

Camal Judo

Woodland Park, New Jersey

For Sensei Anthony Camal, being a judoka and not competing is like being a firefighter and not fighting fires. And Camal is a firefighter.

Some guys are firefighters but they don't fight fires," he said. "I fight fires."

Unfortunately, in one of those ironic twists of life, Camal was injured fighting a fire about seven years ago, putting his competition on hold for a while. The story is well worth repeating:

Camal and his partner were at the door of a burning two-story house with a woman screaming in the street that her baby was still inside. Fire chiefs were yelling at them to NOT enter the building. But from inside came the screams of a child. Camal said he looked at his partner. They knew what they had to do. They burst in, ran to a back bedroom where they found the baby on a bed. Camal passed the child to his partner. As they ran from the house, the ceiling collapsed, fracturing Camal's back.

He credits the tenacity required by judo for some of the fast thinking that helped him save that baby's life. The martial arts "helped me a lot in my career, because sometimes you just have to go for it, and not be afraid."

Injuries put his competition on hold, but he barely missed a beat teaching at his club, Camal Judo of Woodland Park, N.J. "I never really paused ... I was on crutches on the mat," he said.

And then last summer, just as he was telling himself that he might be ready to start competing again, a big-rig collided with his fire truck, causing him more injuries and again postponing his return to competition. Well, he may nearly be ready again. "I'm thinking about the masters this year," he said.

But, while Camal holds competition in high regard, he also believes that "winning" in the traditional, literal meaning is not what it's all about. His dojo recently held an annual awards presentation – everyone got some sort of medal.

"Everybody gets something. They're all special to me in some way," Camal said.

A kid may not ever be a "champion," and Camal Judo has put out plenty of those, but he may be a great judoka, in the manner that judo's founder, Jigoro Kano, intended in one of his hallmark principles: *Mutual Welfare and Benefit*. That means "not only helping yourself but other people, too, at home and in your school," Camal said.

So Camal gives medals for the Most Improved Peewee and The Best Judo Student in addition to his Bushido Fighting Spirit Award. "They may not be my best competitor, they may never be a national champion," Camal said, "but they're my best judoka," and so they certainly get a medal.

For more information, go to Camal Judo's website [HERE](#).