

Borek — the karate kid who stands tall

Jeff Kohn has no trouble coming up with adjectives to describe Randy Borek, the undersized 5-year old who walked into his Morton Grove North Shore Marital Arts Academy to begin karate training.

"He was a small, shy, crybaby kid," said Kohn flatly.

Now 5 years later, Borek is still very small for his age but certainly not shy and nowhere near a crybaby. And suddenly Kohn has a hard time finding adjectives to describe the 10-year-old phenom, who on April 30 became the youngest ever to receive a black belt at the school.

"He's an amazing kid, truly amazing," Kohn said. "What else can you say?"

Amazing may be the only thing. Besides being a martial arts phenom — "At his

age, he's the most talented person we've had here," Kohn said. — he's a star little league baseball player, a piano player, a drummer, a Golf Junior High wrestler and basketball player and a Saturday bowler. He attends Hebrew school and is a near straight A student. "I got a B-plus one time," he said, "but that was the lowest."

"You look at him and wonder if there isn't anything he can't do," Kohn said.

Actually, when you look at him you wonder what he can do. Tiny for his age, he stands just 4-3 and weighs 59 pounds. "But pound for pound, he may be the strongest athlete around," Kohn reminded.

When he began martial arts training, he could not do one pullup. Last year he

set the Hynes Elementary School record with 23 pullups and he can now do 30. His father Sam recalls the time he took him to see Rocky III and once home, Randy began doing situps. Dad had to stop him at 400.

"I knew after six months I had something special," Kohn said. "As shy as he was, he was very intense. He didn't give in. You watch him in the ring and he's the most intense competitor I've seen."

"When I first started, I just thought it would be good training," Borek said. "But I really liked it. It made me stronger and it helped me concentrate more in school and other sports. After a year, I entered a local tournament and I didn't expect anything but got a second. From then on I've just been setting higher goals."

One of those goals has been accomplished with the black belt but there's always a second degree black belt, the Maccabiah Games (Jewish Olympics) and the International Olympics. Karate will become an exhibition sport in the 1992 Games.

And don't think anything has gone to Borek's head.

"His reaction to coaching is unreal and his work ethic is like that of a professional athlete," Kohn said. "He's a very respectful, mature young man. To think he's just 10 is hard to believe."

Kohn calls karate a big man's sport and he worries that his lack of size will eventually catch up to Borek. Competitions take place according to age until 17 when they go by weight.

"He's at a disadvantage, no question, but he's smart. He knows he's smaller so he tries to be smarter than his opponent," Kohn said. "When it comes to someone smaller taking on someone bigger, he's the model. When you're at a tournament and he gets in the ring, all the video cameras come out. He's the model."

Karate competitions are held in kata (forms) and sparring (one-on-one combat). Borek is a past national gold medalist and last weekend brought home another state championship medal from Springfield. In October of 1988, he was a



Jeff Kohn works out with one of prize pupils, Randy Borek.

junior Olympic champion.

He favors sparring over kata because "it's more exciting" but sparring does worry Kohn a bit.

"He's in advanced, so it's the toughest competition and all the kids are bigger than him and that worries you sometimes," Kohn said. "But he just

sizes up his opponent and goes about his business. He knows no fear."

Size is not an issue to Borek.

"I'm used to it," he says. "Kids call me small and they call me shrimp but I ignore them. I just feel I've set myself on a higher level."



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