



Judo opens the doors of the South

By Nicolas Messner on 20. Mar 2019

The recent successful organization of the Crans Montana Forum which took place in Dakhla, in the south of the Kingdom of Morocco, offered the opportunity to the Royal Moroccan Judo Federation (FRMJ) to formally establish the Dakhla and Oued Dahab Judo League, a project that had been in progress for several months.



Group picture after the judo demonstration in front of the local authorities, and representatives of the Ministry of Youth and Sport, the FRMJ and the IJF

Some had come from the African continent, others from much further, beyond the seas and oceans, but regardless of the distance, African and global leaders attending the Crans Montana Forum were able to enjoy the presence and the dynamism of young Dakhla judoka, led by their coach, Samir Kabdi, and the new president of the Dakhla Judo Association, Amina Zanir.

The National Judo Federation, chaired by Chafik Elkettani, was represented by its Vice President, Khalid El Boussiri, and its administration director, Mohammed Fidou, while Nicolas Messner, IJF Media and Judo for Peace Director, was also present at the event.

Before the official launch of the Dakhla and Oued Dahab Judo League, President Elkettani said: "We formalize the creation of the League, but judo has already been present in Dakhla for a few years. Thanks to Amina's presence and with the coach's involvement, the first activities started in 2014 and since then the success is growing. In full cooperation with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, we initiated the creation of several local leagues throughout the kingdom, to optimize the development of our sport. We have many projects and especially for the Dakhla region."

When Amina Zanir, president of the FRMJ judo promotion and development committee and now at the head of the new league, landed in the south in 2014, there was nothing: "We started from scratch. We first brought the coach from the Casablanca region, which is nearly 2,000km away from here. Then we made contact with local associations, to organize demonstrations. From the very first moment, the authorities, including the Wali and the President of the Region, were conquered. We even managed to organize an international judo tournament, which was a success."



Young judoka from Dakhla were present during the closing ceremony of the Crans Montana Forum, when African young leaders were awarded

Despite the local enthusiasm and the dynamism of the Moroccan federation, it was not easy, as everything had to be cleared and created from scratch. It was necessary to bring equipment and skills, it was also necessary to attract young people who did not know about judo. The demonstrations that took place at the Crans Montana Forum this year, as well as in front of the Wali representative, the delegates from the Region, the FRMJ, the Ministry of Sports and the IJF, prove that the challenge was worth a try. Judo in Dakhla is now in its infancy and is about to grow bigger and bigger.

At the constituent general assembly held on Sunday, March 17, in the sports hall of Dakhla, Khalid El Boussiri stressed: "The creation of this league is an important step for the development of judo, both locally, nationally and internationally. There is great potential. The Ministry of Youth and Sports is doing a lot of work, especially with the local sports centers for example, and we had to integrate this strategy to bring the values of judo to this remote region. The judo federation will now work actively to train coaches. At the moment, first and foremost, we have an educational development goal, but we are also convinced that there is a great sport potential as well in this region."



From left to right: Elhabib Elhathat, Dakhla Youth and Sports Director, Pierre-Emmanuel Quirin, Crans Montana Forum President, Khalid El Boussiri, Vice President of the FRMJ, Amina Zanir, President of the Dakhla and Oued Dahab Judo League and Samir Kabdi, judo coach, during the official announcement of the creation of the league.

President Chafik Elkettani, who has been running the FRMJ for several years, has already had a lot of successes, such as the annual IJF Grand Prix recently held in Marrakech, or the 2018 World Open Championships, also organized in Marrakech, or the World Masters of Rabat, to mention only the most recent major events of the international calendar held in Morocco. The federation is also very active in the field of education. At the beginning of March, an agreement was signed for the launching of a vast program for the integration of judo at school as well as for the setting up of an African judo center. Regular activities also take place in several orphanages in the country.

"In Dakhla, we must build the base of Judo. We were pleased to see that there was a real enthusiasm from everyone and we are very happy about it. We have very interesting projects for the future in this region and we will continue to work seriously for them to come true," said President Elkettani.

The least that can be said is that beyond the official and formal dimension of the creation of the league, the youth of Dakhla loves judo and shows it. The smiles displayed during the demonstrations at the Crans Montana Forum and downtown, or the unfeigned pride of the twenty or so young girls and boys when they were honored at the closing session of the Forum, are vivid evidence. Among the many participants of the event, one could hear the "They are beautiful in their judogi" and the "Oh, it is adorable"... Yes they were beautiful and adorable, but they were also good in their performance.



Judo demonstration by the young judoka of Dakhla

Everything is now in the hands of Amina Zanir, the new president of the Dakhla and Oued Dahab Judo League, elected by acclamation at the constituent general assembly. Black belt 3rd dan, and passionate about the sport above all, she says about herself that she is in love with the technique: "I like technical judo. I have been following all the courses of the FRMJ for years. Although I have not had the chance to be a competitor, I am one in the soul. Nevertheless, I could learn what judo is and what it could bring to the people of Dakhla, but also elsewhere. When I arrived here for the first time in 2014, it became clear to me that judo had a place in the southern landscapes. We open doors and we intend to open a lot. The challenges are numerous. We have everything to build. As a Moroccan woman, I feel very proud that I have been entrusted with this task."



Judo demonstration during the forum

The doors of the south are now open so that the values of sport and judo in particular can benefit a youth who is keen on learning. 'It's time to work hard...'. It seems obvious that all the ingredients are there for judo to attract more and more people, in Dakhla as well as in the rest of the country.