

UNITING THE WORLD THROUGH **MARTIAL ARTS**

TKD *TaeKwonDo* **TIMES**

JANUARY 2015

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Breaking the Competition

by Master Terry Wisniewski

Take a drive down your typical suburban neighborhood on a sunny Saturday afternoon and you will see kids by themselves, with friends, or family members playing sports. Basketball hoops hung up on garages. Hockey nets placed on the street. Soccer nets on the driveway. They are everywhere.

What you do not see is any martial art apparatuses or kids practicing martial arts with their friends.

Why?

The answer lies in the nature of the sport (or art) itself and the lack of appropriate equipment. It is normal for a buddy to drop by and kick a soccer ball, shoot a puck, or toss a baseball, but having them gear up and spar isn't safe. Furthermore, martial arts are more geared towards individual practice, not team competition. Even with friends in martial arts, it is pretty hard to get together to do something safe like patterns when the other person might be a totally different level or style.

Typically, martial arts equipment is not designed to be easily relocated. Any six-year-old child can grab and drag a hockey net out of the garage for practice but setting up a heavy bag or maneuvering a "Bob" is out of the question. Another fac-

tor is that martial arts equipment generally fails to provide immediate gratification or feedback. Even at the most basic level, anyone kicking or throwing a ball towards a net can see just how close they came to success. A child doing a pattern has no real feedback whether that last repetition was better than the one before.

When they added breakaway targets, bright color aiming zones, and cutout opponents, mainstream sports took the basic practice nets and amped them up to make practice time, play time. For any good instructor or coach, disguising repetition is always a key objective as is finding a way to get the students to "practice" at home. Making success more exciting by flipping the target in with the perfect shot converts the standard practice equipment into a pesky carnival game where you were so close you just have to try it again. Like the barkers say, "Anyone can play....everyone's a winner!" If kids are somewhat tricked into looking at games as practice, they will get better and they will win more.

So, what does the martial arts have that can accomplish the same thing? Board breaking, of course.

Nowadays, any child can take their lightweight board holder and a stack of cool colored rebreak-

able boards out to the driveway or fence and start breaking. A cracked board encourages them to try again; a complete break brings a shout of joy and a fist in the air in triumph. Afterwards comes the "play," mixing half of one color board with half of the other color of board, or stacking up more than one, trying it with different techniques, or even putting it on the ground for a downward break. Drawn by the "kiya's!" and the crack of boards being broke, soon our young martial artists will have a crowd of friends wanting to try it, too.

Finally martial arts kids have a part of their activity that their friends can appreciate and even try. When a kid can outbreak their friend, the hockey player, he or she gets recognized for their prowess. Of course, this success has a positive impact and encourages more practice, and therefore, greater skills, which creates more success in the dojang and at competitions, which spurs on more practice.

When a kid tries to break a board for the first time, seeing the impressed look on the faces of his friends, he or she could become the next great, young martial artist. These fun moments of play can help our sport increase its foothold in America, thereby building up our local schools.

• **Master Terry Wisniewski is a 7th degree Black Belt in ITF Taekwon-Do and 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.**