

UNITING THE WORLD THROUGH **MARTIAL ARTS**

TKD *TaeKwonDo* **TIMES**

JANUARY 2014

**HALL OF
2013
FAME**

DAN SEVERN

THE BEAST

MASTER

TOM GORDON

MIXING TAEKWONDO AND MMA

ED PARKER JR.'S
"MARTIAL ARTS"
CONTRAST IN MOTION

EXCLUSIVE REVIEWS:

DR. HE-YOUNG KIMM'S
TAEKWONDO HISTORY

WORLD

TAEKWONDO SUCCESS
IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

GREECE'S ATHLETIC CLUB PROTEUS



by Master Terry Wisniewski

Wood boards look great so I still use them for photo shoots and demos. Audiences “understand” wood. They like the cracking sound and seeing splinters fly. But otherwise I don’t use wood boards anymore. Too many problems: cost, storage, dryness variability, grain variability, and even thickness changes if you leave North America. Clean up is a pain.

Wood boards are expensive unless you buy in bulk. They have cost me \$.50 to \$1.50 each, depending on the year and availability. To get the best pricing, I have to buy almost a thousand linear feet. And then find storage. Another civic issue today is conservationism and the concern of wasting valuable trees; our solution is to donate broken boards to organizations who will reuse them for small building projects like bird houses and toys.

Variations in dryness and grain, and the existence of knots and other imperfections can make breaking wood frustrating and competitively unfair. In Canada, we found that West Coast boards were sometimes twice the weight and strength of the boards in Eastern Canada (don’t ask me why). Boards in Brazil and Argentina are a full 1” and not 1” planed down to ¾” as in North America. They certainly are not kiln dried the same. In Mexico I was able to peel a strip off a board from end to end like bark from a tree. The tree’s life cycle affects the grain of the board, some are tight together making it harder to break as compared to big growth trees where the grains are farther apart.

I have watched a better, more powerful breaker hit wood boards perfectly in competition and not break, only to be followed by somebody with sub-par technique who did break and win. It was all due to the luck of who had which boards set up for them.

Conclusion: wood boards are too expensive, vary too much, and unpredictable to use in training.

Plastic boards are the best option for everyday training. True, they cost more upfront but can be used for years. The difficulty level can be adjusted to fit with the students experience and physique. Easy storage and no messy clean up. They are fair and consistent in competition. There are a number of different kinds of plastic boards.

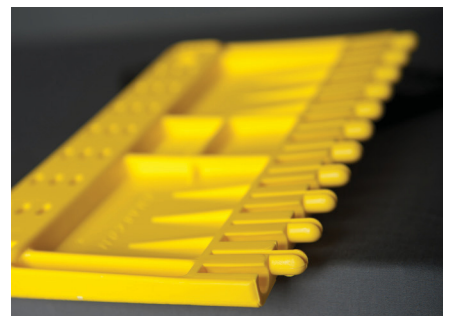
Plastic finger boards use pegs that slide past each other like fingers on your hand. The fingers vary in length and compression, which determines the strength of the board. They come in seven different strengths, denoted by color, and the halves can be mixed to get the perfect level of difficulty for each student. For example, I might use half blue with half green. Once broken just fit it together and slam it on the wall or floor to reset for the next break. I recommend the rubber backing option so they won’t slide around, and a thin foam pad (flat pool noodle) in front for reducing impact for children.

These boards are made using a nylon material that flexes like real wood boards. The flex allows energy to dissipate and reduces the sting we get if we don’t break so they are safer for kids. There are two problems with these boards: Black Belts who stack three or more black boards can sometimes snap off the “pegs.” The other issue is cost; they are expensive, especially if you are buying enough to start a breaking program. However, I have some that are almost 20 years old and still going strong after thousands of breaks.

Tongue and groove boards have been around for a long time. They are available from many manufacturers and usually come in three or four difficulty levels. They are composed of a hard plastic and usually have a thin foam material covering the breaking area, which I like. One of the drawbacks is I don’t find much difference in the breaking levels. They remind me of hitting cement because there is a definite break or no break point and nothing in between (this is possibly due to the



Plastic finger boards vary in length and compression, which determines the strength of the board (Photos courtesy of UMAB The Ultimate Martial Arts Board, www.umab.com)



type of plastic). And it takes significantly more time to put these boards back together than the finger boards. They also tend to wear out very quickly. However, these boards are inexpensive and readily available.

The last type of board I want to discuss is also a tongue and groove design. I recommend these for Black Belt power breaking instead of the finger boards. They are solid plastic and about ¾” thick. They are heavy and they last. Instead of 6-9 wood boards try 3-4 of these. Although they will flex and crack, hitting them is like brick and only for advanced students. There are just two levels so you are limited in your variations. At the moment you have to order them from England and shipping is expensive, but for power breaking I have found nothing better.

Conclusion: Plastic boards ensure consistently fair/safe breaking, as well as being more economical and “green”. If you have any comments or want information about manufacturers, please email me at masterwiz@BoardBreakingHQ.com. **TW**

• Master Terry Wisniewski is a 7th degree Black Belt in ITF Taekwon-Do, founder of Tien Lung Taekwon-Do. He is a full time professional Taekwon-Do instructor with three schools. As a 9-time coach for Team Canada he has trained World Champions in Patterns, Self Defense & Power Breaking.