

## Train Hard Fight Easy

As a Taekwondo Master for more years than I care to recount, I am disgusted with the public's seemingly well justified view of Martial Arts today. The proliferation of McDojos and six year-old black belts has given Martial Arts a black eye. With sub-par schools run by so-called experts with bellies so big their belts look more like bow ties, it is very hard to stand apart from what the public sees as the norm.

While I've always held myself and my students to a higher standard, I was looking for a test to raise the bar at a recent black belt exam.

"Fatigue makes cowards out of men." This quote is often credited to the great American football coach, Vince Lombardi, but in fact was coined by General George S. Patton. It goes on to say, "Men in condition do not tire." Few people are willing to get out of their comfort zone and really push the envelope on personal limits.

The questions I wanted to answer were:

No. 1 Did the students have their techniques stress proofed or would they fail when pushed beyond their comfort zone?

No. 2 Would this Black Belt candidate have the fighting spirit to prevail when having to fight in an extremely pre fatigued, compromising position?

In order to stress-proof we must first define what stress is and the effects stress puts on the fighter.

The US Army's Combat Stress Control Concept Manual defines and interprets stress terminology as follows:

“A stressor is any event or situation which requires a non routine change in adaptation or behavior. Often it is unfamiliar or creates conflict among motives within the individual. It may pose a challenge or threat to the individuals well being or self-esteem. Stressors may be positive or negative (for example, promotion to new responsibilities or threat of imminent death.)

Stress is the internal process of preparing to deal with a stressor. Stress involves the physiological reflexes which ready the body for fight or flight. Examples of these reflexes are increased nervous system arousal, release of adrenaline into the blood stream, changes in blood flow to different parts of the body, and so forth. However, stress is not synonymous with arousal or anxiety. Stress involves physical and mental processes which, at times, suppress arousal and anxiety. Stress also involves the accompanying emotional responses and the automatic perceptual and cognitive processes for evaluating the uncertainty or threat. These processes may be instinctive or learned.”

The mind-body reaction to stress is called the fight or flight response and is triggered automatically whenever the individual faces danger or perceived danger, like competition. Actually fight or flight is only two of the four possible responses. The other two are freeze and faint. The first two have a positive place in the Martial arts world. It is an obvious advantage to be in fight mode during a competition or self-defense situation and flight is often the appropriate response to an attack. Freeze and faint spells death on the street and defeat in the ring. The athlete must be conditioned against the latter two responses through rigorous training both physically and mentally. One way to lesson stress is to make it an everyday event. “The more one sweats in training the less he bleeds in combat.”

Pavel has said, again and again that under stress one reverts to training. So how to stress them?

Enter the 100 man Kumite.

The idea comes from the late karate great, Mas Oyama. Mas Oyama developed the Kyokushinkai style of martial arts, "the world's strongest karate", and has killed bulls in "hand to horn" combat. Oyama designed a famous test to determine his students fighting will and sparring abilities. This test is called the 100 man "kumite" fight.

The participants' spar 3 minute rounds with a fresh opponent being substituted every round until he is survived 100 rounds. As cool as this sounds it is a very hard for the average American gym to organized 100 willing opponents. So in order to get a taste of this kind of test I had to combine it with another grueling but more logistically friendly test called the Secret Service Snatch Test.

The SSST was designed by Pavel Tsatsouline to test the physical and mental endurance of federal agents. The original test was conducted with the 24 kg kettlebells which was to be snatched for five minutes without rest. The test was increased 10 minutes because some of the agents did not get significantly stressed by the original. The agents could put the bell down or switch hands at any time but a hundred percent effort was demanded, and a 200 rep count was expected at the end of 10 minutes.

Pavel meets Oyama

The following evil cocktail is to be enjoyed periodically as a gut check to see how the athlete can handle an extreme situation, it is not be used as a regular daily training because it drains the athlete both physically and mentally. Like any strong cocktail make sure you enjoy in moderation!

Equipment and personnel needed is as follows. 1.24 kilo Kettlebell and three willing sparring opponents. The test subject does 10 minutes of snatches immediately followed by nine minutes of full contact sparring. Every three minutes a fresh opponent is cycled in. The fighter must not only survive the 10 minute snatch test but he must adequately

defend himself from the three opponents when he is completely exhausted. If the fighter is knocked out or loses the will to fight or the ability to protect himself the test is failed. To work up to this test the student should undertake each phase of the test individually before attempting the grueling will-building combination.

Before I go on I must stress that the students basics must be perfected before being subjected to physical stress proofing. When learning a new skill one must be fresh and sharp as possible. Only after the student is proficient in the skill is it to be practiced in a pre-fatigued state.

### Training for the Test

To prepare for the test follow a modified version of the Dept of Energy Manmaker Program. The original DOE Manmaker calls for the athlete to do Kettlebell swings to a comfortable stop followed by a recovery jog. My modification has nothing comfortable in it at all.

Do one minute of swings alternated with a two minute round of pad drills, rest for a minute and repeat. The pad drills, affectionately known as suicide rounds because you feel like you are going the die during the round, are flash cards for strikers. Your partner moves the pads around and you strike them with the appropriate attack. Full power- full speed, all out, no pacing, two minutes of solid striking .The whole point of this is to hit the wall and then break through and tap your inner beast. It should be a very intense experience, hence the name.

You may start with only doing one minute rounds, with the goal of gradually working up to 3 one minute rounds of Kb Swings and 3 two minute rounds of pad work. Try this once a week in addition to the program for the SSST as laid out in Pavels' Right of Passage Program.

The test and preparatory training was designed for strikers but could easily be adapted to grappler. Instead of pad work just have them grapple for the combat segment.

I guarantee this extreme test will be harder than any competition you will likely encounter. Like the old saying goes – “train hard fight easy”.