



# entertainment

C6 New Film Review: 'The Lunchbox'

C14 Twitter Abuzz Over Naeem Khan Gown

C20 Randeep Hooda on 'John Day'

## Taekwondo World Champ's Got the Right Moves



By LISA TSERING  
India-West Staff Reporter

At age three, Rayna Vallandingham was so timid at her first martial arts lesson that she hid under a chair.

Now a remarkably accomplished and self-possessed international Taekwondo champion at age 10, Rayna is getting ready to make her acting debut in the martial arts action film "Underdogs."

How did she undergo such a transformation? And where does she get the self-discipline to persevere? The young dynamo — whose looks reflect a photogenic blend of her Punjabi and Dutch roots — revealed some of her secrets in a recent phone interview with **India-West**.

"Taekwondo has helped me with confidence and life skills that apply to my everyday life," Rayna said. "It especially helps me to have self-esteem and respect for others."

Taekwondo is a fighting art developed in Korea in the 1940s that blends self-defense with sport and exercise. Rayna is not only a top practitioner of this demanding art, but also excels at the flashier



Rayna Vallandingham poses with a few of the many medals she's won for Taekwondo and Extreme Martial Arts. Now, Rayna is getting ready for the release of her first Hollywood film, an action martial arts release titled "Underdogs."

At 10, Taekwondo ace Rayna Vallandingham is the youngest black belt martial artist to attain 11 World Championships.

(Cont. on page C2)

# Taekwondo World Champ's Got the Right Moves

(Cont. from page C1)

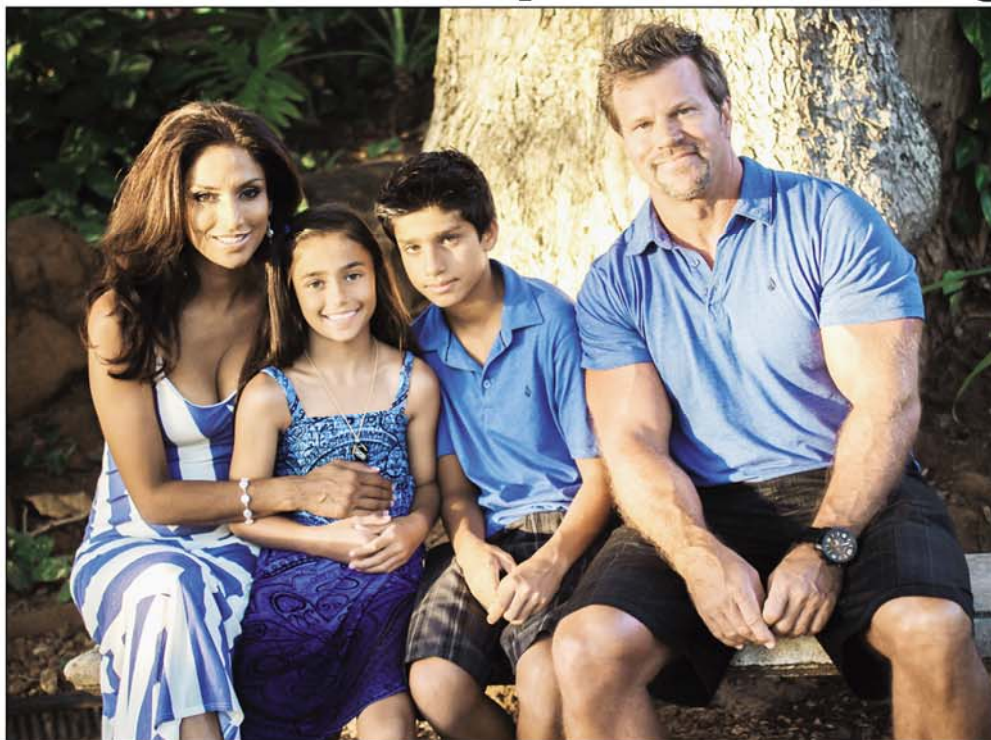
XMA, or Extreme Martial Arts, the showy, acrobatic style perfected by former "Power Rangers" star Michael Chaturantabut, an elite teacher who now coaches Rayna.

"Everything about her sets her apart," Chat told *India-West* in an e-mail. "Physically — just look at her move, enough said, but I could go into massive detail about the way she trains, [and] how she is able to pick up on choreography. Mentally — not one but 11 world titles, really? At her age? She almost has more world titles than years alive!"

As Rayna's manager explained, Rayna Vallandingham is the youngest black belt martial artist to attain 11 World Championships.

When she was 8, she took four world titles at a competition in Little Rock, Ark. (the Triple Crown in Traditional; Forms, Weapons, Sparring and Creative Weapons), making her the youngest black belt ever to win a championship — and competing against older girls twice her size.

The following year, she won six more world championships (Triple Crown in Traditional, Creative Weapons, XMA Forms, and XMA Weapons), and in 2013 she won the XMA Forms World Championship.



Rayna Vallandingham is seen in a family photo with her mother, Joty; father, Jeff; and 12-year-old brother Zane.

As many parents know, it can be a challenge to carve out time to drive one's kids to sports and afterschool activities right in our own neighborhoods.

But twice a week, Rayna's mother, Joty Sandhu Vallandingham, loads up the car and transports Rayna from their home in the beach community of Del Mar,

Calif., on a 120-mile journey each way to Chat's dojo in North Hollywood for an eight-hour training session. "She trains every day at home, too, at least two hours a

day, with weapons," said Joty.

Chat's dojo, known as XMA HQ, is known as one of the top training facilities in Hollywood, where actors in M. Night Shyamalan's "The Last Airbender," the cast from 2010's "The Karate Kid" and "Twilight" heartthrob Taylor Lautner underwent training.

When Rayna's trainer and manager found out that top martial arts filmmaker Philip Rhee was making a film called "Underdogs," about a ragtag group of impoverished kids in Los Angeles trying to make a name in the sport, Rayna knew she had to try out for a part. The role of Leticia, a young Latin American girl who sees martial arts as a way out of poverty, was written for an older actress, but Rayna aced the audition out of a field of 600 girls and secured the part. The film has just completed principal photography and is now in post-production. Rayna is homeschooled and studies acting with Samuel Warren Jr. in San Diego. When she isn't honing her mad Taekwondo skills, she works on an anti-bullying campaign by performing martial arts shows along with another talented youngster, Channah Zeitung, under the name of "Child Prodigies."

"Underdogs" represents more

(Cont. on page C4)

## Taekwondo World Champ's Got the Right Moves

*(Cont. from page C2)*

than just an opening into Hollywood for Rayna, Joty explained. Its director, Philip Rhee, is one of the top filmmakers in the martial arts genre, but what's more important is the message of the film. "This movie is so inspirational," the Indian American mom told **India-West**.

Now that Rayna has aced the martial arts titles and made her foray into acting, it seems that following in the footsteps of other athletes-turned-actresses — such as Deepika Padukone, Jessica Alba and Michelle Yeoh — seems to come naturally.

**India-West** asked Rayna how she was able to drum up the motivation to practice so relentlessly, day after day, when most girls her age would rather boot up their iPads and plop down in front of a One Direction video.

"It's my choice," she said, "to be the greatest person I can be. I have many goals, and I push myself to



*Rayna Vallandingham with her trainer, Extreme Martial Arts founder Mike Chat.*

my highest level."

Visit **IndiaWest.com** for a photo gallery, and catch Rayna's up-

dates on Twitter (@RaynaVham) and Facebook (facebook.com/pages/Rayna-Vallandingham).