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The Joy of Breaking

Breaking is A Tool, not THE Tool

By Master Wiz

Photography by Jennifer Lancaster



If I had a dollar for every time someone has said to me that they do not practice or teach board breaking because “boards don’t hit back” or they quote Mr. Miyagi that they have “never been attacked by a tree,” I’d be a rich man. These comments are usually handed down from a previous instructor and have been accepted as fact rather than a personal choice.

Statements like these sound logical IF you are assuming that Board Breaking is the ONLY activity the martial artist is doing. However, this has never been the case, nor should it be the case. Board breaking is A tool, not the ONLY tool. As General Choi explained in the “Composition of Taekwon-Do,” dallyon (board breaking/conditioning) is 20% of the martial art curriculum. Dallyon is necessary to make the other aspects more effective, just as the other aspects help the student break more boards.

Let’s look at these statements from an outside perspective.

1. Tell a boxer that he’s wasting his time hitting a speed bag or heavy bag because he’s “never been hit by a ball or a bundle of rags,” and people would think you’re crazy. The speed bag and the heavy bag are TOOLS—one is for hand-eye coordination and timing, and the other is for power development and body positioning.
2. Tell law enforcement personnel that they should not practice shooting at the range because they have never been attacked by paper, and they would look at you as though you’re crazy. The target range is only PART of their firearm training; they also do live dynamic drills with simulated ammunition.

Board breaking is only one of many tools that instructors can use to help students improve their skills, power and speed. The unique aspect to board breaking is that it can PROVE the students ability to themselves and others, which can also increase the students confidence, which is vital to success.

Those who oppose board breaking often state that they use shield or heavy bag drills allow students to develop the power instead. While these are great tools, they are not perfect solutions, as they do not provide any empirical evidence or proof of the amount of power or TYPE of power a student





is generating. Students hit the bag or shield and think they are powerful because of the sound it made or because it moved. The reality is maybe that the sound was because they hit with a flat foot, making a loud noise or that although the bag moved, it was because the student “pushed” the bag. Students who practice ONLY using these tools often have a false sense of confidence in their abilities and in a real-life situation may find themselves surprised at the lack of effectiveness of their strikes on the bad guy.

Breaking boards proves that the student generated EXPLOSIVE power on target the type of power needed in order to stop an attacker. By changing the board colors, they can see if they are progressing and becoming more powerful.

Those who oppose board breaking sometimes argue it is not realistic, as the boards are supported by a holder and cannot move, unlike a body, which moves away when hit. While there is some validity to that statement, it is easily discredited with a simple drill. Mount a board holder on a heavy bag and see how many boards students can break boards on this unstable platform.

The other necessary benefit that board breaking provides is that it forces the student to be realistic and confident in their technique. Board breaking ensures that students strike with the right tool and are mentally prepared for some discomfort

in order to accomplish their goal. Mental focus and confidence are vital in order for students to develop the mental toughness that will prepare them to face a real-life self-defense situation.

Board breaking provides unique insight and feedback to students on their ability to generate explosive power through the application of proper technique and focus.

As I mentioned before, board breaking is one of many tools needed to develop a strong martial artist. Board breaking does not replace sparring, patterns, fundamental exercises, or self-defense training. It works together with the other components to make a competent martial artist.

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