

Judo better than meds

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Charné Griesel from TuksJudo is a self-confessed judo addict.

On the days she is unable to train, she says she battles to stay focused; on a terrible day, she might even fight to fall asleep.

Griesel has valid reasons to be passionate about her sport of choice.

When she was younger, she was hyperactive. It was recommended that she be put on Ritalin, but her parents refused.

They believed participating in sport was a healthier way for her to get rid of excess energy.

Her parent's vision might just lead to her representing South Africa at the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo.

Tuks head coach Nikola Filipov, who has helped South African judokas qualify for the last three Olympic Games, gets quite excited when he starts talking about Griesel's abilities.

He believes that she has what it takes to go all the way.

According to Filipov, there are three definite peaks for female judokas.

The first is between the ages of 17 and 18. Their quick reflexes make them formidable opponents on the mat.

The second peak is between the ages of 21 and 22, and the third peak is between 24 and 25.

Griesel will be 21 by the time of the 2020 Games.

She used to be also quite a talented hockey player and has earned provincial colours. But when it came to a choice between hockey and judo, it was not a difficult decision.

"Judo to me is the ultimate sport. To be competitive, you need to be fit and have a physical presence on the mat, but that is not all," she said.

"It is also very tactical, which means you have to be able to make split-second decisions. When I compete internationally, I do a lot of research on the strength and weaknesses of my opponents. It is essential to know whether they are right- or lefthanded and which techniques they tend to favour, so that I can counter.

"Through experience, I have learned that you can never afford to rest on your laurels during a fight.

"My main goal each time I step onto the mat to fight is to be better than the previous time."

With such an attitude it is no surprise that Griesel is the current South African cadet (u/18) and junior (u/20) champion.

A definite highlight last year was the opportunity that Judo South Africa organised for her and a few other talented youngsters to train in Hungary.



Judo was Charné Griesel's medication against hyperactivity. Photo: Reg Caldecott.