

Feature

He gets a kick from karate

By **BOWEN VANDERBERRY**
Staff Writer

He strides slowly out onto the mat, his eyes gleaming as he bows to his opponent.

The crowd hushes. The unmistakable black belt which encircles his waist and the sheen of his blond hair are the only splashes of color against the starched white of his uniform. The referee signals the beginning of the match. There's no question in his mind who will win: The Silent Warrior.

No, this is not the showdown between Ralph Macchio and his new nemesis in the final scene of a Karate Kid sequel. The Silent Warrior really does exist; his name is Tommy Margrave, a 17-year-old living in Durham. Margrave holds a black belt in karate; he also just happens to be deaf.

Sounds like your average story plot: young kid overcomes handicap and goes on to accomplish great things. Margrave's hearing loss was apparent at birth. Despite this setback, he took up karate at age 10 and within three years attained black belt status, a feat which normally takes at least five years. So far so good for accomplishing great things.

So what makes Margrave's story different? Not only does he practice karate and compete in tournaments regularly, but he also teaches karate to other enthusiasts and plans to lead a class for other hearing-impaired youngsters in the near future. Karate isn't his only sport. He also plays soccer and wrestles for Athens High School in Durham.

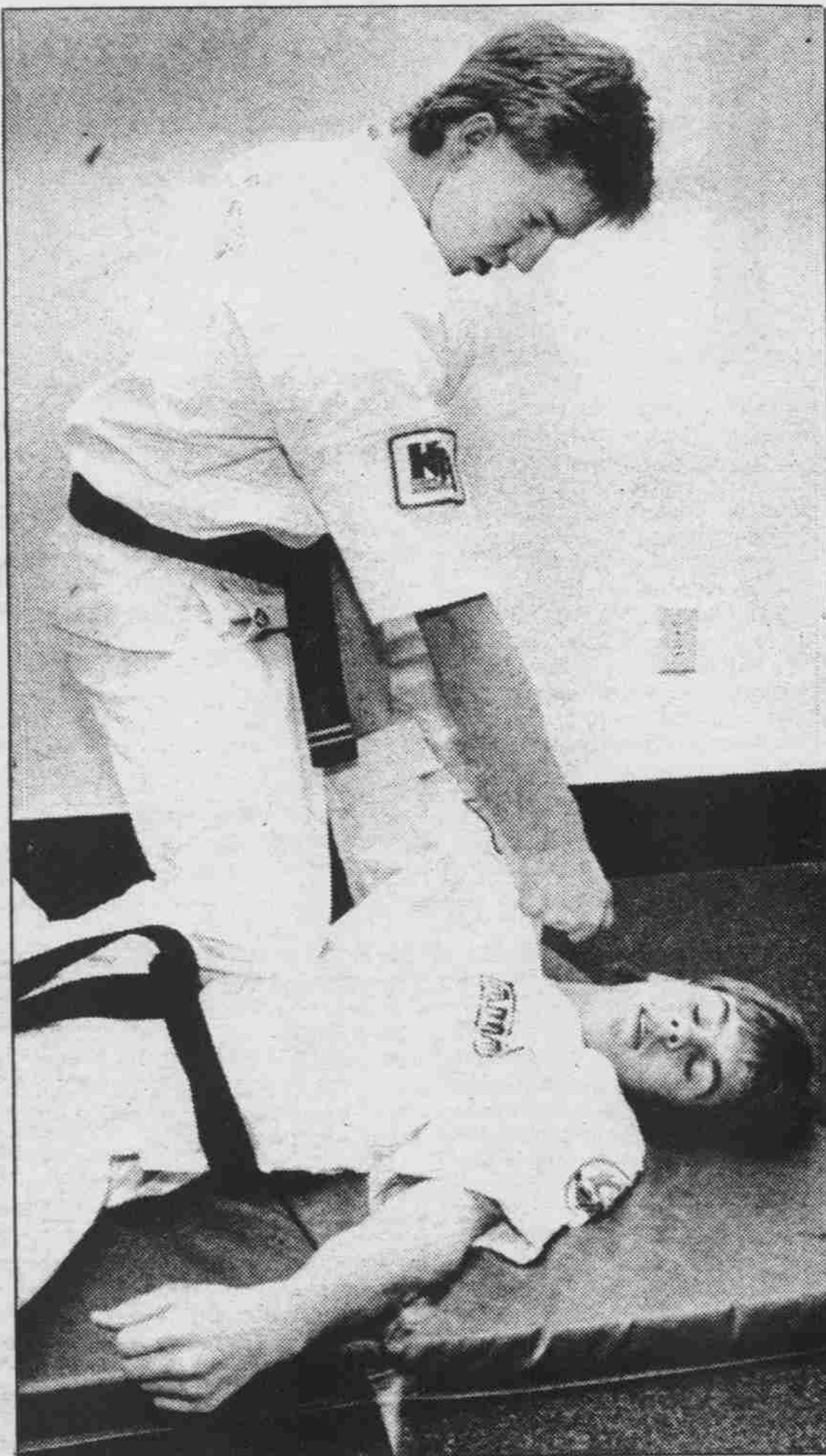
It all began April 22, 1980. That was the day Margrave took his first karate class at the insistence of his mother and grandmother.

"Tommy had always just accepted the hearing loss with grace," Margrave's grandmother, Teddy Tidbal, said. "He never questioned why he was different from the other kids." But his classmates began to tease Margrave about his handicap; they stole his hearing aid and mocked him. Margrave changed from a gentle and accepting person to someone that his relatives couldn't control. When he began to get into numerous skirmishes at school, his mother and grandmother gave him a choice: he could take either karate or gymnastics.

"We felt that he needed some outlet for his anger at the world," Tidbal said. "In karate, Tommy found a way to focus all of his energy." And at the age of 13, Margrave became the youngest black belt in North Carolina. He has since collected over 100 trophies, medals and ribbons.

But it wasn't enough for Margrave to simply become accomplished in the sport; he wanted others to be able to share in all that he had found in karate. And so he began teaching.

But how could a deaf person instruct others without being able to speak? According to Kevin Gurganus, head instructor of the Durham branch of Karate International where Margrave teaches, karate "isn't



DTH/Charlotte Cannon

Karate instructor Tommy Margrave, a 17-year-old black belt, shows 15-year-old Joshua O'Briant some holding techniques

just a physical thing. The way in which it trains your mind is just as important, if not more so, than the physical aspect of it."

Because of the mental emphasis and the fact that karate is mainly a demonstrated sport, words are rarely necessary. "My eyes can say a lot more than my mouth ever could!" Margrave said, using sign language.

Gurganus says Margrave's deafness may actually be an asset to his teaching technique. According to

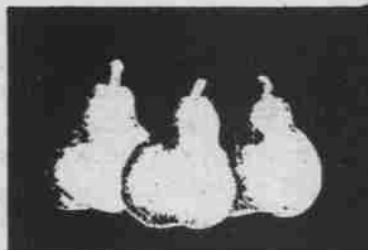
Gurganus, Margrave is far more sensitive to body language than most instructors and much more patient with the beginning students, for he too knows how difficult it is to pick up something foreign. "He's just got a real good way of dealing with people," Gurganus said.

Margrave's life outside of the karate studio is much like that of any other 17-year-old student. He is one

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RESTAURANT

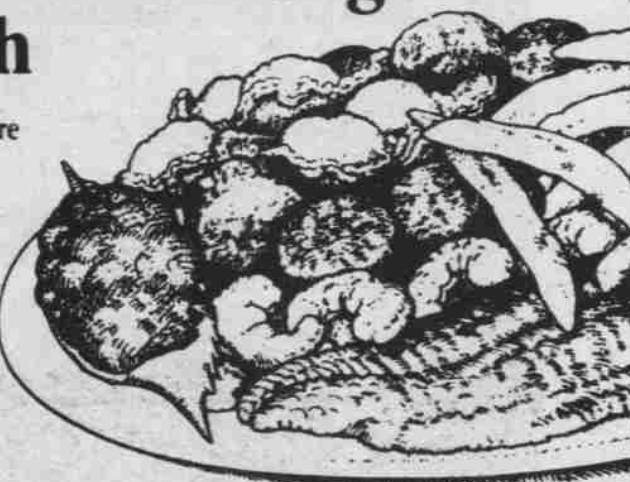


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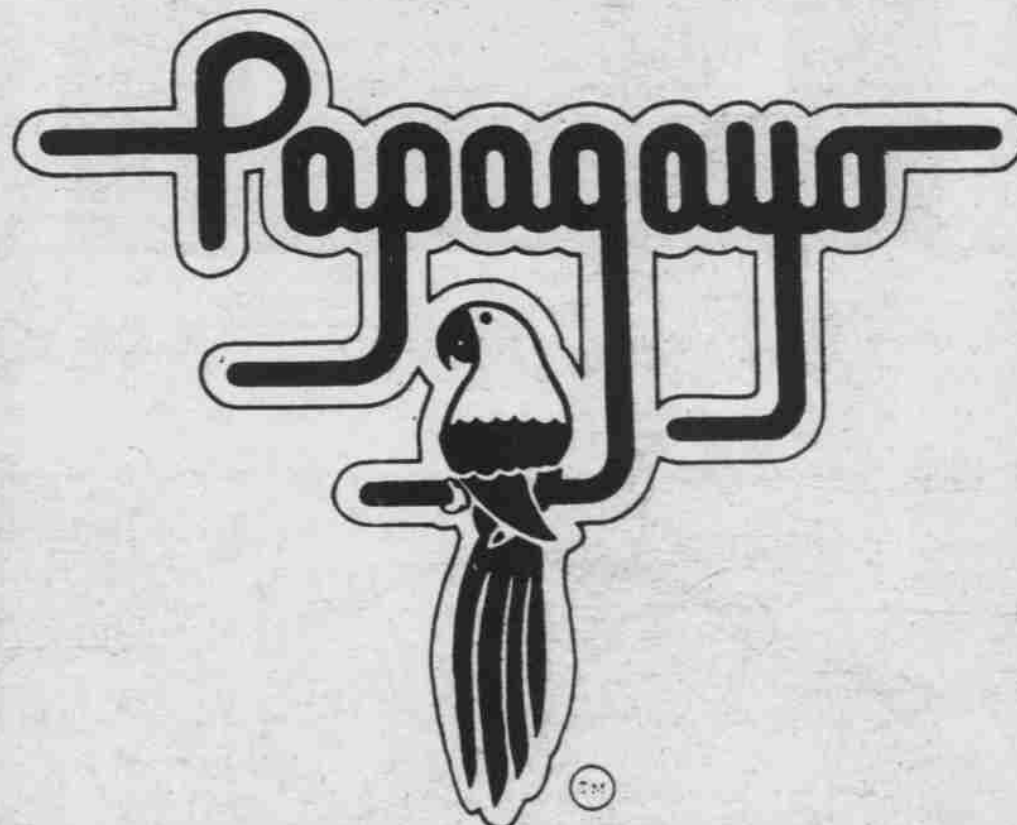
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