

During one of many battles in an international online Pokemon competition, the Unova Classic, I was in an icky position. My Japanese opponent had just gotten his Terrakion to power-up to the point where if he were to attack, my Pokemon would die instantly. My Chandelure, a Pokemon that looks exactly like a chandelier, had been knocked out by an Ice Shard. I didn't know what was going to happen next, but I knew I had to send out my unconventional Pokemon Octillery next, in order to take advantage of the turns. It was now my turn to use my "Trick Room" move, which would slow down my opponents so I could knock them out. I brought out Octillery, an orange octopus with a cannon for a mouth, and I hit my opponent with a water attack. That was a finishing blow for the Terrakion, so I was finally in a good position. To add to my advantage, my Octillery's special ability activated, granting me a power-up. Now, I was in a wonderful position! All I needed to do was use the same water attack over and over to win. My opponent brought out his best answer to my attacks, the Pokemon Azumarill. I was holding my fists hard and hoping for the best. Still, my Octillery was at full health, and therefore much stronger than my opponent's Pokemon. Within two hits his Azumarrill almost fainted! I stood up and jumped with joy. Azumarill went down. I had won the battle. That win came because I decided to build a team around Octillery, an unconventional Pokemon. I've always loved Octillery. With a cute design and a solid selection of attacks, what's not to like? A lot, according to the many people in the online Pokemon community. People say Octillery is bad because its stats are too low, its abilities are very situational, and there are better water Pokemon out there. But I've always liked unconventional and strange things, such as Pokemon, insects, or stuffed animals at age 17. A lot of people, such as my parents and friends, question why I always break tradition when I could follow the safe route. The answer is simple: I choose to break convention, not just in Pokemon battles but also in life because taking risks is the only way we can create a new better world. Every time I look at the top teams from statistics from international pokemon competition websites, they did something to break the mold. Whether it's an unexpected Pokemon, a crazy strategy used with a popular Pokemon, or the use of unexpected items, they used unusual methods to give them an edge. People often fail to realize that everything - books, video games, companies, medicine - all those were created via risks. Bravery and taking chances are required for something new to appear. In other words, breaking the rules is the key to forwarding the world.

In that competition, I managed to secure a 41-battle winning streak over three days. I lost the next two battles, but then I won my last fight. A few weeks later, the results came out. I got 3rd place worldwide in the Junior Division and 1st Place in the Junior Division for the US. Fellow players on the Pokemon forums congratulated me. One person said my team was amazing and unexpected and it gave him huge trouble on Pokemon Showdown, a simulation site where we test out teams before going to

compete. This was the first time where I achieved such high results - and I did it using my favorite Pokemon, even though everyone told me not to. That's when I decided to consistently build teams around my favorite Pokemon. If I'm willing to take risks and work with my favorites, I can always achieve what I'm looking for.