

# The Not So Secret Training Methods of John Matsuoka

Mr John Matsuoka

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## Introduction

The basis for my thesis was a personal journey for me to improve my Taekwon-Do techniques. Realising what it took for me to understand what I was trying to accomplish I had developed a few training methods to attain my goals. I used training techniques from wherever I could find, a cheap DVD on Bill "Superfoot" Wallace for leg speed, Mrs. Antje Niven for core strength, Mr. Matt Breen for helping me develop power in my techniques, and the list goes on with everyone who I have made contact with over my Taekwon-Do career that has helped me be me.

My main topic that I chose is dealing with slow motion. How it had improved my equilibrium or balance throughout the whole technique. How I had developed training methods to improve students that I have taught over the years, whether they be coloured belts, black belts, male or female, it didn't matter. It has been a joy for me to see personal improvements by these students. And this is what I want to share with my Taekwon-Do family. If you take any one thing from this thesis be it Perseverance, just never ever give up. Enjoy!

## Slow Motion Technique

One of the training secrets in Taekwon-Do is that hands, feet, eyes, breath all come together at the same time, that is at the moment of impact. To achieve this I have found that you need to find your balance points through the whole technique. This is not limited to knowing or keeping your balance at the beginning of the technique, but knowing and keeping your balance throughout the entire movement to the moment of impact.

I came up with slow motion technique when learning my new patterns. I found that doing my patterns in slow motion helped me understand the whole technique including, the starting hand and foot position, through to the intermediate hand and foot position to the finishing hand and foot position, including crossing, relax motion and finalising the execution of a movement.

In doing my new patterns in slow motion, I found that this could be used to help any students with timing of their finish. I experimented with slow motion using myself as a guinea pig! After finding teaching methods that worked for me, I wanted to experiment on other guinea pigs to test whether my theory worked.

## Slow Motion and White Belts

My first guinea pigs were white belts at Nibun Central. They were brand new white belts, with timing, power, co-ordination and balance issues. They were the perfect group to start experimenting on! My approach was to start with walking stance and co-ordinating that with a forefist punch. I noticed that my first guinea pig group was a mixed bag of skill. The women in the group suffered the traditional lack of power but were able to achieve smoother movements in

their techniques. The men in the group equated power with muscle tension and tried to execute powerful techniques using their upper body muscular frame with no timing and co-ordination with the rest of their body. The men had very stiff and robotic movements. For the next few weeks I had all the students in the group learn their new movements in slow motion, including saju makgi and saju jirugi. I had them focus on co-ordinating their finish movement with no power. The power of the technique was to come later. I wanted the students to learn their new movements in slow motion because the stances in particular are unique to martial arts, especially Taekwon-Do. In Taekwon-Do there is also sine wave to contend with when learning forward and backward motion in new stances. To eliminate the confusion of equating speed with muscle/mass power, I had them focus on getting the students' basic stances correct, their movement through the technique flowing smoothly and co-ordinating that with finishing with their hands at the same time. I found that the students' struggle with the techniques that they were learning was with their balance points when they left their centre line. Because of this difficulty with balance, the students suffered from "stutter step" when they left their centre line when doing slow motion. I then told the students that in order to stop "stutter step" they should do 300 crunches a night for a couple of months!!! This was to shift the students' focus from their head to their core. Slow motion technique and core strength are connected together. Slow motion technique with stutter step can only be achieved by tightening the core and shifting the students' balance point from their head to lower down- their core. It took some time for the students to understand what I was trying to achieve, but eventually the students, after constant reminders from me at training, the students got their timing and balance right for their movements.

I wanted to test my theory on white belts, because I believe that white belts should have a strong understanding of timing and balance of the technique instead of focussing purely on power or strength. I believe that by using and learning slow motion technique at white belt level, the students will have a strong fundamental base of techniques which will stay with them throughout their Taekwon-Do life. Also, slow motion technique could be used when learning new movements when the white belts advanced to yellow stripe/yellow belt.

Over the weeks the students progressed to a comfortable level to move on to the next step which was speed, which I will discuss later.

## Slow Motion and Black Belts

Learning slow motion technique is not limited to white belts. It could apply to anyone at any level. I also had weekend training sessions with black stripes going for black belt and black belt students going for their grading. For these students, I wanted to focus on their basic techniques through patterns. As a basic rule, I left them to do their own physical training. I gave them 'assignments' to do during the week and it was their discipline that had to put them in condition for the physical aspects of grading. My main focus on the weekend trainings was to get the students to concentrate on the basics. The basics flowed through to their patterns, breaks and sparring. Being senior belts, I asked the students to do Chon-ji, which is my default pattern. I use this as my default pattern to find out what their techniques were like, especially their timing and finish. It was amazing to see that students at this level could still have issues with timing, co-ordination and balance! What they perceived to be an excellent display of Chon-Ji in power and movement was really an uncoordinated display of Taekwon-Do. Upon telling the students what

their patterns were really like (much to the dismay of the students) I introduced them to slow motion technique. The students were encouraged to do all their patterns in slow motion. I started the students on Chon-Ji because it has the two most used stances in Taekwon-Do, the walking stance and L-stance. The immediate goal for the student was to focus on finishing their techniques with hands, feet, eyes and breath, all co-ordinated to finish at the same time. This also allowed me to work on their intermediate positions prior to the completed technique. This was hard work for the student and the teacher but we persevered.

When getting the senior students to do slow motion, the students sometimes sped up their techniques because they did not have the core strength to keep their positions for longer lengths of time. I then got the students to deliberately slow down their patterns to slower than slow motion in a normal speed pattern. By making the students do their patterns at this speed, this not only strengthened the students' core, but also made the students aware of their intermediate positions and their balance points throughout the movement as their weight shifted during the movement. It also gave the student an opportunity to think! I constantly reminded the students to focus on where they placed their hands and feet when moving through the technique, for example, avoiding chicken wings or keeping their hands too close to their bodies and co-ordinating those movements with their feet and body positions. This soon became habit and part of their muscle memory. This meant that when the students did their patterns in normal motion, their bodies had learnt the correct intermediate positions and where their hands and feet should be throughout the entire movement, including finishing in one co-ordinated motion. This made students' patterns sharper and more powerful. Even the students found this to be so and were amazed at the improvements they had made in their patterns just by slowing the patterns down and focussing on the how the movement travelled from start to finish.

The senior students after training using slow motion to perfect their techniques had placed in the tournaments in which they competed in. They would also go on to complete an 'A' pass at their grading.

### Slow Motion and Kicking

Slow motion is equally applicable to kicks in Taekwon-Do. With the senior students, they had lots of kicks in their patterns. I found that a lot of the senior students were over kicking and had balance problems which led to problems with sine wave after the kick. So applying the same slow motion technique and understanding the balance points throughout the movement of kicking from start (for example bending ready stance A) to finish (for example middle side kick), the students were able to focus on their balance when executing the technique and learning where their focal point for the kick was, instead of over kicking. This also helped students co-ordinate their hands in kicking techniques as part of reaction. By practising balance and focussing on the students' core in slow motion, instead of the end point of the kick, the student was able to keep their balance, perfect their technique and sine wave after the kick.

### Slow Motion and Speed

I mentioned earlier that I would discuss slow motion and speed. Speed was only introduced after the students could do their techniques and patterns in slow motion, starting and completing movements in one co-ordinated motion with balance. The downside to doing slow motion, the

students' hand speed was directly related to their foot speed. This meant that the students were co-ordinated with their hands and feet but had no power. At this point it was time to introduce speed to the students to help co-ordinate their technique so that they could incorporate speed with the other aspects of the theory of power.

The senior students could not understand the purpose behind what I was trying to teach them. I found that the reality was that the students did not understand the theory of power. The theory of power is made up of reaction force, concentration, equilibrium (balance), breath control, mass and speed. By using slow motion technique all of the aspects of power come into play. While the focus may initially be on balance/equilibrium, slow motion technique gets the student to also work on their mass, breath control, reaction force and speed to a focal point/concentrated area. To get these students to understand the theory of power and how slow motion technique could be used to achieve maximum power, it was easier to break each part of the theory of power into simpler steps.

Starting with reaction force, I got the students to stick one hand out and pull back that hand to their hip as fast as they could. I got them to do that on both sides, three time each side. This was done in a parallel stance, so that there were no foot movements to confuse the student. At this point, I told the students to focus more on the reaction rather than the technique itself. By getting the students to focus on their reaction hand, this took their focus away from the technique itself and adding too much power to the technique. By focussing on reaction the students improved their timing and actually stopping at the moment of impact, rather than over punching/over reaching. I then had the students do their patterns in slow motion, focussing on the reaction hand, in particular when in their intermediate position and in the finish. What I noticed, just from focussing on reaction and slow motion, was an improvement in their patterns. Stances were controlled and solid and the students' power was crisper, because their technique finished all at the same time.

With the bigger male students, when doing this reaction exercise, they had problems relaxing their muscles. To help them I had them do jabs with their finger tips. The reason is that you cannot do a quick jab with tight and tense muscles. You have to be relaxed. By having the students do quick flicks with the finger tips eventually getting them to do jabs with a closed fist, then combining that with the reaction force, they were able to stop their forward movement at the moment of impact.

After getting their co-ordination with reaction and balance in slow motion, I then got the students to add speed. I started with the basics again. I again used Chon-Ji, in particular the first movement, a low forearm block in walking stance. I got the students to start the movement as they would if they were doing it in slow motion and then told them to speed up their movement three quarters of the way through the stance. After practising their patterns using this method of starting slow and finishing fast, I noticed a distinguishing difference between their intermediate movements and their finish, which created very powerful and crisp techniques.

With the speed of kicks, the students' kicks either had no power or had too much muscle and were extremely laboured. Using the same principles of slow motion, focussing on the core, balance and practising full extension of the kick to the point of impact, and the return of the

technique to the start, a students' kicks could be improved and be powerful. I had watched a DVD by Bill "Superfoot" Wallace where he taught a class of students how to get fast kicks. I wholeheartedly adopted his training methods and incorporated them into my trainings. To summarise his teaching, he warms up his legs without using dynamic or ballistic stretching. He warms up by slow stretching. First he sits on the ground with his legs as far apart as they would go, holding for 5 deep breaths. He does 4 sets, and at each set, stretching his legs further apart. Next, he does a side split, spreading his legs as far as they will go, holding for 5 deep breaths for 4 sets, stretching further at each set. The purpose is to get the blood flowing into the muscles of the legs ready for fast kicking. This is similar to yoga stretching. The last stretching warm up is standing in parallel stance and bending from the waist, keeping your legs as straight as possible, with your knuckles to the front of your toes, holding for 5 breaths, then moving the knuckles to the back of the heel while touching the ground and keeping the legs straight as possible and then moving the back of the hands on the floor to the front of the toes and then grabbing the ankles and pulling your torso towards your knees. Your legs should be warm at this point. You then either with a partner, wall or free standing, you balance on one leg and do 15 slow side turning kicks, as slow as possible, and then immediately afterwards do 30 fast side turning kicks. The fast kicks should be like a jab, as opposed to a powerful breaking kick. There should be no muscle in the kick, just a flicking motion like a jab. This is then repeated on the other leg.

By using slow motion and understanding the way in which the kick travels and using the training methods of Bill "Superfoot" Wallace, I found that the students kick improved immensely.

### Slow Motion and Sparring

It is easy to see how slow motion is applicable to patterns and learning new techniques. However, slow motion is equally useful for sparring.

Slow motion requires you to focus on your core strength and balance and rhythm, which are all important for sparring. By practising sparring techniques in slow motion, such as jabs and fast kicks, and learning to move around and knowing where your balance points are when shifting and dodging and attacking your opponent, you create a rhythm that upsets your opponent's rhythm. By having that focus on your balance, techniques and your core, you become a more difficult opponent and you have more confidence in your techniques to be applied in a sparring situation.

### Slow Motion and Breaking

The same theory of slow motion applies to breaking. By applying the same techniques of slow motion to power breaking, you understand where your balance points are, and how to move your mass, and timing that effectively with your speed, to the concentrated focal point of your target (the boards) you can amass so much energy to do your breaks effectively. This applies equally to whether the break is done on the ground or in the air. The key is that when breaking you must be balanced at all times.

### Core Strength

This part of my training came from Ms Antje Niven. She had this really wicked way of doing crunches which I incorporated into my training. It starts with lying on your back with your knees bent and arms straight level with your ankles. You start the movement forward by 'crunching' your abdominals while reaching for your ankles, 100 reps. Next the legs are straight up 90 degrees to the floor and hands in same position as first set doing same movement as the first set, 100 reps. Then right leg straight up and the left leg straight and 2 inches off the floor same movement as first set, 50 reps. Finally swap the legs around and do your last 50 reps. Do this core training everyday for two months and you will feel a difference. It took about 30 minutes with fewer reps in the beginning but after two months it drops to ten minutes for the whole 300 reps. Enjoy!

## Conclusion

I feel I had a real sense of success with the not so secret training methods I developed over the years. It has helped me develop my standards of technique into a more powerful unit. By developing my teaching methods and continually trying to improve people I personally train I find a confidence within myself to move forward. I get a sense of pride watching people I had an opportunity to train with my methods to attain a medal at tournaments and also having 'A' passes in their grading. Much goes to their determination and a whole lot of patience with me guiding them to be better martial artists.

These training methods were purposely designed for any practitioner to use at a pace of their own choosing. It will increase your awareness to correct yourself because of the slowness of the movements.

Feel free to try any of these simple but effective training techniques which I've been doing for a few years now. By starting slowly and building strong basic foundations everything starts developing your potential for personal development.

## Thank You

I would like to extend a personal thanks to Ms. Bernice Ng for translating my verbal gibberish into something of substance.