

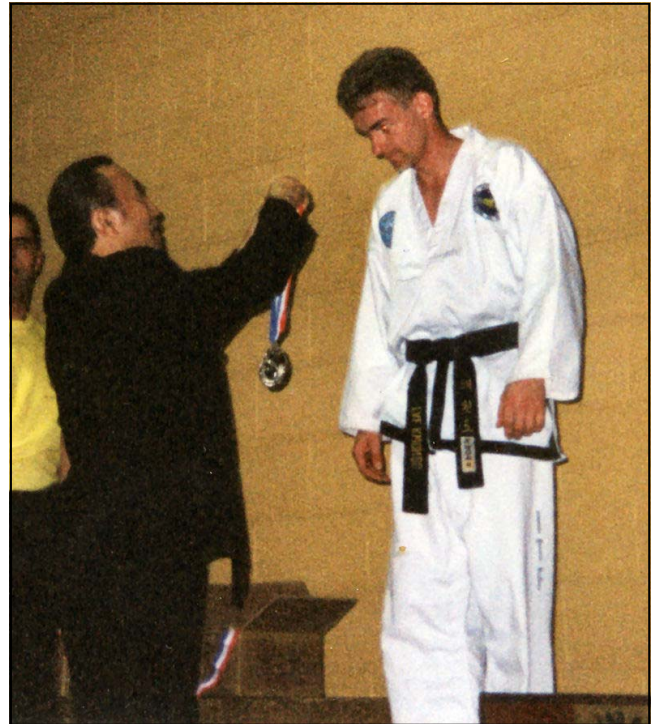
# Top Tips for Successful Competition

By Stuart Anslow

Having competed since early on in my Taekwon-do career and still doing so to this present day, I have been to both local and international events and competed in sparring, patterns and destruction (as well as team events). I do not consider myself an '*Ultimate*' competitor, but I have had a fairly successful competition career and met and competed against some great guys along the way. So, from my experience I offer the following advice for any student that wishes to participate in the sport side of Taekwon-do. The following is based on the *light continuous* format, which varies from light to heavy contact in many cases.

## Preparation

If you are serious about making your mark then preparation is an essential part of competition build up. Ideally you should start doing extra training at least two or three months in advance. When training at standard lessons you should push your fitness, this will not only make you fitter but develop that '*never say die*' attitude, better known as indomitable spirit. All sparring should be serious against all opponents, no matter what grade. When sparring opponents who do not match you for ability, it should be used as a way to work on specific elements, such as foot work or those rear left leg turning kicks you don't pull off as well as other techniques. If possible, select the best sparrer's in your school as often as you can, even if they are bigger, faster, stronger and better than you. Work on various styles of sparring for the different types of fighters you may encounter – from the big heavy guys, to the '*flick flick*' feet guys. For patterns and destruction, it's a case of practice, practice, practice.. after all failing to prepare is



preparing to fail.

Finally, ensure you read the rules of the tournament. Far too many competitors enter having never looked at the rules and then wonder why they lost or are getting pulled by referees for things!

Remember the 5 P's - *Perfect Preparation Prevents Poor Performance*.

## Extra Training

All serious students that are entering a competition put that extra bit into their training in the build up, so you need to go one step further. Extra sessions outside your own school club, at home or even better at other schools, will help immensely. Practice your patterns as often as possible, road work & shadow sparring are a big help for sparring as well. If possible, get a training partner for those home sessions, if not, hit the bag as often as possible!

## Prepare your mind

Visualise the competition. If you know who your opponents usually are then visualise beating them ...easily. If you don't know who your opponents will be then just visualise yourself winning, over & over again. Often it's not down to who's got the skill to win, but who's got the will to win.

## Stamina Work

As I said above, roadwork (running) is an essential part of your extra training. The nerves and the adrenaline a competition produces really take a lot out of you. Running & sprinting will aid in the loss and recovery of essential energy. As mentioned, bag work (as in a heavy hanging bag) is also a good stamina builder. Not only do you work on your stamina, but also your speed, power and accuracy. Always train in rounds and perform for longer than you will have to at a competition. You need to build up anaerobic and aerobic energy.



## Speed Work

This is all about kicking and punching as fast as you can, but on target. Work on your speed, retraction and multiple/combination techniques. Use the heavy bag, focus mitts, floor to ceiling ball, shadow sparring or a partner if possible. Work on it also when sparring at classes,

as a separate thing for simply sparring away. For ITF based competitions it's better to kick faster than harder as it's all about scoring points.

## Distance and Timing

This is another essential part of your competition training. In the club work on your distance and timing by keeping just out of reach of your opponent, then attacking and counter-attacking at opportune moments. Learn to read your opponents quickly, if your opponent seems to be a leggy kicker fight inside, if he/she seems slow fight outside etc. Try out strategies within your school, then employ them at tournaments ensuring you note their success rates for future events. Every fighter has a weakness; you just have to figure it out!



## Confidence

On the day of competition you should have confidence in yourself and your techniques. Tell yourself how hard you've trained, that you're well prepared for all eventualities and that it will be no problem. Remember if you don't know your opponents then the old saying '*when ignorance is mutual, confidence is king*' comes into play. When you step into the ring keep telling yourself that it's going to be easy, that you're fit, prepared and that beating this opponent will be no problem. Never let yourself look under confident as this will boost your opponent's confidence.



## Psyche

The psyche-out of your opponents could play a major roll in winning or losing. People psyche people out in different ways; it's not always about starring your opponent down just prior to the fight. Ask different club mates how they do it. Different types of people can be psyched out in different ways, some can't at all. Don't bother trying to stare them out unless you're positive it won't psyche you out and have the reverse effect. Never let them ruffle you or wind you up as this could be part of their psyche on you. There's so many different ways it would take this whole article to list them all, but one way is to limit what you show before you fight and simply show a few of your fastest and strongest techniques, perhaps a rock solid turning kick at a focus pad for example, do this full power and full speed, just for the show! Don't worry about practising your poorer techniques, after all, if they arnt that good by now, a few more kicks before an event won't change much and will show a weakness to your opponent.

## Do What You Know

Forget that triple jumping spinning kick that you've been working on. Leave the flash techniques until you are positive you are miles ahead. Stick to basic kicks and they

will come out fast and natural. Always try to score, as too many fakes and dummy kicks waste precious energy.

## Attack or Defence

Counter-attacking is a lot harder than people realise. Its better in most cases to attack as continuously as possible. If you're the one attacking, your opponent will find it very hard to get their attacks in. If your feeling tired don't just run around the ring trying to avoid contact, but rather attack in short, fast spurts, blitzing your opponent with four or five techniques then moving out of range.

## Final Thoughts

Though I still compete these days, I do so more for the fun of it than in any serious way. For the majority, the sport side is not the be all and end all of training in Taekwon-do, so don't get disheartened if all doesn't go well as I know of students that never won a thing as a coloured belt, then, following their black belt they excelled. Some students are driven by the crowds and adrenaline at tournaments, this makes them perform better than usual, for others it the opposite and a competition should be used to build on that internal strength, it not always about winning and losing.



In my years of competition, when I was a serious competitor and youth and fitness were more on my side, I have trained up seriously for some events and done well, consequently I have hardly trained up for some other events and still done well. This

was not because I am superb at competition, but rather that my mind set for each was different. When I trained really hard, it was with a 'do or die' attitude, I had photos of certain opponents on my garage wall to make me train harder, I did round after round of bag work, loads of roadwork (up and down hills – and I hate running), I punished myself to make myself faster, fitter and stronger and thus my personal expectations of myself were high, I step onto that tournament arena feeling (in my mind) like I couldn't be beaten. When I hardly trained and did well it's because I went into a tournament with no expectations, no cares. If I won I won, if I lost I lost. And with no expectations of yourself, there's a lot less pressure to perform and sometimes this can work in your favour as well.

If you're a Taekwon-do student, then entering competition is like practicing your art and as such I personally dislike those that only compete in sparring or patterns, as personally I feel all areas are part of the same coin and even if you aren't the most technical person at patterns, or the most confident of sparrers, or the best at destruction, you should still have a go at them, if only as a learning experience. Being 'top dog' at one area doesn't relate to being good at Taekwon-do it just means you can spar well, or perform well or break some boards, being competent at all areas, rather than specialising in one is the sign of a good Taekwon-do competitor.

Regarding sparring, it's more than a good idea to be able to spar at different contact levels. You should be able to spar with controlled techniques, but also be able to step up a level if required, as 'light continuous' contact levels can vary dramatically and although no one likes

getting thumped, we are doing a martial art, not ballet, so consider it good training. Remember, even the toughest of bouts end eventually and it's better to work with heavier contact at a competition, with first aid and referees than learn outside that you can't take a hit!

For me, competition has always been more about testing myself than winning medals. It was more about having the guts to step up there than being the all out champion. Sometimes (especially now) if I haven't been feeling the greatest or lacked confidence, I will still step up there, as winning is less important to me than knowing I still have the guts to get up and give it a go and believe me, even in the veteran divisions there are some great opponents. I have only sat out of a two tournaments in my entire martial arts life, one because I was very unwell and the other because I had an injury and didn't feel I could give my best, so didn't want to go in half prepared. At both of them I felt the 'itch' of wanting to be up there with the rest of the guys, however one I know it would have been the wrong choice to compete, where as the other I still regret not stepping on that mat as I felt I let myself down – I'll leave you to decide which one is which. I'll leave you with one of my favourite quotes that relate to competition:



***“If you want to be a winner, all you have to give, is everything you got!”***

*Stuart Anslow is a 4<sup>th</sup> degree Instructor of Rayners Lane Taekwon-do Academy and still an active competitor, albeit in a semi-retired way. To see his achievements in the field of competition visit the 'The Instructor' page at [www.raynerslanetkd.com](http://www.raynerslanetkd.com) and click 'achievements'. Video of his competitive career can also be viewed at the site.*