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TWENTY FOUR

# My Taekwon-do Years

Rachel Freegard III

## INTRODUCTION

Black Belt means perseverance.

At 54 years old and I have been studying Taekwon-do for 24 years. The number is both significant in Taekwon-do and a milestone for me as I strive towards my 4th degree promotion.

Throughout the 24 years I have persevered my training while working full-time, raising a child and teaching Taekwon-do and Boexercise classes. I have picked up injuries, broken bones, and ripped muscles along the way.

This is my a record of my journey.

The number 24 is significant in Taekwon-do:

*There are 24 patterns the founder, General Choi Hong Hi, compared the life of man with a day in the life of the earth. He believes that people should strive to bequeath a good spiritual legacy to coming generations and in doing so gain immortality.*

<http://itkdc.com>

## GROWING UP

I grew up loving sport, representing my county in athletics, trampolining and gymnastics. I was Sports Captain, and I understood the importance of perseverance, encouragement and inclusivity from an early age.



While I did not pursue the three sports into my early twenties, I kept fit by attending gyms and exercise classes.

I was introduced to Taekwon-do firstly as a spectator in the mid 1990s, what captured my attention was the grace and flexibility required for the patterns, the hidden strength and precision to break boards and the courage shown in the sparring rounds.



*Photo: Pg 523 - Taekwon-do Encyclopedia - Fifth Edition (last edition by the late Gen. Choi Hong Hi.)*

# My Colour Belt Years

Learning the Alphabet

1998 - 2008

## THE BEGINNING

The beginning of my Taekwon-do journey began with a white belt and a crisp white dobok. The only prior knowledge I had of the art, was taking my daughter to classes and competitions and helping her learn the terminology.

Spectating is different to training and my journey ahead seemed unknown and challenging, I was full of self-doubt, am I too old in my early 30's, can I dedicate enough time while working full-time and raising a family? Am I quick enough to keep up with younger students?

My first class marked my journey of learning new techniques, testing my stamina, enduring physical and mental application as well as marking the beginning of my potential unknown journey towards the ultimate goal: Black Belt.

My determination and perseverance carried me through the first few months of training, my body hurt and while I thought I was fit, it soon became apparent to me the muscles used for kicking were different from the muscles I used in my exercise classes.

*In Nae* Perseverance

## MY PHYSICAL CHALLENGES - **STRETCHING**

Taekwon-do requires flexibility and mobility, while I was slightly more flexible than most older students (thanks to my gymnastics days) I was still left with sore muscles for days.



I can recall attending many colour-belt seminars hosted by First Pioneer Grandmaster Rhee Ki Ha and Grandmaster Paul Cutler - I was impressed by their flexibility, age was no barrier as they kicked above their heads, out-stretched most students in the warm up and had photographic evidence of jumping over cars and perfect splits kick.

Being impressed was quickly followed by disappointment and frustration on my part - 'why can't I do that?' 'can I do that?' and wondering how I could fit stretching into my everyday life.

*Photos:*

*Top Left: FGMR Famous Split Kick.*

*Bottom Left: Grandmaster Paul Cutler*

It was during my colour-belt years I picked up a bi-lateral tear on my left thigh while stretching at the end of a class, I heard a 'rip' noise and thought it was my dobok, it was not. It was my leg. I was unable to train for several months and was a few hundred pounds lighter paying for sports massages to repair the tear before I was able to train again with confidence.

## **THE ADVANTAGES OF REGULAR STRETCHING**

I learnt early on stretching had to be a commitment outside of the Taekwon-do class, a quick 10 - 20 seconds stretch per move was not enough if I did not want to pick up injury after injury. As I progressed through the belts, Tul movements required higher and faster motions kicks and stretching/dynamic conditioning was important.

Dynamic kicking over many years require knee stability and good mobility of the hip joint, I have seen Masters and Grandmasters who eventually end up with knee or hip replacements as a result of wear and tear over the years.

Stretching deserves respect, it promotes suppleness, stamina and strength. I knew that as an older student I needed to dedicate time outside the class to achieve a good level of flexibility, it required effort and discipline to fit it in and at times it could be weeks that I did not fit the extra stretching in because of outside factors - unfortunately this would undo any previous work.

Over the last few years I have started to attend a Pilates Reformer class twice a month and stretch at home myself using the PNF Method.

**Pilates Reformer Class:** Reformer Pilates uses the Pilates reformer machine and is generally more intense and more dynamic than mat based Pilates as it adds resistance to the Pilates exercises via the use of the springs which form part of the machine.

**PNF (Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation):** involves both stretching and contracting (activation) of the muscle group being targeted in order to achieve maximum static flexibility.

## MY STATIC STRETCHES

- **Butterfly stretch** - *targets hips and groin*
- **Seated saddled stretch** - *targets inner thigh, hips and groin*
- **Low lunge stretch**- *targets groin, hamstrings, quads and glutes.*
- **Wall split stretch** - *uses gravity to help achieve a wider split/straddle stretch.*

## MY DYNAMIC STRETCHES

- **Leg raises** - *front/back and side to side*
- **Lunges** - *walking back and forth plus walking sideways*



## MY PHYSICAL CHALLENGES - POWER TESTING

As a spectator or student, power testing / breaking boards looks impressive, it can look easy. However, it is not, it requires a six factors to come together at once to succeed.

# *Crembs*

## The Theory of Power

Concentration - (Yip Joong)  
Reaction force - (Bang Dong Ryok)  
Equilibrium - Kyung Hyung  
Mass- Zilyang  
Breath control - Hohup Joojool  
Speed- Sokdo

As an adult practising Taekwon-do, when you reach blue belt you are require to break boards as part of your grading. Firstly on a static breaking holder then progressing to jumping techniques at different heights.

For me, this was a huge mental and physical challenge, I didn't want to break bones or injure myself. It is quite simple, if you hit the board incorrectly, or do not use the correct tool - it hurts. Most of the time, you don't need overwhelming power. If you hit the board correctly using the correct technique - it will break.

While heavier students may use their brute force to break the boards, it will not work everytime. I could use the excuse that I cannot break boards because of my height or size, but this is a myth.

## SIZE DOES NOT MATTER

When I visited the Taekwon-do Palace in Pyongyang, DPRK, there was a small area dedicated to General Choi, his dobok was on display and it was clear that while he may have been of a small frame he was a strong and skilled practitioner.



*General Choi breaking with Sonkal Dung*

## OVERCOMING MY FEAR

My instructor would ensure breaking boards was practised regularly at each lesson. Lighter boards were used and I trained in my Taekwon-do shoes to begin with, drilling the same technique over and over again. Only once a technique became easy to do (first time) could I progress to another.



*Me breaking with twimyo Yop Chagi*

Once the practical challenge became easier to achieve, it was the mental application of the theory of power and in particular staying calm and focussed under exam conditions.

I had to commit, I had to break through the board.

It paid off - [click here](#).

## MY PHYSICAL CHALLENGES - SPARRING

In my experience, when I ask people about Taekwon-do they often talk about the sparring with its fighting battles of impressive kicks, spinning and jumping techniques. After all it showcases skill, speed, fitness and agility.

As I progressed through my colour belts I realised there was much more than just free sparring on the mats, there was the pre-arranged three-step, three-step semi free, two-step and one-step sparring which formed part of the grading syllabus.



*Ibo Matsogi*

Pre-Arranged Step-Sparring allows the student to show attacks and blocks used in a formal manner and techniques that are not widely used in free sparring. It should not be staged and the pace is fast it should not resemble free sparring.

*Guk Gi* Self-control

## COMPETITION SPARRING

Throughout my colour belts I was encourage to enter sparring, this was something that did not feel natural to me in my 30's but I felt was an important part of my training and part of the self-defence training.



*My achievements*

Until I became a 'veteran' at the age of 40 I would compete in the same category as other females / belts from 18 years upwards and often felt intimidated by their speed and flexibility. This was a mind set issue to overcome, due to the contact and I found it difficult.

To improve my skills, I also attended a weekly martial fitness class, this was a session using pads and boxing gloves to help me improve my techniques so I could deliver them with precision and power.

This did improve my fitness and sparring skills, I learned how to change direction, judge distances, when to counter and when to attack the most effective technique for maximum points.

Achieving my Umpire Course C Class Certification at Blue Belt was beneficial in 2004 as I had to learn the scoring system.

# My Black Belt Years

Learning the Words

2008 - Present



## THE FINAL GOAL? - BECOMING A **BLACK BELT**

It took me eight years to be ready to test for my black belt. The grading was in Scotland in front of First Pioneer Grandmaster Rhee Ki Ha over a cold weekend in February. I can remember it as clear as yesterday as this is what I had been working towards for years, was all the hours of training, injuries and revising the terminology going to pay off?

The Friday evening started the weekend with a few hours of training with people from all over the UK, I remember sitting on the cold floor practising foot sparring and conditioning the shins.

Saturday was a full day of patters, fitness, stretching and covering all forms of set sparring. It was tiring and tested my body and mind.

Then Sunday morning arrived - the day of the grading. Sitting nervously with newly made friends all wearing red belts / black tags, we were called up in sets of six to perform the grade patterns, followed by self defence and sparring,

Then the final obstacle was presented. The house brick. I did not break it. However, I did go on to break with two side kicks, one turning kick and one reverse turning kick. I could only hope it was good enough.

I can clearly remember how nervous I was on the Sunday, stood in that cold hall waiting patiently as the higher grade results were called out first. Finally, when my name was called, I walked up onto the hall stage and shook hands with all the Masters before being presented my black belt, tie and pin badge from First Pioneer Grandmaster Rhee. I was so happy, a sense of relief and joy, and now the decision - I was now a 1st degree?

Did I want to carry on?

Pain is the best instructor, but no one wants to go to his class.  
Choi Hong Hi



## CONTINUING MY JOURNEY

### 2ND DEGREE BLACK BELT

Three years later I applied to grade with Grandmaster Adolfo Villanueva from Argentina in Grenada, I was successful despite having my thighs in bandages from a bad burn a few months earlier where I spilt hot water on my legs.

### 3RD DEGREE BLACK BELT

My 3rd degree was back in my country grading under Grandmaster Williamson (as Grandmaster Rhee had left the organisation) and at 47 years of age I passed my promotion. A tough and personal achievement.





# Teaching

My own school

2008 - 2018

## Teaching

Once I became a black belt I really wanted to open my own school. I had been an assistant instructor for many years with my instructor and I loved the theory and teaching tuls.

In 2009 I opened WRMA - Westcott Martial Arts in Swindon affiliated to the UKTA (United Kingdom Taekwon-do Association), I taught children through to teens twice a week, I enjoyed watching them develop and would regularly take them to competitions, seminars and gradings to improve their skills and develop their own Taekwon-do journey. I remember Master Miller complemented me on a couple of my students at a seminar, that was a huge complement to me.

Due to personal reasons and work commitment I unfortunately and regretfully had to close my own school in 2018, however, I have always continued to teach weekly at my instructor's school, which I thoroughly enjoy and assist in club gradings.



U.K.T.I.

My Contribution

2018 to present

## Moving associations

In 2018, my current instructor decided to move away from the UKTA to a new organisation UKTI (United Kingdom Taekwondo Initiative), this was founded by Grandmaster Augustus Mitchell, who I had trained with and met many times over the years.

My background is a graphic designer and I built the organisation website and designed the new logo.

Take a look - [click here.](#)



## The vision and logo



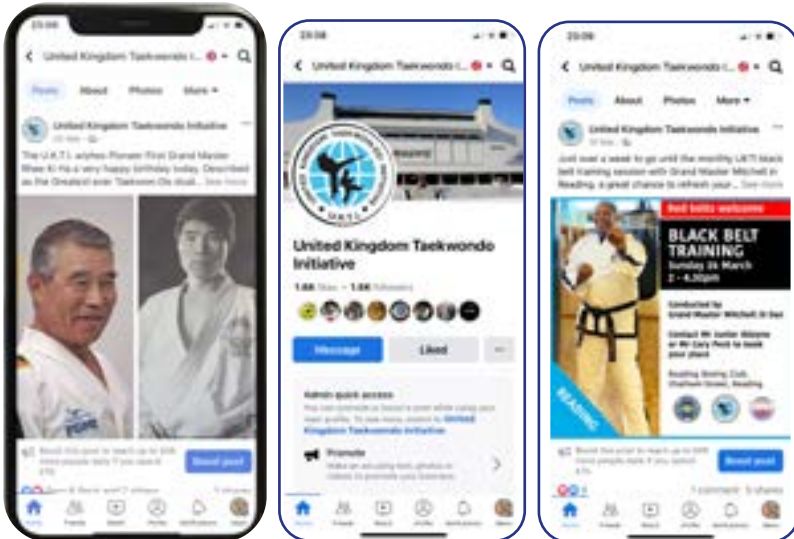
The UKTI is an umbrella organisation which aims to support small Taekwon-do clubs and schools and provide opportunities for all. I wanted to reflect this in the logo, over 95% of martial arts logos showcase male adult students, I wanted to encompass women and children. The blue signifies wisdom and inspiration.

## UKTI Secretary

In 2019, I became the UKTI Secretary, my duties include renewing licences, taking meeting minutes, admin, design work, running the social channels and managing the ITF database.

## Social Media

I have grown the Facebook account by 45 % in three years, building a community worldwide through creating assets to promote events.



[Click and follow the page](#)

# My Record of Achievement & Supporting Taekwon-do

## My Journey

### Colour Belt

10	September 1998
9	February 1999
8	December 1999
7	June 2000
6	January 2001
5	September 2002
4	May 2003
3	July 2004
2	September 2005
1	August 2006

### Black Belt

I	9 March 2008
II	10 June 2011
III	9 October 2016

## Blk Belt Seminars

Glasgow x 1	2008
Reading x 2	2008
Charvil x 4	2009
Charvil x 1	2010
Didcot x 1	2010
Charvil x 1	2010
Reading x 1	2011
Didcot x 1	2012
DPRK	2012
Grenada x 1	2012
Reading x 1	2013
Reading x 1	2014
Reading x 1	2015
Reading x 1	2016
Torbay x 2	2016
Reading x 1	2022
Reading x 1	2023

## Umpire Certification

**National A**  
February 2023

**Instructor Certification National A**  
November 2022

**Boxercise Instructor and run own school**  
Since January 2012

**UKTI Secretary and Social Media Lead**  
Since July 2019

## Supporting the Taekwon-do community



I was asked by FGMR to send in some ideas for his anniversary logo via the UKTA office.

[DPRK click to view the album](#)





There is no gains without sacrifice, for if you do not  
start you can never be expected to finish.

**The Book of J No. 224**  
**Mr Joseph Alleyne VI**

24 hours, one day, or all my life.

Rachel Freegard III