

Tournament Sparring For The Beginner

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So you have decided to enter your first tournament and would like to know what it is all about?

There are many questions that arise when considering to enter your first tournament so before we get started with all the formalities listed below are a few questions that are asked most frequently about tournament sparring. For any additional answers to your questions please consult your Instructor as they should be your first available source for those answers to your every question.

Will I get hurt sparring?

Like any sport or recreational activity there cannot be a guarantee that injuries will not occur but in the case of sparring under the rules and regulations put down by the I.T.F.N.Z serious injury is highly unlikely due to the strict governing of such areas as protective wear and contact.

What is sparring for?

Sparring will give you a chance to use your knowledge and techniques against an actual moving opponent that can attack and react to yourself and not just an imaginary target as in relation to preforming a pattern or doing line work in class.

What happens if I get someone twice my age, size and grade?

Under the systems in place this will never happen as every tournament has a wide variety of divisions drawn up well before the day of the competition and provided that the correct information has been filled out on your entry form you will be included in a division according to your own age, size, belt colour and weight.

What if I'm not very good at sparring?

Sparring like most other aspects of Taekwon-Do takes time to achieve good results, Everybody in the beginning is nerves and unsure but just like coming up through the grades it takes a lot of practice to refine the right technique for your own personal style and entering tournaments is a good way to improve on this.

But I don't like competitions?

Competitions are not to everyone's liking but it is a good idea not think of competitions as a means of finding a winner and a loser but an extension of your training as they are an important means of boosting your confidence and discipline also giving you a different medium to train apart from just club nights.

Competition Sparring

Sparring is a very important ingredient in all the aspects that make up the foundations of a Taekwon-Do practitioner. Like baking a cake, the end result is only as good as the combination of the correct ingredients. For example a chocolate cake can hardly be called a chocolate cake without the addition of the chocolate, so a Taekwon-Do exponent is also only as good as the combination of his/her training, example being, only training on patterns and sparring and forgetting about theory. This being the case it is also important to understand the reason behind practising all these areas of Taekwon-Do, as it is important to know that the chocolate in the cake gives it a chocolate flavour.

Sparring permits the student an opportunity to use his/her training, experience and techniques on not just an imaginary target as in relation to the practising and performing of patterns but to actually encounter a mobile target which reacts and responds to his/her actions and reactions. This gives the student an opportunity to improve in such aspects as their reaction to and against actual attacks and defences in a realistic yet safe combat environment while still striving to achieve the correct technique, posture, distance, accuracy and timing.

Pre-Tournament Considerations

The correct safety gear is first and foremost your largest priority as without all the correct items a competitor is automatically disqualified before stepping into the ring. The correct items are as follows.

Male Competitors

- Foot protectors that completely enclose the toes and rear of heel area.
- Shin guards, Mouth guard and Groin guard
- Hand protectors that completely enclose the fingers
- Head protector that covers the head area from injury
- Head protectors are the only item that shall be supplied by the tournament organisers for the use of the competitors.

No item in the above is optional all items are compulsory and nonobservance will result in a immediate disqualification

Female Competitors

- Foot protectors that completely enclose the toes and rear of heel area
- Shin guards and Mouth guard
- Hand protectors that completely enclose the fingers
- Head protector that covers the head area from injury
- Chest protector (Optional)
- Head and Chest protectors are the only items that shall be supplied by the tournament organisers for the use of the competitors.

The only item in the above being optional is the Chest protector, all other items are compulsory and nonobservance will result in a immediate disqualification

Accurate completion of the application form is not only accentual but common sense. This is an area widely over looked by the competitor but is extremely important as if the information you fill out on the application form does not correspond to that at your weigh in then you can run the risk of being disqualified.

When filling in your weight on the application it is important to get it right, don't guess your weight or think that you can lose a couple of kilograms before the day to just sneak into a lower category as this is seldom the case and can lead to disappointment. Your weight is an important variable in the division you will be added to, you can usually compete in a heavier weight division but will not be permitted to compete in a lower division.

A few of the points the judges will be focusing on are whether you can complete your pattern accurately enough to return back to the mark from which you started, your balance and focus of each movement and the accuracy and execution of the techniques.

The judges will be assessing from the point at which your name is called to the time you have left the ring so due to the high level and number of competitors it is important to put on the best show you can from start to finish as it can only usually take half of a mark to decide the top placing.

Preparation is the most important area of patterns competition, it is foolish to think that you will perform to an acceptable level on the day. You would not expect to pass a grading if you did no practice at all and just turn up on the day. The same can be said for a competition. It is in your best interests to get all the practice and tuition you can before the big day. You will also need to know the patterns that you will be performing as it is a little late to decide that on the day.

The first of these will be the pattern that you last graded on. The second if your are lucky enough is one of your own choice.

Always choose an optional pattern that suits your capabilities and that you can complete effectively.

Attention to detail in your pattern will end up obtaining you the greatest improvement.

To achieve this you will need to go back to the basics and study the patterns you are thinking of performing. This documentation can be studied from the Condensed Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do or The ITFNZ Taekwon-Do patterns work-out book.

These two books in conjunction with your Instructors advice can only add up to a winning combination.

The more you work on obtaining perfection of each movement individually then your pattern will improve and all your hard work will show through on the day.

On the day of the competition always remember the spirit in which you compete, for example winning is always good and sure feels nice but there will always be as in any sport a loser and the longest lasting memory people will have is that of a bad loser. So please remember that it is the experience that continues to improve your abilities as a Taekwon-Do practitioner and not that you are able to win. People will have just as much respect for a humble loser and no one likes a poor sport.

As an added bonus if you are lucky enough to do well in a regional tournament then you may get the chance to be part of the regional team to compete nationally against the other regions within our organisation. This will require you to devote a lot of your time to things like attending regular training sessions with the team and helping with fund-raising to get the team to the destination of the tournament as these are held in a different region each year. This also adds to the excitement of being in the national team as you may have to travel as a team to the destination for the weekend.

Being in a national team is even more challenging than a regional competition as you will be competing against other ITFNZ students from around the country representing your region to maybe take home the national trophy at the end of the day for the best region along with any other medals and trophies you may be lucky enough to obtain. Both the regional and national tournaments are also a good place to get to make a lot of new friends and you can always come away with great memories of the occasion and that is even more important than whether you won or lost.

It is also important to remember that the judges and referees are only human and can from time to time make mistakes or in the eyes of the side line spectator make the wrong decisions. The volunteers that make up the judges and referees have all at their own expense completed a certified course and usually are operating under the pressure of being in short supply which means they sometimes are on demand all day. So as a competitor it is a good idea to keep this in mind and instead of cursing against a tough decision take some time out to think how difficult it was to be in the ring for your fight and then how difficult it is for a judge or referee to be in there all day? Most of the negative confrontations at a tournament are usually made in the heat of the moment when the excitement of the bout has not worn off so it is a good idea to take a few minutes out to relax and think things over and if you still feel you have been wronged there are measures in place by which you can appeal.

If you are really keen to find out all the ins and outs of a tournament and the official rules and regulations then there is a document that can be made available to you from the ITFNZ Tournaments Sub-Committee on the rules and regulations of ITFNZ Tournaments. You can obtain this document by either asking your instructor to contact the chairperson of the Sub-Committee for a copy or at your instructors approval you can contact them in writing requesting a copy.

Author's Note:

This thesis was not intended as a training aid yet it was an attempt to give the beginning sparrer a chance to go over a few of the finer points and the background of competitions as it is always a good idea to be as well prepared as you can to go into a tournament for the first time.

As a beginning student your instructor should be your first line of information as their experience will be a great guide to your training. Remember it is the best compliment for an instructor to have his/her students to eventually surpass them in knowledge and experience.

Taekwon-Do is more than just a sport it is a way of life and unlike most sports you can never confess to be an expert at it as there is always something to learn and always there will be someone from who you can learn it from no matter what the grade. An instructor can learn as much from a white belt as a white belt can from them.

The best piece of advice that can be given to the beginning sparrer is to just relax as much as possible and even though it is a competition atmosphere have fun inside the ring and don't take your first competition too seriously but always prepare well and do all your background training and when you step into the ring it should just fall into place and it isn't about winning but that you put in the best effort you could on the day. Remember the Student Oath and Tenets then use these to your best advantage and never give up trying to the very best you can be. That is all that can be expected or asked of you.