



**ON THE MAT:** More than 140 judokas, ranging in ages from five to 55-plus, tested their skills at the Howick and St Heliers Academy of Judo Club fun day last Sunday. The annual event, held at Howick Leisure Centre, featured bouts on three mats. In action are Howick members, from left, Cole Peters (blue belt), and Alex Macmillan (blue).

Times photos David McPherson

# Isabella undeterred by falls

By DAVID MCPHERSON

IT TOOK two years of nagging before Craig Bartlett would let his daughter Isabella have a go at judo.

Bartlett has been involved in the Japanese martial art for as long as he can remember.

Holding a third-dan black belt, he's an instructor with the Howick and St Heliers Academy of Judo Club, as well as a national and international referee, on the referee's commission for New Zealand. Bartlett is also general treasurer of the Oceania Judo Union.

Isabella, 10, started asking her dad about getting into judo when she was four.

"I thought that was too young and kept putting her off," says Bartlett. "But she kept asking and when she was six I caved in and said okay."

However, things are never that simple. The day before her first lesson Isabella broke her wrist.

"I was on a flying fox, let go and landed strangely," she says.

That wasn't the end of judo misfortune. Two years later, just as Isabella was preparing for her first competition, another fall cost her.

"We were swinging in a tree and then letting go to see how far away we could land and I fell and broke my elbow in the same arm."

She finally got her chance at a tournament in Tauranga.

"In my first fight I got chucked to the ground in about two seconds, but I got up again," says Isabella.

She went through to the match for the bronze medal. "I lasted about a minute."



**OVER THE SHOULDER:** Young Howick judoka Isabella Bartlett, the South Island senior girls' under-40kg champion, throws her father Craig in training.

Photo supplied

Now ranked an orange belt, Isabella recently won the South Island senior girls' under-40kg championship and is preparing for the New Zealand championships in Wellington during Labour Weekend.

She trains twice a week for an hour, alternating between the

Howick and St Heliers dojos.

"I enjoy beating up the boys, learning the skills and self-defence, and the time I spend with dad doing something we both love."

Isabella's also not averse to throwing her father around on the mat if she gets the chance.

"She's flipped me a few times,"

says Bartlett.

The club has more than 130 members training at the dojos.

"We have about 30 juniors who train at St Heliers and more than 100 seniors and juniors at Howick," says Bartlett.

"We've even got two or three seniors who have taken up judo after bringing their children along and watching them."

Bartlett doesn't often compete and is more likely to be found doing the draws before the start of the action and then taking control as a referee.

"I have a fight every couple of years and that's about it."

He competed for New Zealand at Oceania level "a long time ago" and says he enjoys officiating.

"I've been lucky enough to referee at grand slam events [third highest level worldwide] and I'm heading to Glasgow the weekend before nationals for the European Championships."

Isabella sums up her love of judo: "Medals are nice, but at the end of the day you've got to have fun."

Owner Lawrie Crooke says the club was founded by Ivan Willis 30 years ago and is the biggest in Auckland.

"For those that don't know, judo is a martial art, a sport, and self-defence all rolled into one.

"It teaches discipline, respect and self-control."

Crooke believes judo should be available in every school to teach self-defence to girls.

"At the very least, we can teach girls how to break holds should they ever suffer the misfortune of being grabbed by someone."