

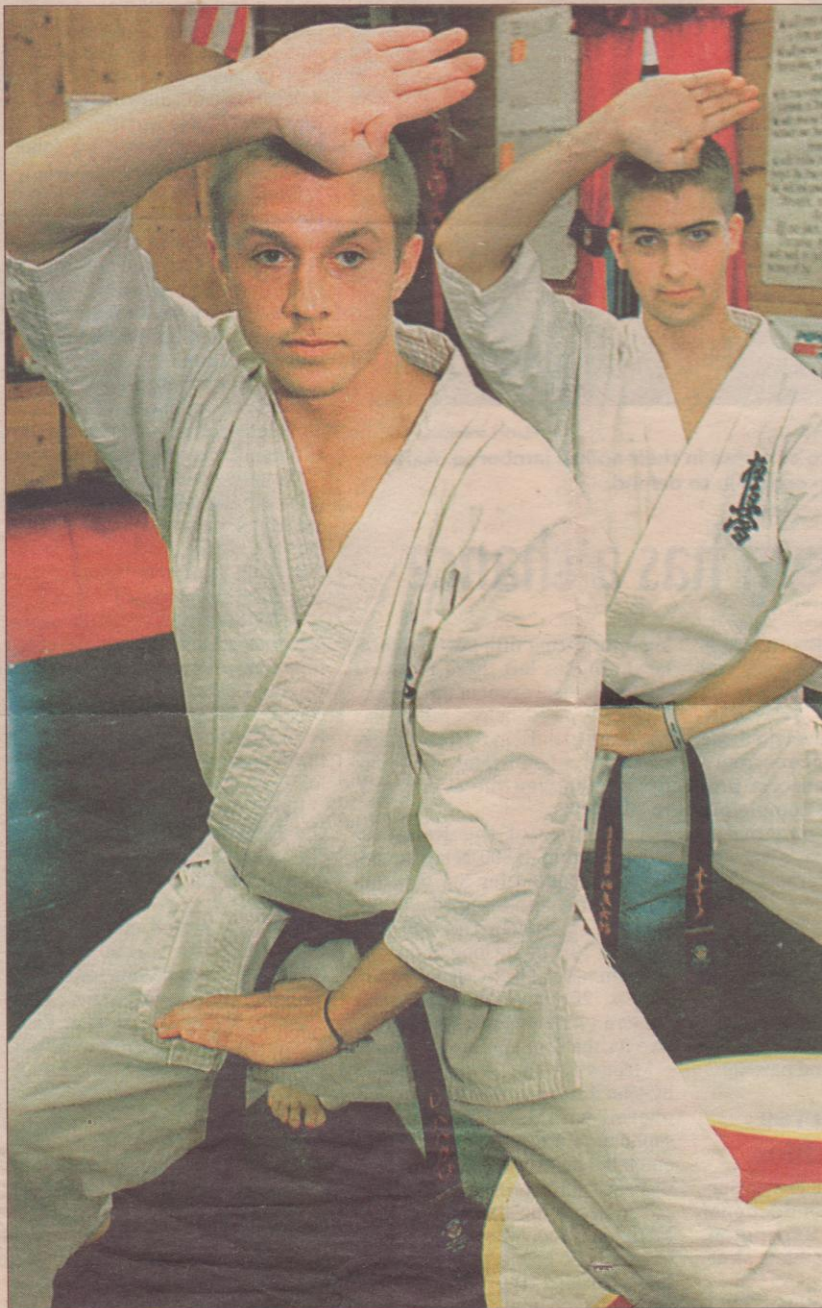
Success in  
ultimate  
uphill  
battle.



Kris Driscoll  
Martel

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## Methuen's own karate kids



Judy Emmert/Eagle-Tribune

Methuen Karate Association students (from left) Jarrod Brown and R.J. Bonanno, both of Methuen, were awarded their International Kyokushin Organization black belts this spring.

### Dedicated teens defy odds, earn 1st-degree black belts

By Kevin Conway  
Eagle-Tribune Writer

Their brand of karate is known as Kyokushin, meaning truth or reality. Yet, ironically, it was a popular form of make-believe that originally drew them to the martial art.

When Methuen Karate Association students Jarrod Brown and R.J. Bonanno were barely elementary school students, the motion picture "The Karate Kid" popularized the self-defense discipline across this country. It brought hundreds of interested novices into a dojo for the first time, and these two Methuen youngsters were no exceptions.

Now, a decade later, through an enormous amount of dedicated time and energy, both teens have accomplished their No. 1 goal. This spring, Brown and Bonanno were both officially presented with a first-degree black belt from the International Kyokushin Organization of Tokyo.

Putting aside the tremendous toil involved in striving for karate's pinnacle, just the transition from brown belt to black is overwhelming. It involves a five-year process with the final two years heavily invested in training as well as teaching.

The process culminates with a six-hour exam in which the prospective black belt is tested in pre-arranged form, board breaking, basic technique, bench pressing, a three-mile run and sparring against 25 different opponents.

What makes Brown and Bonanno's journey to the top of their martial art unique, other than their young

#### BLACK (AND BLUE) BELT TEST

Earning a Kyokushin karate black belt is a five-year process which culminates with a six-hour exam, often held overnight in order to challenge a student in the most extreme circumstances.

The test includes:

**Style** of karate form

**Breaking** of boards

**Demonstration** of basic techniques

**Bench pressing** prescribed weight

**Running** three miles

**Sparring** against 25 different opponents