



Competition Manual

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Feel Free to use this page for notes!

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming . . . his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat. —Theodore Roosevelt

The above is a quote from a man who used to be the US president, explaining that competing is not about who wins or loses. It's about being brave enough to let people watch you try your best at something, knowing you might not be successful.

Remember: **It's better to be second, third, or even last place than to be one of the people who never got out there and tried.**

Benefits of Taekwondo Competition

Fitness— It's easier and more fun to exercise when you have reasons, goals, and deadlines.

Focus—When you know you'll be "on stage," your mind readily lets go of other concerns.

Fun—This comes from traveling with your team or family, meeting other Taekwondoists, trophies and medals, or watching high level competitors.

Setting the Right Goals

One of the main goals of this book is to teach you to use goals in your Taekwondo competitions. Most people probably think of **outcome goals** like "I'm going to win" or "I want 10 first place trophies". These goals don't help you win because 1) most of your competitors also have these same goals and 2) you can't control whether you reach these goals.

The kinds of goals that you should be setting are **process goals** like "I will practice my footwork 10 minutes a day" or "I will hit as hard on the last move of my form as I do on the first."

Types of Taekwondo Competitions

- **Practice Tournaments**, where you pay a small fee to compete against others from your school.
- **Local Tournaments** have entry fees around \$50 - \$70 and take up a whole Saturday. (We call a tournament “local” when most competitors travel 100 miles or fewer.)
- **Regional Tournaments**, or especially large local ones, often take two days, with black belts on Friday or Sunday and all other belts on Saturday.
- **“National” tournaments**, hosted by various organizations, that take up to a week, with your check-in on a different day than your competition and different ages/ranks competing on different days. These big tournaments have entry fees around \$100, which isn’t much compared to the travel costs. National tournaments usually also have smaller, qualifying tournaments that you must participate in to be eligible to attend the national event.

Each tournament is different, so always read the paperwork to see what events are offered, when you are supposed to check in, how long the sparring rounds will be, etc. At Gold Medal Taekwondo, information about upcoming tournaments can be found in the weekly email, on the homework page, in the newsletter, and at the student information desk. Some, larger tournaments also have websites.

In most tournaments, there are several events from which to choose. Sparring (kyugi), forms (poomsae), and breaking (kyukpa) are the most common.

A **Hanmadang** is a special type of a tournament that has a large variety of events and often does not have sparring or individual forms.

Some tournaments have other events like

Creative form—a form you (or your coach) make up

Team form—people doing a form, timed together in a certain way

Highest (or farthest) jump kick board breaking

Point Sparring—an older type of sparring, similar to what most karate tournaments use, which is less athletic and uses different equipment and strategies from the type we do.

Sometimes these “special” events have very few competitors and sometimes they are only open to black belts.

You can choose to enter only the events you like; but, it is best to compete in at least two events because this doubles your chances to win a medal or trophy while it somehow lowers the stress. For example, if you are very nervous for your first event you may enjoy your second event much more.

10 Things to know about Taekwondo tournaments:

1. Local tournaments almost always make exceptions to deadlines, national ones NEVER do. Similarly local tournament never follow posted weight divisions, national ones always do but let kids under 13 change weight classes if they've grown.
2. You don't score extra points for being first in line, so don't rush to get there exactly when check-in starts.
3. Tournament schedules vary and are rarely accurate. Usually, your event actually starts whenever the events scheduled before it actually finish. New competitors are often surprised with how much waiting is involved in Taekwondo tournaments.
4. If you forgot a piece of equipment, you can probably buy it at the event, but check with your coach and teammates first in case they brought an extra.
5. The loudspeakers are hard to understand so keep trying to guess when you are needed in the holding area (the place where competitors are divided into their age/rank/weight/gender groups). Watch for groups of your age/rank congregating. If you're concerned that you might have missed a call, ask any coach or experienced spectator.
6. When tournaments are scheduled from youngest to oldest, it takes a really long time to get from age 6 to age 12. After that, getting from age 12 to 41-and-older goes QUICK.
7. When competing in sparring, there is no reason to put your chest gear on until you have been grouped in the holding area, with your name written on the paper. After your name is on the paper, you can see the color for yourself: Of the two people who will spar with each other, top line wears blue, bottom line wears red.
8. Losing competitors are more likely to complain about the refs and judges than are winners. It often seems to the judges like no matter what you do 1/2 of the people are upset! Notice that there is no point in arguing with the judges about their opinions. The only time it's worth the trouble of telling the judges they made a mistake is if it is a mistake that can be fixed, like giving out the wrong color of medal.
9. There will occasionally be examples of bad sportsmanship. Try not to be one. If you feel you have been wronged, take some deep breaths then talk to an experienced coach about it. They can tell you which volunteer at the tournament is the best one to explain your problem to.
10. Although the referees and judges sometimes make mistakes, and occasionally aren't up-to-date on the rules, remember they are all black belts (or almost black belts) who voluntarily gave up their whole Saturday to give you a chance to compete. The rest of the tournament staff usually has little or no training/experience in their job.

Remember, you do this for fitness, focus, and fun, not for awards!

Injury Care

Now that you are an athlete, athletic injuries are possible. They include, but are not limited to, twisted ankles, bloody noses, and pulled muscles. For perspective, a typical 200 competitor tournament could expect one of each and about 20 bruised knees from kicks colliding.

I once heard on “Paul Harvey” that martial art competition is responsible for fewer injuries than football and basketball. The following are a few other things I have “learned” about martial arts injuries that I think you should know. Please also know that I am not a doctor and have no way to be sure any of my advice is correct.

- Rest, Ice, Compression, and Elevation reduce swelling thereby shortening recovery time from most any injury. Don't leave the ice on for more than 20 minutes without taking a break from it. Don't leave the injured area wrapped overnight. If you use R-I-C-E, a 6-week injury will heal in 3 weeks and a 4 day injury will heal in 2 days, so USE IT.
- Many competitors “tough it out” and continue competing on an injury. Sometimes it is no problem. But, once in a while it turns a small injury into a big injury. Learn to know your body to decide how badly you are injured. You can also ask tournament medical staff for advice. I recommend you ask them questions that don't open them to liability like “do you think I have a concussion” instead of “do you think I'm ok to keep fighting?”
- It's been my experience that chiropractors fix sports injuries better than doctors do. I wish I had gone directly to my chiropractor, Dr. Gary Gemoets, for many injuries that I tried to tough out. One guy I knew wasn't able to walk on a banged up foot for months. X-rays didn't show why, but his chiropractor figured out that it just wasn't quite lined up right and fixed it quickly.
- Most, but not all injuries will heal on their own; and, just because a regular western medical doctor is the only practitioner your insurance will pay for doesn't mean they are the only or even the best way to get your body working right.

About pain medication:

Now that I am a health-food person, I think all commercially manufactured pain medications are dangerously bad for you. But, here is my understanding of the expert advice:

If you might be having a heart attack, it's aspirin you need.

If you've recently been hit on the head, aspirin or ibuprofen are dangerous because they thin your blood, making any concussion worse. (A concussion is a bruise on your brain and is dangerous because your brain doesn't have room to swell.)

If you haven't been hit in the head, aren't having a heart attack, but are in more pain than you want to put up with, aspirin, acetaminophen, or ibuprofen would all help. Most people have one they feel helps more than the others. But, consider rotating between more than one to cut down on any possible bad effects to your body.

If some body part hurts all of the time, but never got injured, I'd suggest trying (in no particular order):

Making it stronger

Giving it a few days break

Checking with a chiropractor

Having your posture analyzed by an Egoscue therapist

If you see a regular doctor, make it clear you want to fix the problem, not just get pain medication.

Kids must take child strength medications!!!

Should You Compete in Sparring?

WTF Taekwondo sparring is a full medal sport in the Olympics and other major international sporting events. Those who enjoy sparring competition enjoy taking chances, being tough, and responding to the unpredictability. You have no idea what strategies or fighting style your next opponent will use.

Some people don't like competing in sparring because this unpredictability creates stress. Sparring is also more intense than other sports because 1) you are by yourself, unlike in soccer or other team sports and 2) you are looking directly at the eyes of your opponent, unlike in tennis and many other individual sports.

It can be helpful to realize that you aren't trying to hurt your opponent, you are just using them to create the unpredictability that allows you to test your sparring ability. Most, but not all, competitors realize this and can be very friendly with each other before and after their matches.

Training and Setting Goals

Training is what you do in the weeks before a competition, to help you win the competition. Six weeks of training will definitely have a good effect. Four weeks might. Two weeks of special training is unlikely to make much difference. Training hard year-round without breaks from at least some types of your training can be bad for you and boring.

You may choose to do

- **Strength training**, like lifting weights, to make your muscles stronger
- **Endurance training**, like running, to make your blood, heart, and lungs work better
- **Diet control**, like giving up carbonated drinks for weeks before a competition
- **Mental rehearsal**, like imagining your opponent, overcoming nervousness, using the strategies you plan to use, and being declared the winner.

You should definitely do some sport-specific training, practicing the moves you plan to use in the competition. How much sport-specific training do you need? Just remember:

**Whenever you aren't training, your opponent is.
If you meet them at the next tournament, they will win.**

But really . . . Keeping good attendance at competition classes might be enough. An extra 1/2 hour two or three times a week is recommended. World champions train hours a day.

What do you practice if you train at home?

The most important things are footwork, and round kicks. Practicing your footwork for "rounds" of the same length of time as will be used at your next tournament trains your mind to recognize the time while it trains your feet to do what you tell them to. Practicing your round kicks as touch-and-go trains your endurance while it trains your kick.

The second most important thing to practice are the offensive strategies on the GMTKD Coach's Words page in this manual. If you like to use defensive strategies, like hujin and kick, paduchagi, or back kicking your opponent while they round kick you, you should practice those, too. If you don't have a partner at your house, mental rehearsal is a great way to practice defensive strategies. Another way is with a friend who will hold a target while stepping towards you, so you can pretend someone is kicking at you.

Sparring Training and Goals Plan

For your sparring tournament training schedule and goal setting, basically, I want you to just start with something, see how it works, and improve the plan from there.

Date of your tournament: _____ (put a “?” If you need) Date you’ll start training: _____

Any strength training, endurance training, dietary changes, or mental rehearsal planned?

Sport specific training: How many times a week will you do these training sessions? _____

If you don’t do any sport specific training at home, at least keep good attendance in competition classes!

Footwork: _____ minutes

Round kicks: _____ minutes

Offensive Strategies you’ll practice and how many times you’ll do each (like “fast” or switch and kick)

1 _____ 2 _____

3 _____ 4 _____

Other things you want on your training plan:

Setting your goals. Below are some sample process goals that can help you win sparring tournaments. Pick 3 and write them in.

- I will go to all sparring practices I’m invited to attend.
- I will train at home 30 minutes twice a week for 6 weeks before the tournament.
- I will not stop trying to score more points until the match time runs out.
- I will not assume my opponents are easy (or hard) to beat based on how they look.
- I will learn something from each sparring match that will make me better next time.
- I will volunteer to spar bigger, harder people whenever I get a chance.
- I will not hold my breath when I spar.
- I will always kick as hard and as fast as I can kick.

Write below the three goals you are going to use for now:

If you understand how, it’s best to write them as affirmations like “I kick hard even when I’m tired.”

Before and During the Competition (for Sparring)

Check to make sure you have everything ready:

- dobok, belt, other clothes , shoes
- forearm guards, shin/instep guards, mouthpiece,
- groin protector (required for males, optional for females)
- chest gear, head gear (unless you have arranged to borrow ours at the tournament)
- water and snacks (there isn't always time for lunch break)
- camera, relaxing stuff to do while you wait for your turn

Some say Taekwondo sparring competition is 85% mental and 15% physical. You need to figure out what last minute preparations make your mind feel most ready.

The night before the competition, some people like to warm up good and have a light workout. Definitely don't work out hard enough to be injured or sore the next day. Other people feel they do best taking three days before the competition completely off from any exercise.

Definitely eat food that you know to be healthy and unlikely to make your stomach feel weird the next day. Drink extra water but absolutely no soda. The same goes for breakfast.

Another individual choice is whether you like to make friends with your sparring competitors before your matches or wait until after you spar them to make friends. Some people like to take a nap before their sparring competitions, others like to listen to angry rock music. You'll need to experiment to find what works for you.

At the tournament, as it gets close to your sparring time, even if you have already competed in other events, warm up until you start to sweat. Although you can't tell for sure when you will spar, warming up 45 minutes before your turn and then having a 30 minute rest is optimal.

Here is a sample tournament warm up:

30 seconds each of

- 1 Running**
- 2 High knees** (like running)
- 3 Low knees,** (like running)
- 4 Skipping,** (step hop step hop)
- 5 Knee lifts** (like marching, but hard on the way up, not down)

Then check if you are sweating yet. Repeat as needed. You can do these in place or forwards and backwards as space allows.

After this, if you've been training at home, practice the same things on a paddle a few times.

If you get taken by surprise being called to the holding area before you warmed up, do the same running, skipping, and stuff while waiting in line in the holding area. You can do the resting part while sitting next to the ring, waiting to be called up.

Coaching/Supporting a Sparring Competitor

A parent, friend or spouse could be “support person” to a competitor. The support person should read the previous page and help the competitor:

1. Get to the tournament on time with the correct stuff
2. Eat healthy and stay hydrated
3. Be at the proper level of relaxation or excitement to do their best (This varies by individual; so, experiment.)
4. Warm up until sweating as it gets close to their call to the holding area
5. Practice moves on a paddle target or chest or head gear held to be a target

Then

- 1) Remind them of their chosen process goals for this match
- 2) Yell and clap when they score or get close to scoring a point
- 3) After the match, point out things they did well and ask them what changes they want to make in their goals for next time
- 4) If they aren't happy with the place they won, let them calm down for a while and then start making a big deal out of anything good that happened at the tournament.

A support person does not need to tell the competitor what moves or strategies to use. It's usually better if they don't.

But, if you want to learn how to “corner coach,” suggesting strategies for your competitor, use the words on the next page.

Also let's clear up common misconceptions from people who watch Taekwondo but don't do it:

The truth is . . .

Blocking is rarely a good idea in sparring or self defense. The only time to block is if you can do so while you are hitting. For the most part, focus on hitting them more/harder than they hit you. If you see a strike coming with enough time to block, but not strike, moving out of the way is preferred.

Although punching doesn't usually score points, it is a very useful way to set up your kicks.

When you think the judges are ignoring your competitor's kicks, remember that you don't notice the kicks they miss for your opponent and most likely your competitor's kicks aren't hard enough.

Should You Compete in Forms?

Whereas sparring is unpredictable, forms competition has practically no uncertainty involved. The stress in forms competition comes from the fact that you can't forget that the judges, and many other people are watching your perform. If you are terribly nervous about competing in forms, it can be helpful to realize that, other than the judges and your friends and family, the rest of the spectators aren't watching just you, they are watching everything that's going on.

It is a very brave thing to do, to stand up in front of people and give it your best shot at doing the form exactly how you practiced it.

Training and Setting Goals

To train for forms competition, you can do the same things as for sparring:

- **Strength training**, will help you hit harder
- **Endurance training**, will help you hit as hard at the end as at the beginning
- **Diet control**, will help you benefit more from strength and endurance training
- **Mental rehearsal**, of imagining the judges watching your form will help overcome nerves

You should definitely do some sport-specific training, practicing your form at home. I believe doing the form 5 times a day for 3 - 6 weeks before the tournament helpful, if you follow my advice below.

What do you practice when you train at home?

Do the form over and over again, trying to make it better each time. If you already know the form, I suggest 5 times as follows:

- First time: starting each move correctly, doing it hard and checking it at the end.
- Second time: same checking the stance more than the arms, or saying the stance out loud.
- Third time: imagine judges watching you and do your best to hit hard
- Fourth time: same as third time but improving any mistakes
- Fifth time: same as fourth time, improving any mistakes

If you are just learning the form, I suggest replace the third time above with saying the move out loud while you do it, so it sticks in your head better.

Although this sounds pretty easy, it really isn't. The hard parts are

1 Knowing how each move is supposed to start (check books & videos and ask your teacher)

2 Checking each move at the end, mainly for

- A. Other hand (not the one doing the move) in exactly the right place
- B. Back heel staying flat on the floor
- C. Eye control and facial expression VIDEO TAPE YOURSELF TO CHECK THESE!!

3 Having intensity of breaking a board and "fire-in-your-eyes" on every move from the first to the last

Imagining breaking a board with every strike, and blocking a real strike with every block can help with this intensity.

By the way, also check to make sure you breathe in as you start each count of the form and breathe out while you are doing the move or moves!

Forms Training and Goals Plan

As for sparring, just start with something, see how it works, and improve the plan from there.

Date of your tournament: _____ (put a “?” If you need) Date you’ll start training: _____

Any strength training, endurance training, dietary changes, or mental rehearsal planned?

Sport specific training: How many times a week will you do these training sessions? _____

List below what you will have as a goal each time you perform the form. As on the last page, I suggest the first goal is correct starting and ending positions, the second goal is good stances, the third goal is power, the fourth is correcting mistakes, the fifth is correcting mistakes. However, you may wish to make changes in this plan, for example if something about doing a good form is especially difficult for you so you want to practice it twice.

First Practice Performance Goal _____

Second Practice Performance Goal _____

Third Practice Performance Goal _____

Fourth Practice Performance Goal _____

Fifth Practice Performance Goal _____

Below you may add in your goals if you plan on practicing the form more than 5 times in a row or other things you want on your forms training plan

Setting your goals. Below are some sample process goals that can help you win forms tournaments. Pick 3 and write them in. (Or make up your own)

- I will practice my forms 5 times a day for three weeks before the tournament.
- I will never forget to warm up until sweaty before I compete with my form.
- I will imagine breaking a board with each move of my form.
- I will imagine I am alone and forget about the judges watching me.
- I will hit as hard as I can on the first move, but somehow hit harder on each move than the last.
- I will keep my back heel down with each stance.
- I will always place my “other hand” correctly.

Write below the three goals you are going to use for now:

If you understand how, it’s best to write them as affirmations like “I kick hard even when I’m tired.”

Before and During the Competition (for Forms)

Make sure you read page 7 about preparing for sparring competition because all of the same stuff applies about

- Remembering your dobok, belt, snacks, and other stuff
- Preparing mentally/physically the night before and while waiting
- Knowing how relaxed or excited you need to be to do your best
- Warming up before your turn to perform (even if you have to do it in line in the holding area)

The different things about preparing for forms competitions are:

- 1) It's more important that your uniform looks nice.
- 2) It's more important that you warm up until sweaty.
- 3) You'll want to figure out how many times you should practice your form before your turn. You may notice when you practice, for example, that your 4th time is usually your best, so practice your form 3 times when warming up.

Supporting a Forms Competitor

Your parent, friend, or spouse should also read page 8 about supporting a sparring competitor because all of the same stuff applies about

- Helping you remember to do the preparations listed above
- Reminding you of your process goals for this event and
- Cheering you up if you didn't win and
- Helping you decide what to change about your goals for next time

A forms support person may also

Be a pretend judge at practice sessions and watch for judging mistakes like

- Wrong competitor going up when the judges call a competitor
- Score display held incorrectly, confusing the recorder
- Adding forms scores wrong (if 5 judges high and low don't count, other 3 are added)

Realize that there are a few different methods used for deciding the winner in forms competition. Your support person may or may not care to learn exactly which method will be used at your next tournament. If scores are used, you'll do your form only once. If single elimination is used, only those who win their first round do the form more than once. If double elimination is used, everyone does the form multiple times. If repechage is used, those who lost to the first place person earlier in the tree do their form again.

One of the good things about using elimination trees instead of scores for forms is that there is less possibility of judging error! When scoring is used, also remember it doesn't really matter what scores you get, just if they are higher or lower than your competitors. For example, don't get mad about one judge giving you a 7.0 when the other judges gave you 8.0 if that judge also scored your opponents lower than you.

Should You Compete in Breaking?

Breaking competition is nice because, like sparring you don't notice the judges watching you, and like forms, nobody is trying to hit you. But, be advised that there is a lot of luck involved in breaking competition, so it's not really a true contest of skill . . .

Although the judges are supposed to consider your display better if you use harder moves, you don't know for sure which moves your particular judges consider harder than others. Also, although all judges consider breaking on the first try better than the second, and harder boards better than easier boards, you don't know how they rank second-try-on-hard-boards compared to first-try-on-easy-boards. But, it's always fun to break boards!

To train for board breaking competition, you can do strength, endurance, diet, and mental training like for the other events. You should definitely do some sport-specific training, practicing the moves you will use for your breaking display at home. For lower ranks, just a couple of weeks practicing should be more than enough. For black belts, it depends how fancy your breaking moves are.

What do you practice when you train at home?

Use invisible boards, real boards, or targets held to be pretend boards to practice moves you might want to do at your next competition. Below is the best way to practice a particular move.

- 1) Slow motion a few times, making sure you are using your legs, hips, other hand, and breath properly (breathe in when you start the move, breathe out when you finish)
- 2) Regular speed a few times, still making sure you are using your legs, hips, other hand, and breath properly
- 3) Just once, pretending like you are doing it for real. WITH BOTH KIAPS!

How do you choose what board breaks to do at a tournament?

You can do whatever moves you want, but most judges agree two kicks and a hand technique makes a nice display. If you do more than three moves, you are taking a big chance on:

- 1) Boring the audience and judges
- 2) Failing to break one or more boards on the first try
- 3) Hurting yourself by being too tired to do your last moves correctly
- 4) Not being able to find enough volunteers to hold your boards. Also realize whoever you plan to hold your boards may be busy doing something else when it's your turn to compete.

The only possible strategy for board breaking competition is to prepare two routines, one easier and one harder and then, when you see what the competitors in your division before you do, decide if you want to do your harder or easier routine. For example, if all of your competitors took multiple tries to break their boards, you may want to do your easier routine in case the judges are very impressed with breaking on the first try.

	Cross body	Lead hand	Downward	Kicks
White Belt	Palm	Hammerfist	Hammerfist	Rising, front, round, jump front
Yellow Belt	Elbow	Elbow	Elbow	Axe, Side, turn side, flying side,
Green Belt	Knife hand	Knife hand	Knife hand	Jump side, step in turn side, slide in side, hook
Blue Belt	Punch	Back fist		Narabang, double, speed round, jump back
Red Belt	Ridge hand		Inverted elbow	Spin hook, narabang, speed hook (any), pop up

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Above is our list of suggested board breaks by rank. You are encouraged to use any board break for your rank or for lower ranks than yours. These are chosen specifically to relate to other things you work on at each rank and be good board breaking moves that are easy for your board holders to hold for. *You are NOT encouraged to try the hardest possible move you think you might be able to break a board with NOR to try to see if you can break boards with things that are not on the list. If it was a good breaking move, it would be on the list!*

Before and During the Competition

Everything about remembering what to bring, being properly relaxed or excited, and warming up until sweaty applies the same as for forms and sparring. For board breaking, you'll also need to buy the boards you'll need and take them to the tournament. Occasionally, a tournament will require you buy your boards at the tournament. They always say you must bring your own holders, but, except for nationals, this is never enforced and often three big guys will volunteer to hold for a whole division.

Supporting a Breaking Competitor

You can help a breaking competitor practice by holding invisible, real, or pretend boards for them. Also help them practice handing you the boards, telling you the move they'll use, taking a practice shot or two and kiaping to signal you that it's time for you to hold it tight.

Here's how to be a good board holder:

- 1) Have a good strong stance
- 2) Lock your elbows
- 3) Imagine what it will look like when the board breaks (with the grain) to make sure you are holding it in a way that won't hinder the competitors strike.
- 4) Just for little kids, bend the board right when they hit.

When they get upset about not winning, remind your competitor that breaking boards is fun enough to do even if you aren't getting a trophy.