

Building Successful Kids™

At Mile High Karate® Teleconference #3

Grand Master Oliver: Let me welcome everybody to today's teleconference. We're going to be talking to several of our Mile High Karate instructors and several of our black belts, I believe, and also just going over a little bit of information about how the program works, and give everybody kind of a brief and hopefully concise overview of how the program unfolds on a long-term basis.

Amanda, are you on the phone?

Amanda Christensen: Yes, sir, I am.

Grand Master Oliver: Fantastic. Fantastic. Amanda, we're going to start with I want to really give people a little bit of a perspective of how the process of black belt unfolds. Of course, you've now been there with yourself, your husband and your 2 kids. We also have generated how many black belts in the last year at your school?

Amanda Christensen: I believe I have about 32.

Grand Master Oliver: 32 new black belts? That's real exciting. I believe, if I understood correctly, you have a mom of one of those 32 new black belts on the phone with us here, Matthew Gaster. Is that correct?

Amanda Christensen: Yes, it is. Matthew's not on, obviously, because he's at school. But his mom is here.

Matthew is 8 years old, going to be 9 in December. He just got his conditional black belt.

And Kim, I believe she should be on.

Grand Master Oliver: We'll see. Kim, have you joined us?

Amanda Christensen: It might be a little bit early.

Grand Master Oliver: Yeah, she may be joining us here in a little bit. Let's start with Matthew. Tell us a little bit about Matthew and what his progress has been like. Was he a gifted white belt, or did he take a while to get started? How long has he been training now to be a black belt?

Amanda Christensen: He's been training since, I believe, he was about 5, 6 years old. He was pretty average as a white belt. He was a little uncoordinated. He's a hockey player. I don't know if that has anything to do with it.

Kim Gaster: You must be talking about Matthew.

Grand Master Oliver: There you go.

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Kim Gaster: He is extremely gifted, at this point.

Grand Master Oliver: Sounds like mom joined us.

Kim Gaster: He's developed into quite the little leader. Actually, he led the black belt class last night, did a great job with that.

Grand Master Oliver: Fantastic. Fantastic. Is this Kim?

Kim Gaster: It is.

Grand Master Oliver: Welcome to our call today.

Kim Gaster: Thank you.

Grand Master Oliver: We were just talking about, I guess from Amanda Christianson's school, her and Master Gonzalez, that school has created about 32 new black belts in the last 2 cycles here. So that would be this year. Sounds like your son is one of the proud new ones.

Kim Gaster: He is.

Grand Master Oliver: Fantastic! Fantastic! If you don't mind, let's ask you a few questions. When he was getting started off, would you say that he was an immediate protégé at this, or did he get started off kind of slow and weak?

Kim Gaster: He started off pretty slow and weak. We actually saw some of the higher belt ranks, when we joined, and really felt he'd never be there.

Grand Master Oliver: Pretty common reaction, which is why I asked that. What students have a tendency to think, and I think parents are probably worse at this than the students are, is they tend to think that when they look at the brown belts or black belts, or they see a big show like our black belt extravaganza or black belt testing, they tend to think, "Oh my god, they must have all been protégés and must have all been highly skilled and capable when they started, in order to ever be that good."

But the reality is, frankly, usually the opposite.

Kim Gaster: Right. That's definitely what we thought.

Grand Master Oliver: Okay. So not out of line on exactly how your process evolved. Give us a perspective, now. It's just been over the last month now, that Matthew both got his new black belt at the black belt retreat, but then performed in front of a couple thousand people. How do you feel, as a parent, when that happens with a 9-year-old boy?

Kim Gaster: It's very rewarding. It's a great feeling to see him out there, working so hard. He had a goal in mind and he's always been one to achieve anything he puts his mind to. He did.

So, he made it through Breckinridge, and that was a huge feat for him, myself, and a huge feat for us too. Seeing him out on that stage was just an awesome feeling.

Grand Master Oliver: You mentioned 2 things there. The Breckinridge retreat. Hopefully, everybody on the call will one day get the chance to participate in our national black belt retreat and testing.

But we had, I think, a couple hundred black belts testing that week. Give them a sense of that. I'm sure it was both exhausting and exhilarating.

Kim Gaster: It absolutely was. And it was emotions both up and down the spectrum. It was just amazing how well everybody did, and they all had the goal in mind and they kept it in mind, and they made it through.

Grand Master Oliver: Were you amazed at the range of people who were there testing?

Kim Gaster: I knew who would be there testing, but it was amazing to see the various age levels. I'm not sure what our oldest one was, but just seeing the range of age levels doing it, the young ones were keeping up with the older ones, that was pretty amazing.

Grand Master Oliver: Our record on the range is 5 years old to 78 years old. And we have a couple of record 3 generations testing, either in the current cycle or next time around. So, we have grandmother, daughter and then her daughter, the grandchild, who will all be testing for black belt at the same time. So, that will be fun and exciting.

Kim Gaster: That absolutely will be. Definitely.

Grand Master Oliver: Tell us now, Matthew, and I just saw him a few days ago, performing in front of I think there must have been 2,000 people there. It was a full house. I didn't do a head count. But what was that like for him?

Kim Gaster: He absolutely loved it. Loved it. He's definitely one that loves to perform for people and be out in front of people, and he just fed off that. He's still feeding off of it. He's just very excited.

And then, getting his leadership top at the same time, he's loving life right now.

Grand Master Oliver: That's fantastic. If you were going to identify what 3 or 4 things that he has accomplished by training through black belt, what did it take him, 3 or 4 years?

Kim Gaster: About 3½.

Grand Master Oliver: 3½ years? Okay. So, he was pretty much right on time. What would you identify as 3 or 4 things that he accomplished during the process?

Kim Gaster: I think he definitely has a lot more self-confidence and he is definitely more comfortable in front of people, both speaking as well as performing. He has no problems doing any of that, in tournaments or anything. He's excited to go up. He doesn't really get nervous anymore. That's definitely been a big plus.

And I think his dedication. He's realized that if he does set his mind to accomplish a goal, he absolutely can do it.

Grand Master Oliver: That's fantastic. What are the 2 or 3 things that have surprised you most? He started when he was about 5. So, if you look back at when he was 5 to now, what are a few of the biggest contrasts that have surprised you the most in this process?

Kim Gaster: I think his dedication is one. We weren't so sure. He was so young when we started, that it was a difficult decision to commit to Master Club with a 5-year-old. He said he wanted to do it, and that was difficult. But he stuck with it and he knew he wanted to, and he did. So, that was not necessarily surprising, but that was a decision we had to face onset, that we were glad we did.

But I think what's surprising is just his abilities: his flexibility, his eagerness to help people. He absolutely loves swatting. He loves the little ninjas. He loves helping any age group, working with them. And I think that has surprised me, that he has the patience to help teach the curriculum now. I never really expected him to be able to do that.

But probably mostly it's just his flexibility and his ability to remember the combos, the forms, and definitely under pressure, as well. He can pull those out and he does great.

Those are probably the areas that I would say was definitely something I didn't expect.

Grand Master Oliver: So, reading between the lines of what you said, you are one of our typical pain-in-the-butt, skeptical parents early on.

Kim Gaster: Yes.

Grand Master Oliver: We do come across quite a few of your ilk, frankly. And I think the first thing that you've now discovered is that parents really have to treat this the same as elementary school. If I've got a 5-year-old who's in kindergarten, I'm not skeptical about them being able to graduate sixth grade. But suddenly, I'm skeptical about them being able to, in 4 years, get a black belt, in 6 years get a second degree, and in 8 years get a third degree.

And now, you've come through that cycle and seen not only him, but kids 2 or 3 years younger than him now, all the way up to 60-, 70-year-olds do it. So, I guess you could say to other parents that if they're afraid of a 5-year-old being able to follow-through, it's mostly a matter of both the parents and the instructors working together to accomplish that.

Kim Gaster: Yeah. I do think that. I think Matthew does have an athletic ability. He's always done well in sports. I think with the conditioning, it fit him well. I think it can fit anybody well, if you dedicate yourself to it. Some may have to work a little bit harder than others, but I would agree with that, that everybody has to be dedicated to it. It can't just be the student and it can't just be the parents. It has to be something everybody wants.

Grand Master Oliver: And, a 5- or 6-year-old, you don't expect a 5- or 6-year-old is going to be dedicated to the idea of graduating from sixth grade, middle school and high school. You do expect the parent to drive them to class twice a week and make sure that they're there. Or, in the case of elementary school, every day.

Kim Gaster: Absolutely.

Grand Master Oliver: Anytime there's a gap, and I'm sure there are gaps in his progress, you work together with the instructors and the school staff and fix whatever the issues are, so they get back on track and make the kind of progress that you need.

Kim Gaster: Right. Absolutely. I think the instructors do play a huge part in that. Our instructors definitely recognized that Matthew was maybe not performing at the level he should be. They'd give us things to work on and there definitely were ups and downs with Matthew, but I think the instructors helped make it fun and challenging. And that definitely was a huge part of it.

Grand Master Oliver: Sure. And that's a function both of the curriculum design, because it's been designed to really accommodate kids of all ages and adults, but also the instructor training that we do on an ongoing basis is really unsurpassed.

So, you end up both with people who are caring and hopefully energetic and charismatic and, at the same time, who are knowledgeable enough to convey the material at all ages.

Kim Gaster: Absolutely. And they also supported his love for hockey, as well. And I think that was a big part of it, too. He's very passionate about karate and hockey. And being that he was able to continue playing hockey and do karate both was huge for him. He didn't have to give one up. We could work out both.

Grand Master Oliver: A lot of parents feel like the child is only going to be able to do karate or they think that this is now like the replacement for, in your case hockey, but oftentimes it's soccer or baseball or football, or maybe a musical instrument.

And just like what you found, we always explain that there's elementary school, there's martial arts school, and then there's a variety of other seasonal activities. Hockey is almost year-round. But there are other seasonal sports activities where there could be one other real passionate activity that they're involved with, and they work together and synergistically, rather than taking away from each other.

Kim Gaster: Right.

Grand Master Oliver: Did you see that martial arts helped hockey and/or vice versa?

Kim Gaster: Yeah, I think they both have complemented each other, definitely. I think with hockey, it helps conditioning-wise. He can get up and down the ice faster and stay out on the ice longer.

From a conditioning standpoint as well as a focus standpoint, being able to focus on the puck and kind of tune everybody else out, tune the crowd out when he's in a game, and take those breakaways and make a goal.

As far as hockey helping karate, I think it's almost similar. He's used to performing in front of a crowd when he's playing hockey, and I think just being dedicated and loving what he's doing, I definitely think they both complement each other.

Grand Master Oliver: How has it all worked with school?

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Kim Gaster: It's worked well. We've been lucky that the class times have worked for us and we've been able to get homework done and make it to karate, as well as hockey. We had more options to go to karate class than hockey practices, so we could work around all schedules.

Grand Master Oliver: I'm sure when hockey, from time to time, got more intense, you were able to moderate it with the martial arts lessons. This is obviously an ongoing thing, year-round. So, it's not really a conflict.

Kim Gaster: Right. Absolutely.

Grand Master Oliver: Fantastic. How did it feel on Sunday, at Breckenridge, when he actually passed the test? Of course, everybody was excited, but I'm sure you were beside yourself. How did that feel?

Kim Gaster: It just felt like a huge sense of accomplishment for him and for us. We feel like even though we weren't out physically doing everything, we were out mentally doing it. And I think that it just felt really great. And seeing the look on his face was priceless, and he knew he'd done it. He did it with his buddies and out there with his friends. They supported each other, and I think it was a great feeling. It really was.

Grand Master Oliver: If you look back on it 4 years later, how would you have felt if he hadn't had that experience? Is it something that you really prize that he did? Or would you have gone a different way and just been fine?

Kim Gaster: Oh no, we're very glad he did it, absolutely. If we would have been in Breckenridge and knew that he left karate 2 or 3 years earlier and could have been there and wasn't, I think there definitely would have been a sense of loss, that he missed out.

Grand Master Oliver: Of course, he's just 9 now, but has the martial arts given him an ability to deal with peer pressure, an ability to make his own decisions, rather than go with the crowd?

Kim Gaster: I think it definitely helped with both. He's encountered issues on the playground, he's encountered other things at school, with friends, with maybe kids who aren't so much his friends. And I think it's definitely given him a sense of confidence in handling conflicts. Absolutely.

Grand Master Oliver: Excellent. Excellent. Amanda, anything else for Kim? She's been very generous in sharing. I know, Kim, you have to run.

Amanda Christensen: No, they really have been fantastic, her and Paul both. I think he was more skeptical than Kim was, honestly. I'm not sure which one was more.

Kim Gaster: He was.

Amanda Christensen: And I just watched him in class yesterday. He looked like he was about ready to bounce off the bench. She says not yet, but we'll see.

Grand Master Oliver: We'll go to work on both of them. Too bad they weren't all out there at the same time, getting their black belt.

Amanda Christensen: Give it time. Give it time.

Grand Master Oliver: It is good to know, Amanda, they gave you quite the run for your money early on, being the skeptic, pain-in-the-backside parents. We all appreciate you having a little extra dose of that from time to time.

Amanda Christensen: I think my favorite conversation was at a leadership or black belt class, when they came to me and said, “Thanks a lot,” basically. I really appreciate that, Kim. One, it was very exciting to watch Matthew grow, and it’s going to be very exciting to watch him grow all through his martial arts education.

Grand Master Oliver: I really enjoyed both seeing him at Breckenridge and up there in front of several thousand people.

Well, thank you, Kim. We’ll let you run. But I really appreciate your feedback.

Kim Gaster: Sure. Anytime. Thanks for asking me.

Grand Master Oliver: You’re very welcome. Thank you. And I’ll look forward to Matthew being a second-degree black belt before long.

Kim Gaster: Sounds good. He’s already looking forward to it himself.

Grand Master Oliver: There we go. Thank you.

Kim Gaster: Thank you.

Grand Master Oliver: Amanda, let me keep asking you a few questions here, and I think we have a couple other people I need to talk to on the phone call.

You’ve had several students this year get some pretty interesting publicity; one young man, who couldn’t be on the phone call today, but who has cerebral palsy.

Amanda Christensen: Yes, Jake. He’s absolutely fantastic. Getting his black belt, I had a long conversation. His mom really would have enjoyed being on the phone call today. She’s extremely emotional about the fact. She actually had a little bit of a misunderstanding. She thought she might be done at first-degree. She was so excited. It was like a renewal, that she can be going to second-degree and third-degree, and can complete his martial arts training throughout growing up.

Jake is 9 years old. He was born with cerebral palsy.

Grand Master Oliver: If anybody on the call hasn’t seen it, there was a marvelous article in *Tae Kwon Do Times*. There were several other articles about him recently. He was on NBC, CBS, Fox, I think maybe even ABC news, some interesting video coverage of him receiving his black belt. That *Tae Kwon Do Times* article had a marvelous shot of him and siblings at Breckenridge during our black belt retreat last year.

Amanda Christensen: He definitely needs his black belt, he has 3 older systems. I’m sorry, 4 older sisters.

Grandmaster Smith: Grand Master Oliver, what was impressive at Breckenridge, watching him, was when he was doing his forms. As everybody knows, the forms are quite intricate. They, of course, after 3 days of training, 18 hours a day, for him to get up there and ___ about him, when I saw him just do all of those forms, keeping up with everybody, not missing a beat on the forms, I was floored. I just didn't think he would be able to keep up with the group, going to that many things after going for 3 days, 18 hours a day.

Grand Master Oliver: Yeah, with cerebral palsy. Grandmaster Smith, let me introduce you on the call. I guess maybe I didn't introduce myself. I'm Grand Master Oliver. This is Grandmaster Smith ninth-degree black belt, who's in charge of all of our instruction and a lot of other things at Mile High Karate.

But we had just been talking to Matthew, who had just got his black belt at 9, and then, of course, Jake, with cerebral palsy. Also, a lot of people may have seen some of the coverage on Brittany, including she's going to be on the Montel Williams Show. Tell us a little bit about that.

Amanda Christensen: I'm sorry, the phone cut off there for a second, Grand Master Oliver.

Grand Master Oliver: Tell us a little bit about Brittany. She's coming up on her black belt.

Amanda Christensen: Brittany should be testing this year for her black belt. She is training hard. We kind of laugh a little bit, because she's such a girly-girl. Her experience really helped motivate, too. It's an unfortunate experience, but it really helped to solidify why she was doing this, and her mom was so excited about that.

To tell you what happened, she was confronted with a possible abductor or...

Grand Master Oliver: A rapist?

Amanda Christensen: Yes. It could have been a lot worse than it was. She was able to have the confidence to hold her position and let him know that that was not going to happen, and take off and get away.

She credits her martial arts training with that. I'm glad to be a part of that, because it was right close to our studio, as a matter of fact, and a little bit scary. She'll be testing this year, and the amount of confidence in this young lady, watching her grow has been amazing because when you talk about starting out with very little coordination, that would be Brittany.

And I can relate to that, because that would be my own experience also.

Grand Master Oliver: And Brittany is how old?

Amanda Christensen: Brittany is 14 now.

Grand Master Oliver: So, she's 14. She started probably when she was 11. And literally, what happened, it was only, if I recall correctly, a block or 2 from her home, walking from the grocery store to home. An adult man, approximately 35, I don't think he's been apprehended, accosted her on the street, tried to grab her, presumably to abduct her.

And, of course, she's a very pretty, very well-developed adult-looking 14-year-old, and she was able to first stand up to him and tell him to go away and, second, to quickly strike him and run away and get away.

Of course, she's going to be on Montel Williams, she's been on ABC, CBS, NBC, and *Black Belt Magazine*. A lot of people on the call will have seen the *Black Belt Magazine* article.

But the impressive thing is not the press coverage of it, but a 14-year-old being able to very safely defend themselves against a much larger adult male.

Master Smith, you met her when you were out here last, as well.

Grandmaster Smith: Yes. We tell people all the time, when they're taking the martial arts for self-defense, we know it's good exercise and we know it's fun, we know it builds character. But when you realize that it's kind of like an insurance policy on yourself, if you only have to use it one time in your life, it's going to be worth the time that you put in it. And if you never have to use it, just having the confidence to know that you could, if you're ever in one of those types of situations, gives you a lot of peace of mind.

Grand Master Oliver: Yes. And in all likelihood, Brittany's parents started her in this for confidence and focus and discipline, and all of the mental skills you use every day. But the reality is that one day your 14-year-old daughter is faced with a choice of being abducted, possibly rape or being safe, everything else is secondary.

In this case, it came out wonderfully and the outcome was exactly what we'd hope for. And presumably, without martial arts training, would have been nowhere near that outcome, hearing Brittany's description of what happened.

Amanda, anything else about that, that might be interesting for people to know the details on the call?

Amanda Christensen: The biggest thing that she came to me with was how she was absolutely positive that she would not have had the confidence to stand up to this guy. She would have been quiet. We teach, in the classrooms, how to use your voice and how to maintain eye contact, and to really assert yourself.

She felt so much better that she had the ability to say, "Hey, this is not going to happen," and that she was able to strike back and get away.

The details were pretty much as you described it. One of the things that I was happy about was that she did not stay there to be overly aggressive, either. She left and she ran all the way home. We were talking about the conditioning and everything. She said, "I'm not even sure I could have ran all that way home, if I hadn't had martial arts training."

Grand Master Oliver: She had learned enough in class to know that she wasn't staying there to have a fistfight, she was trying to extricate herself from a situation and get safe as quickly as possible.

Amanda Christensen: Exactly.

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Grandmaster Smith: Grand Master Oliver, my phone cut off back then. Did you get my input there?

Grand Master Oliver: We did. We did.

Grandmaster Smith: Just right at the end of it, it cut off.

Grand Master Oliver: We're not yet into this century on technology. I wanted to try to be as concise on this call as possible, and we've talked a lot about Matthew and Jake and Brittany, but Doug Mooney's on the call as well. Doug, are you on the call?

Doug Mooney: Yes, sir. I am.

Grand Master Oliver: Doug, you're a senior master instructor, and you're developing the Maryland area for Mile High Karate and have a school in Dunkirk there.

You have several black belts at our recent black belt retreat. I think you were going to try to have a parent or 2 on the call with us, as well.

Doug Mooney: Yes. Carmen, are you here? I don't think she made it to the call.

Grand Master Oliver: It may not have happened. Well, tell us a little bit about it. Carmen had 2 daughters at the recent black belt retreat. Is that correct?

Doug Mooney: Yes.

Grand Master Oliver: Give us a little bit of their background and how they've developed, and what they've accomplished.

Doug Mooney: The 2 daughters were Amaryllis and Roxanna Rodriguez Donato. Amaryllis is 15 years old, and Roxanna has just turned 14. They've been training with me since they were 10 and 11 years old.

Mom will tell you that she didn't want them to train in martial arts at first, that it was dad's idea. She wanted them to take dance. Now, she's so glad that they went to martial arts and stuck with it.

I was hoping she could be on here. She's good at telling their story.

Grand Master Oliver: She was another one of our early pain-in-the-butt parents.

Doug Mooney: Well, she might have been, but she was reflecting most of that to her husband, Louie, and he ran interference for me. He really wanted his girls to be able to defend themselves and also to have the confidence.

They moved into our area at the 10- and 11-year-old age, from another area, and didn't have any friends. They have really become leaders at our school. They got into the Leadership Program early on, of course, and have become leaders and really blossomed into great personalities that any time you talk to them, if you're having a bad day, that's going to change really quick. And mom will credit that to the leadership training and to the confidence they've gained, and being able to perform physically, and using their verbal skills to teach people.

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If I have a choice with certain kids who are shy and withdrawn, those are the 2 instructors that I'll put with them, because they'll have them brought out of that shell within a few weeks. They do a lot of swat training. They do a lot of teaching for us on the floor and helping out with beginning students.

Grand Master Oliver: I know Grandmaster Smith and myself were both very impressed with their confidence and focus. We hadn't talked. I didn't realize they were that young.

Doug Mooney: Nobody does. They all think they're like working their way through college. But they're freshmen in high school.

Grand Master Oliver: As you know, we had one of the top public speakers in the country, Dan Kennedy, out here recently. And he said something to me off to the side. He said, "If parents understood what the outcome of martial arts really was, everyone would have their child in martial arts," because he and I did a book together and we were signing books, and he had this whole group of 10-, 11-, 12-, 13-, 14-, 15-year-old kids who were coming up to him, speaking very politely and very disciplined. And he said, "It's a shame the general public doesn't realize the outcome really is. Sometimes, they think it's all about kicking and punching."

Clearly, it's self defense. For instance, in Brittany's case, when you need it, it's worthwhile. But mostly, it's about character development, focus, and the other things it develops.

If Carmen joins us, let's talk to her a little bit.

Master Smith, you and I have I don't know how many thousands of black belts between us, that we've developed over the years and worked with, but give everybody your perspective as of why, as a parent of a white belt, who is 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12 years old, why it's so important ____, probably within the Leadership Program context. Why is that so important?

Grandmaster Smith: Well, I think the first step is to teach your children to stick with things. The problem with most of the kids in this country is they're a little bit on the spoiled side. They tend to get everything they want. Their parents tend to let them jump from one thing to the next, and never really make a commitment and accomplish things that they really could accomplish.

Martial arts gives them an opportunity to learn how to have ____.

Grand Master Oliver: Hello? I think we lost him.

Grandmaster Smith: We lost me, and I got back on. I don't know why it keeps booting me off.

Again, when the parents realize that martial arts is not about the kicking and punching, because I think most parents, when they come in, the initial white belt parents are thinking, "I want my child to learn a little self-defense, I want him to learn a little discipline," and when they come in and they realize that it's really a total development program, they soon find out that there's nowhere else to take a child that can develop so many different things in one area.

By taking them to one place, you develop them physically, you're going to develop their confidence, you're going to develop their discipline, their respect, their stick-to-itiveness.

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Their physical development that they get allows them to be a team player in other sports. That's why we try to tell the parents, when I have my parents say, "Well, he's not going to do karate now because he wants to do soccer or he wants to do t-ball." And I say, "You really should be doing those things, because that's going to help his martial arts training, too."

Martial arts doesn't have to be 6 days a week. Martial arts twice a week is sufficient. And if they are not doing that other activity, then they can come more. But the ideal situation is to come twice a week. And if they're involved in other activities, that's good. It will give them a chance to utilize these things that they're learning.

In school, they're going to learn a little more concentration, to be able to listen to their teachers better, to be able to make better grades.

So, when a parent tells me, "I don't know if he wants to get his black belt, I know he likes it now," what I tell them is the same thing that Grand Master Oliver said. "It's really not up to the child. It's really up to the parent. The parent is the one who's going to bring them. The parent is the one that can keep them consistently on the program. And if the parent works with the instructor, then we can have every one of our students make it to black belt, first degree, and go on to the second and the third degree."

But it's not just a commitment, it's things that they're learning that they can really use for the rest of their life; things that will allow them to excel in their academics and things that will allow them to excel in other sports. You can't put a price on things like that.

Grand Master Oliver: Yeah. You touched on something that may be a segue to explain. I've had a lot of people trying to understand what the difference is between Master Club and Leadership, and how all of this really works together with other sports and school.

The cleanest, simplest explanation I've been able to come up with is to explain that the way we structure the curriculum between Master Club and Leadership really is this: all of the students in the program, starting as early as orange, green, purple belt, really learn about effective teamwork. They work on working effectively with their classmates, on working interdependently.

That has to start with first they become a really good student. They learn how to focus, how to listen, how to pay attention, and how to use their body effectively. Then, we move them into the program on working on being an effective self-starter.

The Master Club Program really takes them through being a good student and an effective self-starter, so now a child can be an A student in high school without any rewards and punishments, and they can be immune to peer pressure, stay off of drugs, one thing or another.

So, the Leadership Program now takes it to the other level, where we're really working on the interdependent teamwork. Then, we're working on speaking skills, we're working on leadership skills, first in a small group and then in front of a larger group, and then to a broader audience.

So, the difference really is everyone, by the time they get to black belt, is going to learn how to be a really effective student, be an A student in school, live up to their own capabilities, and have that skill, and they're going to learn how to be an effective self-starter.

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So, they're going to be immune to peer pressure, they're going to be able to focus on making good grades or doing well at work, without having constant rewards and punishment.

But as soon as they move into Leadership, they really learn interdependency, they learn how to work effectively with others, they then learn small group leadership, and they also learn broader speaking skills and confidence in front of their group. It kind of works in that fashion.

I think the biggest hurdle, and Master Smith, you were just addressing it, the biggest hurdle a lot of parents have to come over is the idea that a white or gold belt is all about the child's enthusiasm, not about making a decision for their own development.

I know, Master Smith, your son is a black belt. My daughter, who's 5, just got her blue belt. She'll be a black belt when she's 7 or 8.

I'm always going to make sure that she has fun with it, but I'm not going to make it optional. So, it's a very important developmental process.

Master Smith, anything to add to that? We need to wrap up in about 3 or 4 minutes here.

Grandmaster Smith: I want to make just one last comment. When you said, "What is the difference between like the Black Belt Club or the Master Club or the Leadership, the Leadership Program really gives your child a chance to develop beyond what I would consider the role model student and beyond that, where they become the ones who are class president. They're the ones who are volunteering and the head of the organizations. They're involved in a lot of school activities because they're learning, at an early age, that it's not just about participating, but you want to get in there and take charge and become a leader.

My black belt, and I really am proud of the fact that our Leadership people that I've had, that were able to graduate into the second degree or third degree, by the time they graduated from high school, when they went on to college, these are ones that got scholarships, that went to Yale or Harvard or the Air Force Academy or the West Point in Annapolis, and became leaders not just getting a scholarship, but when they went to those universities at Annapolis or West Point, they were the leaders of their class. They were the ones that became group leaders because of the training that they had at an early age, on the leadership skills.

Grand Master Oliver: One example is one of our black belts, an assistant instructor, and instructors who ended up second in his class at West Point. And that's a common outcome, not an exception.

So, it really is a real dramatic and positive impact that it has on developing leadership skills with the kids.

Doug Mooney: I think I hear Carmen trying to get on the line.

Grand Master Oliver: Oh, good. Carmen, are you there?

Carmen: Hello?

Grand Master Oliver: There she is.

Doug Mooney: Hi Carmen!

Carmen: Hi!

Grand Master Oliver: We were looking for you earlier. You had 2 daughters recently at our black belt retreat.

Carmen: Yes.

Grand Master Oliver: They've been training now for how long? And they're Leadership members, it sounds like, for quite a long period of time. Can you tell us a little bit about where they were when they started and how their progress has come?

Carmen: The progress is really big. When they started, they were very timid. They didn't have too much self-confidence. It was hard for them to make friends and approach people their own age.

Actually, my husband was the one who decided to put them in martial arts. I was going to have them go to dancing lessons. It just turned out very, very positive for them. I'm very amazed and very content with everything that they're doing. Everything that they learn, they also share it with other teenagers their age and younger kids. It's been very, very good for them – for the whole family.

Grand Master Oliver: If you were looking, as a parent, at the point at which they received their black belt, looking back, what would you say were the things you were proudest of them were?

Carmen: I'm sorry, I couldn't hear you.

Grand Master Oliver: When they received their black belt, and perhaps this weekend at the black belt retreat, or a couple weekends ago, if you look back on them having achieved their black belt, what are some of the things that they've achieved the most, that you're the most proud of?

Carmen: I will say their grades. Everything that they've learned, everything that they put in practice has just been so positive in their life in general, as a whole. Their grades have improved tremendously. It's hard work. There were times that they thought that they were not going to be able to make it. We just kept encouraging them. "You're going to be able to make it. You're going to be able to finish what your goals are right now." And they just kept their mind set on it.

When they got their belts, they were beyond themselves. Now they tell everybody else, "You can do it, if you set your mind to it and you just stay positive and work hard on what you want. You can do it. You can accomplish it."

They have a lot of big goals for their future. Also, they're looking into their future closely. It's been pretty good. It's been nice seeing them grow.

Grand Master Oliver: How old were they when they started?

Carmen: They were 9 and 10. They're right here with me. I just picked them up from school; 9 and 10.

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Grand Master Oliver: Good. And when they were 9- and 10-year-old white belts, did you ever have any skepticism of the idea of committing them to and having them train to be black belts?

Carmen: Well, I always heard that martial art was positive. I didn't have major concerns.

Myself, a long, long time ago, I did kempo. It wasn't much, but it was enough where it built up my own self-esteem.

Grand Master Oliver: Okay. So, you had had a little bit of experience before and you knew what your girls could accomplish.

Carmen: Yes.

Grand Master Oliver: Fantastic. Fantastic. Give us your impression. I don't know what the exact head count was, but there was a couple hundred black belts all testing last week, when you were at our black belt retreat. What was your impression of that whole event?

Carmen: It was amazing! It was just amazing. Even the kids, the way that they work together, they don't look at it like, "I'm from one school, I'm from the other academy." They look at each other as a whole team. That was very impressive. It was amazing to watch each of them helping each other and encouraging each other to do what they had to do.

At the same time, the way that the instructors would just have fun with them and find a way of talking with them, interacting with them and letting them know that everything is going to be okay, you're going to be doing this, you're going to complete this retreat, it was really, really positive. Even the kids, they came back home talking about the whole experience and how they would like to come back someday. It was wonderful.

Grand Master Oliver: As a parent who's had 2 daughters who started when they were 9 and 10 and got their black belt, and are now assistant teachers and working onto their higher degrees of black belt, what would you tell a parent who has a young child who may be, as a white belt, as skeptical if this is something they should make a lifestyle or not?

Carmen: I would just tell them to encourage them, stand by them, practice with them, make it fun, and enjoy the time that they can set aside for this child.

We have one more daughter in the academy. She's 10 years old. She's a low red right now, and we're doing the same thing with her. We encourage her.

When she started, her motor skills weren't there yet. But we've seen her grow and her focusing, her motor skills have improved a lot.

I would just tell the parent, "Be patient with them and work with them. Have fun with them."

It's just a little amount of time that we have with our children. They just grow too fast. But I tell my friends, "Bring the kids. Bring them over and just have them see. They have buddy days, so they get to bring friends with them to practice and expose them, so they can see what's going on. They have a lot of fun doing that.

I just look at it as a very positive thing for the kids.

Grand Master Oliver: Looking back several years, how would you share with another parent thinking about doing the same thing, the time, effort, money, occasional struggle to get to class? What's the value to your children now, when you look back on it?

Carmen: Looking back? I just keep looking at the way that they've grown. It's just priceless. It's priceless, to see everything that they've gained, good instructors and teamwork. I don't know, it's just priceless.

Grand Master Oliver: That's great. That's great. And obviously, the whole family is going to be moving forward into the future here.

Carmen: I'm sorry?

Grand Master Oliver: The whole family is still moving forward here, with one more black belt on the way.

Carmen: Yes. Yes.

Grand Master Oliver: Mr. Mooney, did you have something to throw in there?

Doug Mooney: I was just going to say thank you to her.

Grand Master Oliver: Okay. Okay. Good. And you've seen the incredible resource page that we now bring both in Maryland and Victoria, BC, Orlando, Philadelphia, and all over North America now. It's pretty impressive, when you see the entire team, including Grandmaster Smith. But with all of the black belts like Mr. Mooney, tell people what your impression was of that.

Doug Mooney: Who are you asking?

Grand Master Oliver: Oh, for our mom here.

Carmen: I'm sorry. I thought you were asking Mr. Mooney.

Grand Master Oliver: No, no. From your perspective.

Carmen: Could you repeat the part? I'm not in a good location right now.

Grand Master Oliver: Yeah. When you saw the numbers of black belts and all of the instructors and, of course, you've known Mr. Mooney for many years, but now you look at all of the additional resources that he has, how is your feeling about the organization and how it's going to continue to develop?

Carmen: I'm very, very happy. I'm very happy with the way that things are going. There's a lot of different programs right now, for the kids, where they can pretty much plug in to the one that works the most for them.

Most of the kids, they just want to be in every program, I would say. Right, guys? I would say all of the kids, when they see someone with a blue ghee top, even the parents are asking, “What is that ghee top about?”

And then, they want their children to be a part of the Black Belt Club and the Leadership Academy, and pretty much everything that Mr. Mooney has to offer.

Grand Master Oliver: You bet. You bet. I think the future’s real exciting for your family, but for the whole organization.

We’ll we’re going to have to run, because we’ve gone a little bit over. We were trying to be concise and we’ve had some wonderful people to talk to. I really appreciate your input with your daughters and with everybody else that we’ve talked to on the phone today.

Carmen: It’s a pleasure.

Grand Master Oliver: There are so many black belts now in the organization, that if any parent really needs a third level of validation on what the program accomplishes, there’s plenty of parents and kids to talk to and get their opinion.

But it’s very important, early on, as I’m sure you did with all 3 of your daughters, make a decision at white belt, that this is really going to be something that you’re going to follow through and really achieve the main benefits.

Master Smith, any last things for everybody before we sign off?

Grandmaster Smith: No. I think it was very informative, and hopefully the parents that are thinking about whether the Master Club or the Leadership Program is for them will get a lot of this. It will give them the confidence to make that decision, so their child can benefit like all of the others that have been in our program.

Grand Master Oliver: Absolutely. Thank you, everyone. And for all of our instructors and probably a few parents we didn’t get around to talking to, I’m sure we’ll let you talk to everyone on one of the future calls. But I appreciate it, and we’re going to have to sign off for today. Thank you very much.