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Young competitors find fighting success with Treasure Coast dojo instructor

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The Florida Palm Coast Karate Kick Off, held on Jan. 26 at Jupiter West Community Center, was the martial arts equivalent of a seven-hour three-ring circus.

On eight different mats, students from different facilities competed simultaneously in points fighting, kick boxing, self-defense, and different exhibitions of weapons and forms.



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D.J. Moir (left), 14, and his brother Cody, 8, of Port St. Lucie won several awards recently at the Florida Palm Coast Karate Kick Off held at the Jupiter West Community Center. Both train at LaSala's Dojo/Karate for Christ Ministries.

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tournament ended about 4 p.m. A few belonged to brothers D.J. Moir, 14, and Cody Moir, 8, of Port St. I

Two weeks earlier, LaSala's Dojo won 27 first-place awards, and was named School of the Year, at the F League of Martial Arts (FLMA) state awards banquet in Largo. D.J. and Cody each earned three first-pla awards in their age group.

"They train at our main facility, at Common Grounds Vineyard Church in Fort Pierce, and also at Highpc Community Church in Port St. Lucie," said Fred LaSala, the dojo's founder.

"These two boys go back with me a few years, to when I trained in an attic at a school that had no air-conditioning. D.J. was the last kid in classes there when I took them over, and Cody was still a baby in a

D.J. and Cody both attend Northpoint K-8 Middle School in Port St. Lucie, where they're in the eighth ar grade. D.J. is so focused on his martial arts training that he nearly forgets about his daytime classes.

"I go to LaSala's Dojo/Karate for Christ Ministries," he said when asked what school he attends. LaSala a a Christian ministry.

Such focus is understandable, since each Moir brother has come a long way since with the aid of LaSala's disciplined methods.

"D.J. does grappling, kick-boxing, points fighting, self-defense, breaking and kata," LaSala said.

"He won FLMA awards in fighting, self-defense and breaking. Cody usually picks one or two events eac tournament, but if I asked him to, he'd do them all. He won FLMA awards in fighting, self-defense and k

At the Jupiter tournament, D.J. and Cody each competed in two events, mostly against older kids. D.J. fir second in self-defense and second in points fighting; Cody finished third in self-defense and fourth in poi fighting.

The 8-year-old got involved in martial arts through his older brother's influence, and he pushes himself to D.J.'s accomplishments. After being out-pointed in his last points fighting match, Cody's frustration resul tears, but he was quickly comforted by LaSala and some of the older students.

Teenage black belts like Joey Boyer and LaSala's daughter, Stacey, spent the day doing whatever was rec

from tallying judges' scores to alternately coaching and consoling.

"I still like points fighting the best," Cody said.

LaSala, 47, appeared to be everywhere at once. Despite so many students competing on so many different mats, he nearly succeeded. With his mohawk hairdo, he resembles a Taxi Driver-era Robert DeNiro, and the sixth-degree black belt is just as dangerous. One of his other young students, Zach Hills, sported a similar mohawk — and won his points-fighting age group.

At tournament's end, LaSala gathered his squad for a team photo. In the front row, Cody and Zach, two of the dojo's youngest students, smiled ear-to-ear while holding their trophies.

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