

Taekwondo in a nutshell

1. Study of taekwondo

1) Understanding taekwondo

- Martial arts cultivating sound mind and sound body



Taekwondo is a word combination of tae (kick), kwon (fist) and do (doctrine or teaching), so meaning a teaching that includes kicking and punching. Taekwondo is Korea's home-grown form of gymnastics that connects body, mind and physical techniques, thereby enabling you to control yourself and protect yourself from outward attacks. Around the world, various forms of martial arts were developed to raise soldiers' physical fitness especially during turbulent periods, and that was how taekwondo came into being.

But with the passage of time, the merits of taekwondo's mental cultivation and health promotion have received much more attention than its original characteristics of aggression and strength.

Taekwondo's significance

* Taekwondo as a martial technique

Taekwondo uses movements of the hands and feet to quickly oppress the opponent. Its skills are diverse and focus on strengthening physical stamina.

* Taekwondo as a martial art

Used as a form of martial art, one can show off taekwondo's artistic beauty through demonstrations and performances, including breaking.

* Taekwondo as a teaching/doctrine

Used as a form of martial discipline, one can strengthen his or her mind and physique through training.

Taekwondo's basic movements are jiregi (punching), chigi (hitting), tzireugi (thrusting), khukki (twisting), chagi (kicking) and makki (blocking). These motions require grand movements of arms

and legs and consume comparatively large amounts of energy in a short time. Taekwondo practice constitutes various combinations of basic movements and can be quite exhaustive.

Taekwondo's poomsae is a series of movements for offense and defense techniques which can be practiced alone in accordance with fixed patterns. The techniques practiced through poomsae can be applied in kyorugi, one-on-one sparring. Among other applications of taekwondo drills are breaking, demonstration and self-defense. In breaking, you use your hand, fist, elbow and foot to smash solid material into pieces. During demonstration, you show a series of offense and defense techniques to audiences. Self-defense drill is composed of various techniques which will protect you from dangers and external physical attacks.

Taekwondo gives you a chance to increase patience because it requires continuous and repetitive drills of poomsae, kyorugi and demonstration for you to master its techniques and logic. Therefore, it is advisable to motivate yourself and try to enjoy the sport while you are at it. Taekwondo is different from other games and sports in that it gives you pleasure and motivation through repetitive physical drills and mental cultivation. The following is important during taekwondo training:

* Repetition and perfection of skills

By repeating and perfecting each skill taught in taekwondo, one can check the level of development of his or her mental and physical status and work on continuously improving them.

* Perspiration

Taekwondo requires a rigorous amount of movement and indirectly is also a form of workout. By sweating, one can experience a sense of fulfillment.

* Self-control

The best aspect about taekwondo is its ability to teach one how to have control over one's mind and body at the same time. Taekwondo's poomsae, kyorugi, breaking, and self-defense techniques not only help strengthen the body, but also boost spiritual strength.

Uniform & belts used in taekwondo

Just like a football player's jersey or a soldier's camouflage uniform, taekwondo practitioners must wear a special garment known as a dobok. One thing to keep in mind though is that this particular uniform, beyond its physical outlook, holds a spiritual significance.

It was designed to flatter the systemic movements of taekwondo, to conform to the traditional Korean public's preference for the color white, and to take the form of Hanbok, Korea's national costume. In the past, all dobok were made of white fabric. However, in July 1979, in order to classify the higher ranks, the uniforms have evolved into what they have become today.



Dobok was made to be parallel with and representative of taekwondo's philosophy as well as Korea's culture. They were originally made white because, historically, this color has represented modesty and restraint; white also exemplifies purity and is free of malicious intentions. It illustrates the drive for sacredness, nobility, innocence, dignity and triumph.

The roots for taekwondo belts go all the way back to ancient Korean history - where we find that these belts were created to distinguish a sort of a hierarchy. Different colors serve as a symbol for years of training dedicated to taekwondo and at the same time make the simple outfit look a little more distinguished.

A complete taekwondo outfit consists of a jeogori jacket, a belt, and a pair of pants. The outfit itself is a metaphor for authority and discipline; from the beginning stages to mastery, and each belt worn shows the different amounts of time and effort dedicated to taekwondo.

Generally speaking, five colors are used for these belts: white for beginners, yellow, blue, and red for those in training, and black for the grade holder. The white and black, respectively, symbolize the sun and the moon, day and night, and alpha and omega.

The belts are wrapped around the hypogastric region, the lowest of the three regions of the abdomen, and knotted firmly twice. This is because it is believed that this area is where the negative energy of yin, and the positive energy of yang meet to create a vital force. Also, the knot creates a triangular shape that represents people. Together, the belt's placement and the knot create a healthy balance between inner and external forces.

* Taekwondo belt color spectrum

1. White belt:

- Represents the very first stage of Taekwondo where there is no knowledge
- Symbolizes purity, innocence, and a new beginning

2. Yellow belt:

- Represents the beginning stage of Taekwondo where basic skills are acquired.
- Symbolizes earth

3. Blue belt:

- Represents the developing stage of Taekwondo where skills meet emotions and thoughts.
- Symbolizes the sky

4. Red belt:

- Represents the final stage before becoming a black belt where self-control and humility must be obtained.
- Symbolizes the sun's enormous power and energy

5. Black belt:

- Represents completion and proficiency, the opposite of what the white belt symbolizes

2. Taekwondo's training effects

1) Mental cultivation

- Meditation and concentration



Taekwondo underscores mental development as well as physical reinforcement. Mental development is carried out through meditation. The trainees are required to focus their minds amid repetitive physical movements.

Rather than focusing on technical perfection, the trainees should learn to rid themselves of worldly thoughts and unite their mind and body together.

Meditation in taekwondo leads the students to instill "gi" (spiritual energy) into their minds.

Stress relief through sweating

Taekwondo is a means to train one's mind and body, not just a sort of sport that gives you pleasure. Taekwondo helps purify your mind and energizes your body. The purpose and results of this training lie here.

Taekwondo is not about forgetting or avoiding stress, but about raising resistance potential against one's surroundings through repetitive drills. If the results of a one-hour drill of taekwondo and the same length of fun activities turned out the same, there would be no reason to go to a taekwondo gym. Taekwondo is not just for fun, but makes you overcome external stress and alter your attitudes towards life. Through stress-relieving training, students are soaked with perspiration and gain a feeling of achievement and satisfaction.

Discipline and self-realization

Taekwondo helps develop your spiritual strength with which you can push through any difficulty in life. Through practice, you can not only find about yourself but also learn how to adapt to your surroundings. This self-realization is possible because taekwondo training is based upon the principles of repetition and self-discipline. You might feel that your body is strengthened only physically after the drills, but that strengthening is the result of repetitive training largely controlled by your mind. In other words, your mind leads the development of your body.

Taekwondo training is composed of a series of self-restraint programs. They help overcome mental difficulties and unite the student's body and mind into one.

2) Physical reinforcement

Health care

Taekwondo is a sport that pursues the development of a healthy body. It helps augment people's resistance and immunity to diseases and enhance their physical fitness as well. The martial art helps you develop muscular strength to endure physical challenges and also enhances breathing capacity. Strengthened heart-lung system makes possible an efficient operation of the body. Taekwondo helps you endure extremely cold and hot weather as well.



Hypogastric breathing

Breathing is one of the most important elements in Taekwondo. The coordination between movements and breathing is crucial to each and every taekwondo movement. Without proper breathing, a student can neither conduct breaking properly, nor create quick poomsae movements. Every stance and movement is related to right breathing in taekwondo.

People might ask what kind of breathing is proper for taekwondo. Taekwondo instructors often ask students to concentrate their strength in the hypogastric center (lower abdomen) while breathing. For taekwondo athletes, the hypogastric center has been long considered the nucleus of their mind and body training.

Heart function strengthening

Taekwondo mobilizes almost all parts of our body: feet, legs, arms and hands. The overall movements increase the circulation of blood in the body and reinforce heart functions.

Constant training of taekwondo lowers the heart rate. This can be easily checked after only a three-month training period. A lower heart rate indicates that overall heart function has become much more strengthened.

Taekwondo enhances resilience of heart muscles and helps the heart contain larger amount of blood than before training.

Taekwondo uses all muscles of the body, even those of the ends of hands and feet, sometimes softly and other times roughly. Those movements pump up the blood flow all the way to the heart.

3) Social adaptation

Courtesy and etiquette



The ultimate purpose of the art of taekwondo is not self-defense but rather many other social qualities, including justice, morality, wisdom and courtesy. The primary focus of learning taekwondo is to utilize these qualities for the betterment of mankind and, eventually, society.

A widely accepted goal in the sports world today is the idea of "contributing to peace amongst humanity through sports." Taekwondo, being a form of martial arts and sport, also closely follows this goal. The way that instructors teach their students to genuinely live "by the art of taekwondo and for the art of taekwondo" is by highly intensive training.

Every move conducted in the drill hall is closely watched and is an outline of respect for authority and exemplary behavior.

During the training process, the student gets to serve as an example for a specific skill, as well as follow an example set by another, in order to hand down and pick up on preciseness, respectively. While in progress, students indirectly learn patience, self-control, and respect.

While the external focus in the education of taekwondo is learning how to use every inch of the human body as a weapon, the primary focus is to teach the students not to ever abuse the skills but to only put them to appropriate use when necessary. This is a reason why taekwondo is so popular throughout the world today.

Leadership

The repetitive practice executed to acquire the skills of taekwondo is a discipline that connects the body and the mind as one. The most basic drill is connecting breathing to movement and one step forward is the connection of the movement and the mind. This is what is referred to as the core of any leadership in the martial arts field: demonstrating empathy between the instructor and the students through the agreement of the body and the mind and not only by meaningless movement.

Self-management

Taekwondo is more systematic than any other sport out there. Using basic skills, poomsae, kyorugi, breaking, self-defense techniques, etc., it requires the use of the whole body regularly. Also, with at least three to five days of comprehensive training a week, the regular system is drilled into individuals. This kind of consistent exercise increases the level of the high-density lipoprotein (HDL), also known as the "good cholesterol," in the body. Practicing taekwondo can even help build muscles, as well as prevent or combat obesity.

It is especially important to start taekwondo training at an early age, of course, for the sake of discipline, but also because it will aid children to grow with balanced minds and bodies.

A child's active training in taekwondo will raise the body's activity level dramatically and burn calories that could have potentially raised fat levels. Also, for children struggling with obesity, taekwondo will suppress appetite, help improve their eating habits, improve their digestive systems, and eventually become free of this condition.