

Taekwon-do and I:

The many ways in which Taekwon-do has had an impact on my life.



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“Taekwon-do, what’s that?” was a common and repeated question I got growing up. Usually followed by asking if I were a black belt or if I could show them some moves. Additionally, more times than not these questions were followed up with the typical Hollywood styled connotations of martial arts in the form of martial art noises. These were what I had to deal with growing up as someone who chose martial arts over football or rugby like the majority of boys at school. For many into sport I was seen as different as I had chosen a sport that was not a team sport, and immediately people thought I was Jackie Chan or Bruce Lee. This thesis will have a look at a range of topics, which have each played a part in my Taekwon-do journey. Looking back over the last 22 years, that I have been undertaking Taekwon-do, there have been many things on which I have reflected. Firstly, the unhealthy nature of competition during my teenage years primarily directed towards another student in the class, which was the same age as mine. Another thing is the difference that I experienced compared to other kids in school that chose a team sport, or a more generic sport, and what that meant for me during school. And lastly, is the lasting impact that Taekwon-do has had on my life, and some of the decisions I have made in life, have been influenced by Taekwon-do.

As previously mentioned I have been doing Taekwon-do for 22 years, which meant that I was 6 years old when I started. This was an early age to start, but it was around the same age as the majority of kids in school were starting to take up football. I was never interested in football; I was never able to get the co-ordination down. I was however good at jumping which came in handy when it came to attempting to head the ball. But for the most part I wasn’t that good at football. At school, football was part of the physical education curriculum and therefore a necessary part of the physical education lessons. Those that had started at a club, were of course much better at football than I was. My strengths were in a completely different sport, in the form of Taekwon-do. There were of course, elements



that that helped bridge the gap between the two sports, which allowed me to be physical fit at school, being able to pre-empt the opposition and what they were going to do.

Throughout my time with Taekwon-do there were many people that I looked up to within my club. There were many people when I was growing up, and during my teenage years primarily there were an abundance of people that were either the same grade as me or were a higher grade to me. However, there was one student in particular that I did look up to too, but I had to constantly compete against them. They were the same age as me, they had started Taekwon-do before me, but I had managed to catch up to them, until I managed to break my elbow and therefore had 6 months out due to the physiotherapy etc. When I look back at the times I was growing up through with Taekwon-do, I can see that I allowed being competitive to take over from many experiences that should have been for me rather than just to try and be better than someone else. For example, many of the gradings that I went to, and the speed that I tried to go for the next grading were not really for me or for the achievement that I managed to do it. Instead, they were more for me to catch up to this other student that I felt I always had to compete against. I look back and see that this unhealthy nature of competition wasn't ideal, and maybe did hinder my early time with Taekwon-do.



I feel that those achievements very much should have been great moments for me to feel proud of my ability, and skill. However, I feel that I didn't necessary feel those as much as I should have and ended up being more for the achievement of catching up or being the same grade as this other student.

Throughout the many years of training, I found that were many things that I perceived that the other student was better at than I was. For example, the

student was considerably better than me at sparring than me, they always seem to be stronger and faster than I was. It took me a long time to realise my strengths in relation to Taekwon-do, and to actually look past being in the other students shadow. I will admit that the other student no longer being a part of the club, did help massively with not feeling that I am in their shadow any longer, but also having had time away from Taekwon-do while I was at university, and having a part-time weekend job, that it has allowed me to realise that there are elements of Taekwon-do that I excel in and that I feel that I can do very well. I have felt for a while, that I do extremely well when it comes to remembering the many patterns that I have to remember being a third degree. I find it very easy to learn new patterns, or being shown something once, and then being able to replicate it. I have found that this has been both a blessing and a curse at times while training. Firstly, when learning a new pattern, it has been very easy for me to learn the new pattern very quickly, and then start to refine it by delving deeper into the stances, and the individual moves, once I have the order of the movements correct. However, on the other hand, it has also resulted in me at times, becoming frustrated when other members of the club, who are also trying to learn the same pattern, don't pick it up as quick as me, and we are having to slow down to allow them to

catch up, or to try and learn it. I understand that it may not come naturally to them in the same way it has me, and I think that is only as a result of growing up, and becoming an adult that I can see this now. But I can reflect on the matter, and realise that there were times I was frustrated, when someone couldn't do something to the same level I was able to. It took me a long time to realise that this was a strength of mine, and I know for a fact that this was mostly due to the fact that I always felt that I was in the shadow of the other student, and therefore I couldn't see what I was good at as I always saw that they were better at me at the majority of things, so I felt they were probably better than me at everything.



Taekwon-do has played an integral part in my life. This is through the numerous ways in which it has influenced my life both in sport, but also in my education and in my attitude to life. Having been training in Taekwon-do for 22 years, it is no surprise that it has had an impact on my life, as it has been an integral part in my life for those 22 years, having always been a constant even when I couldn't necessarily train like when I was at university or during covid. For example, when I was at university, I wanted to make sure I took part in a sport that would have allowed me to keep up with elements of Taekwon-do so that when I returned to my classes during the summer and post university, that I was still



in a good physical state, and the skills that I had, such as my ability to perform jumping techniques well, would still be as decent as they were before I left. Therefore, I made sure to pick a sport that allowed me to continue to train on some of those elements. This is how I ended up being a part of the Volleyball team at Chichester university for the three years that I studied there. The game of volleyball, had an incredible

impact on my Taekwon-do, as it not only allowed me to continue to hone in on my skills of jumping, but it also allowed to improve on some of the other skills that would be necessary when training for Taekwon-do, such as reaction speed, co-ordination, and being able to read an opponent. Through the position that I played, which was the middle, my main job was to either jump and spike the ball, or was to block from the middle, the left or the right side of the courts. This meant that I had to be constantly aware of what the opponents were doing and how they were setting themselves up as to whether to support with the left or the right

wings, or whether I had to block the other team's middle player. As a result of this, I felt that not only did my reaction speed improve as I would have to be able to time my block with the left/right wing blocker and to the time the opposing team hit the ball, but equally my ability to read the other teams setter improved. Over the course of three years and moving from the 2nd team to the 1st team, I felt that I got better at this, and it wasn't until I got back to Taekwon-do full time that I noticed the impact this had on me. While playing volleyball I had to predict what the setter was going to do, by looking at the position that they had got themselves into, and therefore knowing where they were going to set the ball. This easily translated over to Taekwon-do as it allowed me to be able to ready my opponent knowing that the position they were in, when sparring, meant that they can only throw certain techniques effectively and therefore being able to pre-empt them where possible. As with volleyball, sometimes it didn't always work, and equally it didn't always work withing Taekwon-do, but I could tell that I was improving on this vastly. Even though this came as a result of playing a completely different sport than Taekwon-do, it was only as a result of wanting to pick a sport that helped me keep up my level of fitness, and that incorporated some of the same skills as Taekwon-do, that I even considered taking part in volleyball so it all lead back to Taekwon-do.



This photo was one of the ones that I was always so proud of and demonstrated my jumping skills. With the images above from my time playing volleyball, you can see that I continued to improve on jumping, and that I was able to float in the air briefly before landing which has it's advances when it comes to Taekwon-do when doing 360 degrees.

Another way in which Taekwon-do has influenced my life, is through my academic career. By growing up, involved in a martial art, I quickly became fascinated with martial art films, and history. As a result of this, I ended up writing my undergraduate dissertation on the representation of the Samurai in popular culture of the 20th and 21st century. Now the samurai themselves don't have much to do with Taekwon-do, but my love for the history of martial arts, led me onto a path of an interest in the history of the east, and their warriors throughout history. Through a combined love of history and film, I ended up being fascinated by the samurai. After completing this dissertation, I ended up continuing the

same style of research into a new topic for my Master of Research (MRes). Had I not have managed to get my undergraduate dissertation to work, and to realise that I enjoyed writing about periods of history and the representation within popular culture, which is how the majority of people connect with history, then I would not have been able to pursue that area of work throughout my academic career which hopefully continues to the point of a doctorate. This again, just like above with the volleyball stemmed from my time with Taekwon-do, as through Taekwon-do, I was introduced to other areas of martial arts, and was able to look into everything it had to offer, from the history to its Hollywood films. By combining two passions of mine, allowed me to discover an area of academic research that I very much enjoyed writing about, and realised had significant relevance in the historical field of study. It was through Taekwon-do and researching its history that led me to learn about its influence in other martial arts, and how it played a part in the history of Korea, and therefore led to me seeing how other militaries used martial arts, which led me to the Samurai, and a curiosity of them grew. Without taking part in Taekwon-do, I can't deny that I wouldn't have ever landed on this area of research, but Taekwon-do is without doubt a catalyst to what I have built my academic career upon and was a part of a bigger picture that led me to pursue the field of study I have.

Lastly, Taekwon-do has very much influenced my upbringing, and my attitudes and qualities that I feel I have as an adult. Throughout my time with Taekwon-do, I have learnt many qualities that have made their way into my adult life. Through primarily the Taekwon-do oath, and how my instructor and other members of the club have been with me through my formative years I learnt how to be respectful, and to always look up to and respect my elders, and seniors. I have very much enjoyed the last 22 years of Taekwon-do but more specifically my club and instructor. My instructor has always pushed me to be the best that I can be, and his style of teaching is always one that I preferred, which wasn't always present in my Physical Education lessons at school, which I would compare. When I did my GCSE PE lessons and had to teach my own session, I very much emulated how my instructor had been teaching me, because it was the style that I was comfortable with, and for me it had always worked. The style of teaching, and the always pushing me are things that have continued to be present in my life. My instructor would always say "No such word as can't". Ever since the first time that I heard that, I have always used it when I feel that I might not be able to do something. It has helped me through my many challenges in life to continue to push myself and find a way to complete the task at hand. Equally, the way that my instructor is able to break down a task to its core elements, sometimes not making sense, before it is all put together is very useful. It gets you thinking, and you can see all the mechanics of the body working together to get to where you need to be or to do the move that you were trying. Equally, my instructor has always challenged me by getting me to try new things and to push me to my limit, which has always made me want to strive to be better. Being completely honest, I do not think I would be as far with Taekwon-do as I am, and have such a passion for it, if I didn't have my instructor as my instructor. I have always felt valued and have always been an equal at the club, which is something I have always enjoyed, and my instructor as mentioned is able to teach in a way that I have always preferred to be taught, and this helps me to want to achieve the best I can.

The many other members of the club that have been present over the years, have all challenged me and supported me through my gradings, and through perfecting my skills. Each person that I have trained with over the years, have had their own strengths and as a result they have all helped me to improve on that specific area as best as I can. And in turn I have helped them in the areas that I will that I am rather strong at and therefore, we have all learnt from each other, and I then our instructor has then also provided feedback which always helps as well.

Overall, my time with Taekwon-do has been a challenging but rewarding time. I have enjoyed my time training and meeting the people that I have been. It took me along time to realise that my achievements were my achievements and not a way to try and catch up with other people in the club. With going for my fourth degree, this is very much an achievement for me, as I did not think I would get this far 22 years ago when I started. To be where I am, I am incredibly proud of myself, but also internally grateful of all those that have supported me to get where I am. Despite having some time away from Taekwon-do, when I was at university, it was still very much at the front of my mind sport wise, as I made sure to pick a sport that helped me continue what I was good at within Taekwon-do. Writing this essay has been a challenge because I have had to come to terms with the unhealthy nature of competition I had when I was young, and how I wasn't always celebrating my achievements. I also had to realise how self doubtful of myself I was when I was younger, but this has helped me now to realise my strengths and I very much ready to move forward and I am confident in myself with my ability and hope to be doing Taekwon-do for another 22 years.

