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What does it take to raise an athlete?

Some would say a village and that's certainly true for George Lukas, a 16 year old athlete from Duncan, BC, whose dream is to become an Olympian in Judo.

The journey begins at home where George's dad Charles, a single parent who receives welfare disability assistance, has been relentless—like a dog with a bone—raising money or begging, yes even begging, for travel and accommodations so his kids could pursue their dreams. George's twin sister Kristal also competes in Judo and his older brother Alexander was an accomplished judoka until he changed directions when he received a full scholarship to attend MIT in the US.

In March 2011, George's journey took a disappointing turn when they were not able to raise the money needed to compete in the qualifying competition in Edmonton leading to nationals. George lost hope until KidSport Canada, literally, at the eleventh hour, was able to secure flights through WestJet and its WestJet Cares for Kids program. WestJet, another of the villagers, has provided travel vouchers to KidSport Canada annually for four years so that young athletes across Canada can travel to competitions.

To qualify George had to lose 3 kgs which, according to his dad, "he did with a colon cleanser, a bottle of electrolyte water, and a bit of determination because he [George] is now jogging as well with a garbage bag on." That determination earned him the chance to compete at the Junior Nationals in Sept-Isles, Quebec, in July. Once again, WestJet provided complimentary flights for George and his sister Kristal who also qualified. George won silver in the U17, under 60 kg category (Kristal won a bronze in her category) but he earned a spot on the Cadet World Championship team through a "fight-off". George was faced with the ongoing challenge, which was to raise money to travel to Montreal and then onto Kiev, Ukraine, for the next phase of his Olympic journey. The community raised funds by attending a BBQ at the local Thrifty's Foods. WestJet also contributed by waiving its blackout restrictions to provide

a flight to Montreal where George trained for 6 days at the Shidokan dojo (place or club where Judo is practised) before travelling to Kiev for the competition.

Before his first fight against Portugal, George said, "When I got to the mat I was really nervous, lots was going through my head and I just tried to focus and not think about it. I stepped onto the mat and I felt a chill go up my spine. Thousands of people were watching me in that arena even at home I knew my family and friends were watching me online". While he didn't have the "right stuff" this time, George is even more determined to reach his goal. Marie-Hélène Chisholm, head coach of the national team wrote, "It was not an easy day for our Canadian judokas. They all faced athletes who they could have beaten. Most of them were affected by the pressure and were frozen at the start of fight. It's a bit normal since this is their first international experience and they are starting with a major event." Before returning home, George spent some time in Paris and said, "Over all it was an amazing experience that I had in Kiev, Ukraine which taught me some new lessons and I got to see some of the best fighters in the world there. Thank you WestJet!"

He is now focussed on Chile in September for his next competition and his dad is busy raising funds. Such is the life of an athlete and they will once again ask the village to help George continue his Olympic pursuit.

KidSport Canada would also like to thank WestJet for supporting George and for its ongoing support of young athletes across Canada through its WestJet Cares for Kids initiative.

For more about this young athlete, follow this link to: [http://www.timescolonist.com/George Lukas](http://www.timescolonist.com/George_Lukas)

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