



Meeting Carlos, S.

Maria Dias

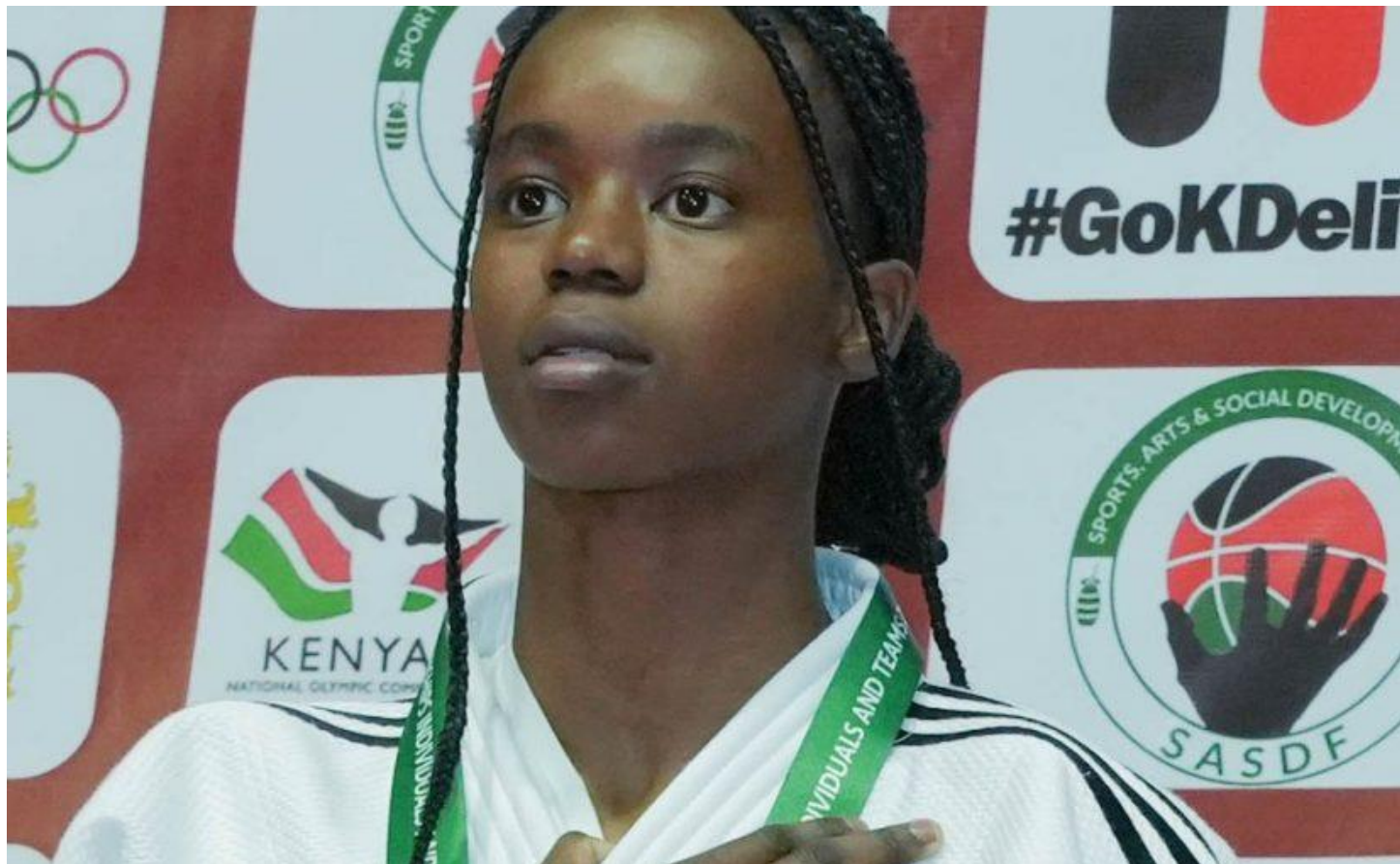


Photo by Club of Mozambique

Meet Shenidy Carlos - the judo champion who started out in a social project and this year brought the first gold medal won in Judo African championships to Mozambique.

At first sight she is only one more tall-skinny-shy teen. However, that fragile figure is home for the serene and courageous personality of a young judo champion.

Shenidy Carlos, 16, started learning

judo in a social project of the Edson Madeira Judo School. This year, she brought to Mozambique the first gold medal that the country has won in African championships. That award was also the first that she has won.

There is no easy way to success, though. And here the difficult living conditions plus lack of a proper training structure demand extra courage, effort, and discipline from those wanting to become champions, and from their trainers.

Shenidy wanted to learn Taekwondo, but destiny wanted her to take up judo. When she was 9 or 10, Edson Madeira visited Filipe Samuel Magaia, her primary school, promoting the programme within the context of a social project of his judo school.

Invited to a test training, she liked it so much that, ever since, she could never stop. Edson says that there were around 200 children there, but Shenidy, together with other four or five colleagues, was immediately identified as a potential champion.

Since then, Shenidy and Madeira, her trainer, have been together on a journey that demands a high level of work, discipline, and personal sacrifices to keep going and achieve their goals.

The way Madeira sees it, in Mozambique adolescents have very few alternatives to improve their lives. Sport is a good opportunity, but here athletes can't count on a proper infrastructure to support them.

Therefore, success depends almost exclusively on will and efforts of practitioners and their trainers.

Frequently, coaches end up acting as a kind of substitute parent, counselling and sometimes supporting their students financially to keep them on track.

“Every day we talk with them about the risks that they face. Shenidy, in her zone, is unique. Her friends don't have the same kind of life. They have other lives,” Madeira says, referring to social problems such as early marriage and robberies affecting many teenagers. “So, every day I tell her about the risks she faces, what happens to other people and that we don't have to be like others,” he continues.

The athlete is not yet conscious about the influence that she may have on her friends and community. But, in Madeira's opinion, competitors like her can make the difference, showing others that they can improve their life conditions and become famous for being good athletes.

Shenidy never had to repeat a year – another victory considering the context. But conciliating judo with her student life is a challenge that requires sacrifice in other areas of her life.

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Between training around 28 hours per week, school, and home studying, the judoka doesn't have much time left to socialize. "I don't have friends. Saturday and Sunday are to stay at home resting. I don't have time," she says.

Still, less than two years away from finishing her secondary studies, despite not knowing where she wants to go next the athlete doesn't hesitate about judo.

"I want to continue practising judo (...). Be able to win world championships and pass the knowledge I have to others," she states.

Besides the demanding training routine, to become a champion Shenidy must want, and believe that she is going to win, from the moment she trains to the instant she is on the Judo mat facing the adversary.

In that instant, when she steps onto the mat, her first fight is with fear. "First, I feel afraid and, after I go in, I feel even more afraid," she says, laughing. To succeed, the athlete must focus and conquer that fear before it

beats her.

The day Shenidy brought the medal home, however, neither she nor her Sensei (the Japanese name for a judo coach) remembered the difficulties, challenges, and efforts on their way to success.

"When Shenidy arrived at the airport, her colleagues, family, and her entire neighbourhood were there to receive her with greeting posters and flyers," coach Madeira said. "They had a party there. And, then the party continued in her neighbourhood, where everyone came out to welcome us."

Despite all their efforts and sacrifices, both Shenidy and Sensei Madeira feel great joy for the work that they are doing. Winning the gold medal was an incredible experience that both hope to repeat.

"There is no money that equals the happiness that we saw that day in people - her parents, her grandparents and all people close to her, transmitting that positive energy. This is what makes us want to work more each day."