

Taekwondo on the World Stage

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Nowadays, the distinctive exclamations of taekwondo practitioners can be heard even in the most remote corners of the globe. Taekwondo, begun in ancient times as a martial art, has since become a sport enjoyed by all age groups, from children and teenagers to adults and the elderly. It attracts people from all walks of life; students, lawyers, housewives, doctors, professors. Taekwondo, along with the triathlon, made its world debut as an Olympic medal sport at the 2000 Sydney Games, bringing the total number of official Olympic sports to 28. Taekwondo has a large following all over the globe, contributing to the promotion of Korean culture around the world.

The basic goal of taekwondo training involves a systematic development of

skills related to both offense and defense, since it is essentially a means of self-defense to be used for proper purposes. However, concerns have been raised that in transforming taekwondo into a competitive sport, its offensive techniques are being overly emphasized at the expense of attention to its defensive nature.

A majority of the taekwondo enthusiasts who enjoy this martial art as an everyday sport train intensively in groups with a sense of community. Their dedicated training is focused on achieving a balanced development of the body and the soul; their goal being to acquire self-defense skills as well as self-discipline and enlightenment through meditation and self-reflection. On the other hand, the appeal of taekwondo as an Olympic sport lies in the



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Taekwondo has become a martial art of the world. Practitioners from around the world training at the Haedong Gym in Seoul (above, right).





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realization of individual goals through the challenge of competition, and the development of effective techniques along with swift and precise physical movements. The biggest difference between the two relates to how the participant views himself. However, for both, the training regimen concentrates on artistic expression, aesthetic movement and the philosophical manifestation of the human body, in addition to preservation of the uniquely pure and clean spirit that is the essence of taekwondo.

Most Asian martial arts help the practitioner to preserve the moral rectitude of traditional culture and society in the midst of fast-paced changes going on in the modern world by nurturing respect for discipline and dedication while learning from the master. In the course of taekwondo training, the student learns the etiquette of the East and shows respect to the Korean flag. In other words, students of taekwondo learn to immerse themselves in a "battle with oneself" through the martial art, thereby developing self-endurance and transforming the physical movements into a form of art.

Coaches Boost Popularity

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Today, people are learning taekwondo all over the world while the number of Korean instructors and local coaches is ever increasing. The local coaches have been taught by the Korean instructors and fulfill their leadership roles with great pride.

A majority of the Korean instructors who went overseas in the 1960s experienced tremendous hardship due to lan-

guage difficulties and cultural differences. In order to cultivate an interest in taekwondo, they demonstrated their art in parks and other public venues-anywhere they could show people the refined techniques of their sport, from basic moves such as fist striking and kicking, to competitive matches to showcase self-defense skills, and demonstrations of breaking layers of bricks and boards with one's fist, the side of one's hand, or a kick, which always drew much applause and admiration from onlookers.

It has been only some 30 years since taekwondo was first introduced abroad. In this relatively short period of time, taekwondo has enjoyed truly remarkable growth worldwide. There are now 3,000 Korean instructors and 50 million people around the world who engage in regular training and have developed an appreciation for the culture of taekwondo.

The first generation of Korean instructors are now septuagenarians with graying hair, while some of their great-grandchildren are following in their footsteps as taekwondo teachers.

Success of Korean Instructors

U.S. President Bill Clinton, King Carlos of Spain, former heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali, the late Bruce Lee and Hollywood star Chuck Norris are among the most well-known students of taekwondo. Lee Jun-ku, a Korean instructor in the United States, has been especially successful, being the only Korean included in the list of "The 200 Most Successful Immigrants" by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. Over 250 former and current U.S. senators and congressmen have learned taekwondo from Lee. Nowadays, he is seeking to develop an entirely new concept of "taekwon ballet," a method of promoting spiritual wellness by performing taekwondo to music. Meanwhile, taekwondo master Lee Haeng-ung is said to be greeted by President Clinton as "Grand Master" with a deep

bow. In addition, professor Min Kyung-ho initiated the first-ever taekwondo martial arts program at the University of California at Berkeley, while the Canadian Taekwondo Association honors its president Lee Tae-eun each year with "Lee Tae-eun Day" on May 31, as officially designated by the city of Ottawa. Master Kwon Jae-hwa, who teaches many actors, models and other celebrities at his taekwondo center in Manhattan, is also well-known in Europe, with a wide range of followers.

In Latin America, Master Lee Ki Hyung has been teaching in Peru, Kim Yong Min in Brazil, and Master Moon Daiwon in Mexico, where he is known as the "Godfather of Taekwondo," in addition to Hong Sung Chon who teaches in the Philippines and Master Lee Jungnam in New Zealand. In Africa as well, taekwondo instructors include Kim Young-tae, who made his way to the Ivory Coast in 1968, Master Yoon Mogg in Kenya, Master Jeong Ki Young in Egypt, and Master Kim Yong Kwang in Libya. In Europe, Master Suh Yun-nam has been teaching since 1967 in Germany, where he is a media celebrity thanks to his book on his unique method of promoting wellness through taekwondo. Master Seo Myung Soo who teaches in the Netherlands, Master Park Sun-jae in Italy, Master Lee Kyong-myong, who introduced taekwondo to Eastern Europe and Austria in the 1970s, Master Lee Kwang Bae in Yugoslavia, Kim Yong Ho in France, Chung Sun Yong in Portugal, and Choi Won-chol in Spain have all contributed much to the internationalization of taekwondo. In teaching taekwondo to local residents, they also act as conduits for the dissemination of Korean culture, including the use of Korean words for taekwondo commands. Their taekwondo training also involves the practice of Korean etiquette and principles of good sportsmanship in matches, which helps to promote Korean culture in these countries. They also do volunteer work in a variety of areas in their local communities by pro-



moting anti-drug campaigns, providing guidance for troubled teens, and aiding the handicapped, thereby leading the way toward a safer, more nurturing environment.

During the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, taekwondo was inaugurated as an official Olympic sport, becoming the second Asian martial art following judo so designated. A total of 103 athletes competed in four weight classes during four days of competition. Of the eight gold medals at stake, Korea won three, while host country Australia, along with the United States, Cuba, China and Greece, the host of the 2004 Summer Olympics, each won one. Though there were some concerns that Korea might sweep all the golds, this proved to be unfounded. The excellent management of the competition, highly refined techniques of taekwondo, enthusiasm of the audience and distribution of the medals among different countries all contributed to strengthening the justification for taekwondo to be sanctioned a permanent Olympic sport at the 2004 Games in Athens.

As for the internationalization of taekwondo, the first notable step was taken in May 1973 with the establishment of the World Taekwondo Federation, headquartered in Seoul,

In the over 80 kilogram men's taekwondo final held at the Sydney Homebush State Sports Center, Korean Kim Kyong-hun side kicks Australian Daniel Trenton (top). Korea's national taekwondo team is giving a demonstration at Kukkiwon, the world taekwondo headquarters in Seoul, to celebrate the inclusion of taekwondo in the Sydney Olympics (above).

which then joined the General Association of International Sports Federations as an international organization in October 1975. The following year, taekwondo was recognized as an official sport by the CISM (Conseil International Sportive Militaire). Then, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), during its meeting in Moscow in 1980, designated taekwondo as an Olympic sport for the first time.

The 1988 Seoul Games and the 1992 Barcelona Games featured taekwondo competition as a demonstration sport, then during the IOC Session in Paris, on September 4, 1994, it was finally approved as an official Olympic sport to be introduced in the 2000 Sydney Games. Today, taekwondo has become a truly international sport, with more than 160 countries being members of the World Taekwondo Federation.

The internationalization of this traditional Korean martial art has indeed flourished, thanks to the dedicated efforts of visionary taekwondo masters around the world, who built a foundation for its widespread popularity, while overcoming many hardships and obstacles.

Taekwondo is now not only a Korean martial art but also a sport enjoyed by people the world over. As both an elite sport and a practical, everyday recreational activity for the public, it is helping to enhance the quality of life of all of its diverse adherents. Appreciation of the culture and philosophy of taekwondo, and dissemination of its fundamental concepts will continue to enrich the spirit of taekwondo practitioners around the world. ♦