

Are you ready for Black???

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The elements one needs to survive the Weekend of Black Belt Grading are:

1. A high level of anaerobic and aerobic fitness.
2. A through knowledge of all theory requirements.
3. Well practised in all techniques as required in patterns, one step sparring, self defence and destrucyions.
4. A clear frame of mind to be able to meet all challenges with confidence, both the expected and unexpected.
5. A supple body to help in the prevention of injury.
6. Strength to be able to endure a tough weekend without becoming over-tired.

To be fully ready to meet all the challenges you are likely to be faced with over a Black Belt grading weekend, you as a potential candidate, should start a dedicated program of training at least 6 month prior to the actual grading date.

In this respect goal setting can be of enormous value and importance, as by not having a clear idea of how your training is progressing can only make it more difficult to end up at your intended destination. Make a list of attainable goals to meet your needs. These goals only need to be easy to begin with and should be revised periodically with the ultimate goal "The Grading Weekend".

Example goals:

First make a list of the required elements needing your attention.

Physical fitness: Strength - Press ups/sit up Anaerobic - Air-shield Aerobic - Jogging

Destructions Patterns One step Theory Mental confidence and fitness Example goals to attain one month after commencement of training:

1. 1. Able to run for 20 mins: Do 30 sit ups: 20 press ups: 2/1 min. rounds on the air shield
2. 2. Outline of 5 one step sparring combinations.
3. 3. Learn one section of theory requirements.
4. 4. Staying focused in training sessions when executing patterns.
5. 5. Determining what are the best destructions to suit you.

When setting goals remember to make them attainable, revise them regularly, allowing time for rest days and recovery from injury.

Once you have established your goals you should identify with both your physical and mental strengths and weaknesses, with these strengths and weaknesses in mind as well as your intended goals, prepare a training schedule which will incorporate these aspects, with more

emphasis towards the weaknesses. The weaknesses are the elements you probably like practising the least and by concentrating more on these weaknesses you should make an overall improvement both mentally and physically, consequently making you overall, a well rounded candidate.

At times leading up to your grading, while becoming over tired at times with sore muscles, you might become despondent and start having a few self doubts. This is the time your body might need a rest both emotionally and physically and your goals revised. Take a positive look at what you have achieved and push the doubts aside, and go forward with confidence.

Be sure to make your training schedule flexible and varied, having light work days and hard work days, with rest days so as to let muscles recover to help prevent injury from over tired muscles.

Jogging or other similar aerobic activities need to be undertaken at least 3 times a week to improve your aerobic level. As time draws closer this should be supplemented with anaerobic activities, like 100 metre sprints, incorporated in your jogging or by air shield work-outs. Anaerobic and aerobic energy both have specific training needs to be developed and since both disciplines will be required over the grading weekend both need special attention.

Strength training is another area which requires special attention. Sit ups and press ups will not happen if not trained for. Very sore, stiff and tired abdominal and upper arms will and can only be the outcome with little or no training, this will make for an inferior performance in the formal part of the examination the following day.

Sit ups and press ups need to be started 6 months out from grading. Starting at an easy level and slowly working up on a daily basis. You will probably already be tired prior to taking the fitness test and cramps will more than likely hit you without enough specific training towards sit ups. You will probably already be tired prior to being tested. To see how you are progressing with this area of your training, do your sit ups and press ups after you come back from a jog or after a club training session.

At this time you could also get someone to give you a few rounds on the air shield, another discipline you will be tested on when tired, after several hours of training. Start with 2/1 minute rounds slowly working up to 3/2 minute rounds.

After all this extra hard training your body is going to start feeling tired and sore, and this is when concentrated stretching comes into its own. You will get more mileage out of your body if you care for it. By stretching you will be doing this.

Before a training session is started correct warming up exercises and stretches should be carried out. This helps to prevent the body from injury and decreases the amount of lactic acid which builds up in the muscles during a hard training session.

Stretching after training teaches the body to relax, encourages the muscle into greater flexibility, and the lactic acid that has built up in the muscles over the training session, will be dispersed more rapidly by stretching.

By doing a correct warm up, and stretching before and after training, encourages the body into a faster recovery, and return to the next training session with a stronger well stretched body, able to handle another hard training session. Stretching is like keeping the body finely tuned, well greased and oiled.

Club training, if not already, should take on a meaningful perspective. As soon as you bow and acknowledge the Do Jang your mind should automatically acknowledge the goals you have set and everything undertaken during training should have your goals in mind. The way you train, will in the end result in the way you grade, especially when both physical and mental fatigue start to set in. At every club training session every pattern, every kick, every hand technique, every jump should be given your full attention and determination to execute it better and more focused than the last time. If you have had a hard day at work or school you should not forfeit a training night, by training after a hard day can only strengthen your resolve, improving and strengthening your mental determination and confidence to perform under difficult situations. Push yourself a little - the discoveries you make might surprise you.

Approximately 6 weeks out from grading all elements of your grading should now be in place with only the fine tuning needing to be done.

On arriving at the Do Jang for your grading remember most of all your etiquette by:

- Thoughtfulness to other candidates, It is their grading also and will probably also be nervous and anxious.
- Having a good attitude; Be ready to give it your all.
- Arriving before time, allowing for a small warm-up and time to become familiar with the surroundings.
- Giving the examiners your full and undivided attention; This signals a sign of respect.
- Taking care of personal grooming, also a sign of respect to yourself and others, i.e. ironed clean Do bok.

Black Belt Grading itself appears not only for the examiners to test your skills as to your worthiness to become a black belt, But ultimately for you to test yourself. Digging deep within, especially when you have become very tired and emotionally stressed out, you may discover or get a glimpse at the real you. When all is said and done becoming a black belt is not supposed to be easy but should be a great challenge.

The rewards you achieve after passing to 1st Dan come in various forms. You could notice a change in the respect you receive from your instructor and pairs. Your confidence level could go up. Because of the extra training and discipline you endured, the art of Taekwon Do seems to have become a little clearer but still with many more new discoveries to be made. A feeling of self-worth and a sense of achievement, but also with the knowledge of how many more challenges there are still to be faced. This is only the beginning.