



Kicking Against the Odds

By Stace Sanchez

Since July of 2008, I have been traveling across the nation doing photo shoots for martial arts schools. It is always an awesome experience because I get to meet some incredibly talented martial artists from all walks of life. In December, I stopped in and did a photo shoot at Master Walter Swaney's school, American TKD Martial Arts Center, in Margate, Florida. This is where I met the most incredible young man who has left a lasting impression on me.

Bradley Schneider is a 19-year-old man with Down Syndrome. He is warm-hearted, polite and has a smile that lights up a room. When it was Brad's turn to take photos, his mother approached me and talked to me about Brad's special needs. I could see the concern in her eyes, so I took great care in preparing myself for his shoot. But when Brad dropped down into the splits, my jaw dropped at his skill. I asked him to do a stance and he did it—perfectly. I then asked him to do kicks and he threw them effortlessly. I was truly amazed at his talents.

Bradley is so passionate about life and learning. His interest in sports, as an active participant as well as an enthusiastic observer, started at a very young age, and the martial arts were no exception. Martial arts were



also important to his mother because she wanted to know how to defend herself and protect her children. So the whole family joined a dojang and the rest became history.

Brad has been devoted to his style of Ko Am Mo Do. His drive and excitement for weapon training, as well as Hapkido training, is an inspiration. He has met many challenges throughout his training. In the early years, he ran across instructors who were not able to cope with his disability. But that didn't stop Brad. Brad and his mother then found Master Swaney, an instructor who believes that anything is possible and focuses on Brad's abilities, not his disability. That is the motto that Brad and his family have come to live by.

Brad's journey continues as his training as a black belt becomes more intense each day. Every day, Brad is ready to train with all his heart and soul. The bond Brad and his family share as they have climbed the colored belt ranks together has deeply strengthened. He is very proud to be training with his mother and she is even more proud to be training with her son.

Brad aspires to pursue his black belt training, as learning is a never ending process. His interests are in helping others and making this world a nicer place. He is currently in a post high school vocational life skills program. He has worked in restaurants, a bank, and a children's center. Brad expresses much interest in living independently and is fantastic at playing Guitar Hero! He is an unbelievable dancer and has great chi. He loves to talk to people. Brad is an incredible inspiration to anyone he meets; his infectious personality and magnificent smile truly illuminate his already positive aura.

Over the last few months, we have heard news of professional athletes who have everything going for them, only to succumb to bad judgment. It is unfortunate that we seem to hear only about the bad people in this world. However, two local news stations have stopped in on separate occasions to do a story on Brad. Finally, the public can hear about an everyday person who doesn't get paid millions and is a true role model.

This world needs more people like Brad. We should all have just a fraction of Brad's love in his heart, his dedication, commitment and honesty to ourselves and others. I am truly blessed to be a part of Brad's incredible journey. And to you, Brad, we wish you many, many more years of kicking! **TKD**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Stace Sanchez is the Owner and Founder of KICKPICS LLC, Professional Martial Arts Photography, and the world famous, KICKPICS.net. He has been shooting martial arts photos since 2001 and travels the entire United States doing photo shoots for schools. His photography has gone global with photo shoots in the United Kingdom and, more recently, invitations to shoot photos in Norway, Sweden and Australia.

