's fastest mile in 4:22.5 when competing for Anderson (Ind.) High School. He went on to have a stellar running career and usually won his age division when progressing through the divisions at D-FW events. However, after having a pacemaker implant, two knee replacements and prostate cancer surgery, John has had to venture into other activities. He has cycled, swam and even played golf. But all eventually became boring, he said.

However, when playing golf one day, he noticed a sign that read "ATA KARATE FOR KIDS." Though at 76, he didn't qualify as a kid, he thought he might be able to keep pace with them. He had considered the sport before, but changed his mind after his pacemaker implant.

This time, he visited ATA and talked to the owner, Sam Vickers, and his staff. He became interested about the program for adults and kids. None of his previous sports endeavors had required the balance, speed, power and refinement with technique and rhythm that's required in this new sport.

So, John dove in the new sport in 2007 and struggled at first at the beginning white belt stage. John said he felt ashamed that most of the kids were better. He finally struggled through to earn his orange and yellow belts. He was improving and it was in evidence at the 2008 World Championship camo belt competition. From there, he learned and worked hard as he earned his green, purple, blue, brown and red. Now, facing him was the challenge of earning the black belt. He said nothing was so exciting and satisfying.

It also was inspiring, he said, to have been selected student of the year. Now, he wants the black. If it happens, he said, credit must go to not only perseverance, but to the encouragement, help, support and friendship from students and instructors and event parents "who probably wanted to see the old man succeed."