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## Wushu a guiding light

By **STEVE BUFFERY**, SUN MEDIA

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Eight years ago, Mohammad Ziaei and his family moved from Iran to Canada.

For the 12-year-old, who could not speak English and was unfamiliar with the culture, life in the new land was difficult.

However, the one guiding force, other than his family, which kept the youngster on the straight and narrow was martial arts.

And now, eight years later, Ziaei is representing Canada in the sanshou discipline at the 10th World Wushu Championships at Ricoh Coliseum, and he couldn't be prouder.

"It feels amazing," said Ziaei, who will begin his competition in the first round today. "Yesterday, walking through the crowd (during the opening ceremonies), hearing everybody chant for us, was the best feeling in the world."

Wushu is a sport derived from traditional Chinese martial arts with two main disciplines, sanshou, a combative style which matches two fighters in a contest that includes kicks, strikes and throws, and taolu, a performance discipline, which includes artistic routines with and without weaponry.

The 20-year-old Ziaei hopes to win a medal at the Wushu championships and some day represent Canada at an Olympic Games, if the International Olympic Committee ever decides to include wushu on the program for future competitions. That is definitely possible as the sport is becoming more international every year and is certainly becoming more popular in Canada. The Canadian team is ranked No.1 in the Americas.

More than 600 athletes from 80 countries will take part in this week's event.

Yesterday, as Ziaei prepared for his first match, a couple of Canadian teammates, Andrea Hung and Margherita Cina prepared for their first competition in the taolu discipline of northern long fists. Cina, 18, finished fifth in a field of 41, while Hung, 17, tied for 11th. Full results will be tabulated at the end of the competition.

Mississauga's Cina, a first year arts and sciences student at McMaster University, began wushu when she was five and last year placed first overall with two golds and a silver at the Pan American championships.

She is also hoping for a medal this week, but acknowledged that many of the top athletes competing at the worlds are basically full-time athletes who receive funding from their respective governments. Still, being able to compete at a world championships is reward enough for Cina, who enjoys teaching others about her sport.

"It's like gymnastics with the choreography and stuff, but it's a martial art," she said. "It combines fluid movements with aggressive ones. And, yes, it is beautiful. I don't have any problem with anyone saying that."

### NATIONALIZATION

Wushu was created in China in 1949 when the central government attempted to nationalize the practice of traditional Chinese arts.

One of the most popular practitioners of the sport is Jet Li, who won 15 gold medals in the Chinese championships, eventually translating his martial arts skills to a successful career as an action movie star.

STEVE.BUFFERY@SUNMEDIA.CA

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