

# The T.K.D. Flash

A Publication of the Association of Academies of Martial Arts

The National Newsletter of the United States Taekwon-Do Federation

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## FROM THE TOP

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a novel coronavirus that was first identified during an investigation into an outbreak in Wuhan, China.

Close contacts of people who are infected are at greater risk of exposure. The first case of COVID-19 in the United States

was reported on January 21, 2020. It is important to note that person-to person spread can happen on a continuum.

Patients with COVID-19 have had mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough and shortness of breath and many have pneumonia in both lungs. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19.



A little virus isn't going to stop **Maestas Taekwon-Do**. Using ZOOM, Maestas proves that "A good student can learn anytime, anywhere." Thanks to Flash Stringer Marsha Wright, 1st Dan, for sharing this. (Pic altered, of course.)

Most states have declared a Stay At Home order and closed most unessential businesses that includes gyms, beauty shops, barbers, day care, stores, recreation centers, and more. The restaurants can serve take out but no on site dining. Each state has their own guidelines to try to stop the spread of COVID-19. If you need more information: [www.cdc.gov/COVID19](http://www.cdc.gov/COVID19).

Some of our schools have initiated Zoom classes or videos of class material to try to maintain the contact of the students during this difficult time. If you need information Sr. Master Ricky Todd has detailed instruction on how to run a Zoom meeting or class and we can e-mail it to you. The USTF did put out an e-mail that ask that we all run our classes with the same guidelines, USTF trains with USTF. Also the courtesy of not contacting someone else's students to invite them to your class goes without saying. We hope these Zoom classes are only necessary for a short time and that we can all get back to our gyms and classes. Sr. Grand Master Sereff joined the STKD Zoom class to observe and was very impressed! Many of the instructors do not like the Zoom class and would rather wait out the time until we can safely have class. Another thing to consider is the fact that some do not want their children's faces on a social media program like Zoom, even though the instructor would invite the students without outsiders being included. Once again, Safety is the key to getting back to training in a gym format. We know there may be some restrictions on numbers, masks, social distancing and more. Keep the faith!

Many cancellations of events and testings have been necessary for the safety of our community. We hope to continue to support our students and local businesses so we can all regain a portion of what we have lost since February 2020. Until then, please follow your states

guidelines for safety and we will continue to keep you updated within the USTF! Stay safe, stay healthy and Stay Home.

*Grand Master Renee' Sereff.*

*USTF Administrator*

[Editor's Note: By way of supplement, the Academy of Martial Arts in Grafton, Wisconsin, has done a series of original short films for distribution to its students. They will hopefully provide some positives. While the techniques covered are the subject matter of the White Belt, the theory is intended to go deeper than we typically have time for. Titles of a few: "The Breath & Ki-haps," "Taekwon-Do Tools & Theory," "Elementary Blocking & Block Analysis," "Facings, Obverse & Reverse Techniques," "Offensive Hand Techniques and Reciprocal Motion," "Floor Drills & Sine Wave," "The Tae in Taekwon-Do & The Whip: Hinges, Mass, Acceleration & Impact."]

## UPCOMING EVENTS

*Pursuant to an admittedly arbitrary editorial decision, we will not publish notices of May events. However, we will publish notices of events, at least in this issue, of events after June 1. We have not received formal notice of the cancellation of some of these events so we apologize in advance if any were either included or deleted in error. Promoters should feel free to contact us to inform of any changes, cancellations, or rescheduling.*

*Your Humble Editor*

On June 20 a Black Belt Testing will be held as Des Plaines, Illinois. The principle Presider and promoter is Grand Master **Earl Weiss**.



**Sereff World Camp 2020** is scheduled for June 21-26. For information and applications, contact USTF Headquarters.

The **USTF Technical Course** originally scheduled for August 8 is cancelled.

On August 27 there will be a combined Black Belt and Color Belt Testing at **Axe Taekwon-Do**, Bellevue, Nebraska.

August 29, the **6th Annual Kirksville Taekwon-Do Tournament** in Kirksville, Missouri. The Tournament Director will be Sr. Master **Ricky Todd**.

September 19, a USTF Step Sparring seminar at Mountain View Taekwon-Do & Fitness, Washington State, Promoter Sr. Master **David Mason**.

The **21st Annual Wyoming Invitational Tournament** will be held on September 19, Promoter Master **Gerald Sisco**. Chief Referee will be Mrs. **Dee Dee Connell**.

There will be a USTF Ground Tactics Course at **Harrisburg Taekwon-Do**, Harrisburg, Missouri, on September 26

Also on September 26, there will be a Black Belt test at **Big Dog Taekwon-Do** in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Screenshot from “Taekwon-Do Tools & Theory,” a film for student consumption at the Academy of Martial Arts, Grafton, Wisconsin. The film is one of a series of seven sent or to be sent to the school’s students and faculty during the current shutdown.

A Black Belt test will be held at **Mountain View Taekwon-Do and Fitness**, at which candidates will participate from Mountain View and also **Bodystrong Takeown-Do** and **Rainier View Taekwon-Do** on October 10. Promoter, Sr. Master **David Mason**.

On November 19 there will be a Black and Color Belt Testing at **Axe Taekwon-Do**.

### AROUND THE COUNTRY

No Stringer has reported local events to us this month for publication.

#### **Why is It So Hard for a Child to Get a Black Belt in Your School?**

By F.M. Van Hecke

[Reprinted from Vol. 15 (2003), #12.]

Every year I take a ring as Center Referee in a local non-USTF tournament. I like the continuous free-sparring format, I like the Instructor, and I like to help out people like him who I think are helping young people develop the right way in our martial art.

And every year at this same tournament, some students, from one or another of my schools, attend and see small children with Black Belts, twelve-year-olds with "Second Degrees," and fourteen-year-olds with "Thirds." My students, and more commonly their parents, observe these preening kids and make comparisons with their own rank and proficiency. It's not uncommon for a Blue Belt to feel that even the more advanced of these Black Belts would not survive a fairly conducted match with him.

What's going on? And why?

There are several things at work here.

The first is obvious: kids start study in the martial arts earlier. The author wrestled in high school and played Judo in college, but his serious study of our art began during graduate studies and his Black Belt achieved in his mid-twenties, better

than five decades ago. Even though most physical education experts would agree that most children are developmentally unable to take advantage of a striking art until age six, many schools are happy to admit children as young as four. One consideration for these instructors is the financial advantage, but, in fairness, there is a market out there. I've received a call from the mother of a three-year-old seeking classes and assuring me her child had a superior attention span. Parents want more activities for their children and are willing to sacrifice more (monetarily) to get them.

A consequence of this market is the availability of more products and programs for these children. Century's "Little Dragon" program and Melody Shuman's "Little Ninjas" are examples. There are many books for children on martial arts themes, and even specialized equipment. While in class, students play games specifically designed to cater to their shorter attention spans and get exercise, never a bad thing. It costs money to keep a school's doors open and the lights on, and instructors have found a new profit center.

A second thing that's going on is the influence of a "self-fulfillment" culture on the martial arts. (It is not without irony that Anthony Robbins is on the cover of a recent martial arts trade journal.) Parents rarely care that a child may have won a trophy by taking on weak competition. The important thing is that the child's got the prize and can feel good about himself. Every teacher knows that affirming a child's self-worth is an important exercise, and good teachers do affirm self esteem in children. Parents want their child to be a Black Belt because they know children admire Black Belts (some days, a young Black Belt teacher may spend more time in a direct and unencumbered interface with the child than the parent). To give a child a Black Belt, then, is not just of value for the work and resultant proficiency that usually

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**Grand Master Promotion.** On May 2, **Tom Cope** was promoted to USTF Grand Master Ninth Degree Black Belt in Taekwon-Do. Congratulations are in order. Grand Master Cope brings with him a distinguished resume', having served as a Regional Director and instructor. He took his First Degree in 1975.





**Grand Master Promotion.** On May 2, **Larry Winn** was promoted to USTF Grand Master Ninth Degree Black Belt in Taekwon-Do. Congratulations are in order. Grand Master Winn brings with him a distinguished resume', having served for many years as State Director for Missouri.



goes into it, it is of value for its apparent statement of the wearer's personal worth.

A third thing that's going on here is the need for closure or completion of an enterprise. Children need to feel they're "moving on," from grade to grade in school, level to level in competition, and will ultimately achieve the "ultimate." Their needs for gratification, quickly, and the feeling of getting to a final position of achievement, "champion," or "honor student," is a relief. We put children under tremendous pressure to achieve, and the resultant tension can be destructive. Boys, in particular, seem to suffer far more anxiety about being achievers than the author recalls from times past. Martial arts teachers feel bad about failure of their charges and there is a constant tug on the heartstrings to promote a child, even when it may be wrong to do so.

In addition to these general changes in the landscape, many parents do derive personal satisfaction from children's achievement as though it were their own, and can be bitterly disappointed if a child does not achieve. This is hardly new. Parents seek personal reassurance, and many teachers are, in effect, selling that reassurance along with the Black Belt.

The martial arts trade associations are highly resistant to criticism of a program emphasizing child Black Belts, because they know the financial consequences of children dropping out and the comparatively greater profits derived from Black Belt testing and programs. They also know that much resistance to these programs comes from the very people -- "old school" instructors -- who are otherwise those most resistant to their profit-enhancing message, services, equipment and programs. (The trade associations do emphasize many positives, such as dojang decor, program expansion, and service tips that can be very valuable to those of us "old schoolers" who open our minds.)

Looking back in history, even in a traditional context it is not impossible for a child to achieve Black Belt, just rare. The child who

does so in that type of school is usually strongly motivated by himself, not just by parents, turns in adult-type hours and discipline in training, and stays with his instructor for years. Often this type of child will arise from a somewhat anachronistic context such as home schooling. Rarely will he or she be oriented toward the passive recreation of television; this student's parents might actively forbid certain forms of passive recreation or control them tightly. Quite often these personal characteristics will lead to excellence in other endeavors as well, although not always exactly where their parents might prefer. And often the kid achieving his or her Black Belt in a traditional context is fairly tough and has exhibited the capacity to overcome some sort of personal tragedy or loss.

So, what's better, to have the occasional very rare achievement of a Black Belt by a child or to have this achievement available to every child who stays with the program long enough?

I believe there are good arguments on both sides, but here is what I've come to think.

Every child should be able to achieve a Black Belt. But only a few will, even in an ideal context, because the context alone cannot make them Black Belts. The student must take advantage of the context. This means a Black Belt cannot just be given, conferred. It must be taken, seized.

One can argue that the context should motivate, and that lack of success of some students means you have to improve the context, but the fact is that even if you provided the best of example, caring, and opportunity, many will not seize it.

There is a lesson here for proponents of both sides of the argument.

No "old schooler" (and this seems to include a lot of young independent school owners) is being fair if he simply blames society or "modern parents" or "lack of

toughness” or “today’s kids” for a lack of success in motivating his students. If he really wishes to promulgate his art and its benefits, he must open his mind to better methods, motivational tools, quality instruction and surroundings. The day a teacher thinks he knows it all and his only need is to pass his knowledge down the chain, he begins to die as a teacher.

A teacher must be a student, must keep learning and improving, should not fear improving himself and his product. If he believes he should not have to go out of his way to move on, he will only fool himself when he self-promotes. The “old schooler” should be motivated to continually improve his school environment to permit students a greater chance at seizing the opportunity. Every dropout should cause reflection.

But no purpose is achieved in simply conferring Black Belts as a courtesy (“Your mom and dad have been paying a long time, so you deserve it.”) and lowering standards either. Older students in particular know when an award is meaningless, and then it is held in the same sort of contempt in which we hold ourselves for accepting it.

In this sense, the trade association junkies do a serious disservice even as they preach (and rightly so) that more traditional martial artists need to improve their educational service. In cheapening the significance of a Black Belt, they lessen the motivation of the aspirant and lower the quality of their respective arts for future generations.

It is an intriguing argument, both sides partaking of being dead right and deadly wrong.

So, in the end, the intelligent consumer will ask a few questions and weigh choices carefully. Is there a “Black Belt Course Option” with an implied promise of achieving the rank? How long does it take to get a Black

Belt (beware the “three year wonders”)? Does the school seem to be overwhelmingly young in its student body, with very few mature students? Is there enough gray hair on the faculty to imply that there is a serious connection to traditional thinking and enough mental acuity under that gray hair to imply that there is a continuing effort to improve (or does the school show neglect)? Does the school have an organized curriculum (as opposed to game-playing), particularly commencing with children aged six and above? Does the school have enough association with other schools that its students occasionally have the opportunity to test their skills in competition? Does the instructional staff appear to have the respect of other martial arts schools and instructors, at least to the extent of holding serious credentials? Are credentials real (sorry, in the real world there are rarely decent fourteen year old instructors, thirty-two year old Fourth Dans) or phony? Am I being pressured to “sign now” with “specials” and so on which would cause me to end my search? Where can I learn more about the school? How long has the school been around, and what does the community say about it? Finally, are these Black Belt teachers the sorts of Black Belts who respect both the persons of their students and their own Black Belts?

It is clear that anybody purchasing a course of instruction who hasn’t had the opportunity to speak with graduates who are themselves in a position to judge comparatively is at a disadvantage in making these judgments. But since that sort of opportunity may be rare, consider the question as broader than, “Can my child achieve a Black Belt?” and follow through by asking whether the Black Belt achieved is worth it.

**YHE Notes:** I have, at this point, read every major Thomas Hardy novel with the exception of Jude the Obscure, (which I have but am saving for a later date). Few who aren't English majors (sorry, mine was Philosophy) pay much attention to Hardy these days although he had a brief popular revival with Roman Polanski's 1979 film Tess of the D'Urbervilles. Hardy is perhaps less well known today as a poet. Nevertheless, browsing (as I do) I found the following, which seemed appropriate at this time:

### **The Darkling Thrush**

I leant upon a coppice gate  
When Frost was spectre-grey,  
And Winter's dregs made desolate  
The weakening eye of day.  
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky  
Like strings of broken lyres,  
And all mankind that haunted nigh  
Had sought their household fires.  
The land's sharp features seemed to be  
The Century's corpse outleant,  
His crypt the cloudy canopy,  
The wind his death-lament.  
The ancient pulse of germ and birth  
Was shrunken hard and dry,  
And every spirit upon earth  
Seemed fervourless as I.  
At once a voice arose among  
The bleak twigs overhead  
In a full-hearted evensong  
Of joy illimited;  
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt and small,  
In blast-beruffled plume,  
Had chosen thus to fling his soul  
Upon the growing gloom.  
So little cause for carolings  
Of such ecstatic sound  
Was written on terrestrial things  
Afar or nigh around,  
That I could think there trembled through  
His happy good-night air  
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew  
And I was unaware.