

SPORTS

# Respect for life 'sweet spot' of martial art

By ED CASSAVOY  
Sports Writer

Athletes like to talk a lot about that area of sports that's hard to classify concretely. Some call it "luck," a "streak," or it's manifested in the athlete's talk of the magical "sweet spot" on a tennis or soccer ball.

The martial arts have their own mystical mix of abstract and concrete inextricably woven into the fabric of the art.

Dr. Michael Trulson, head instructor of the Texas A&M Moo Duk Kwan Tae Kwon Do Club, says this Korean martial art offers a person more than just protection.

Trulson, a neurobiologist at A&M, says the mixture of athletics and meditation found in tae kwon do appear to change the way a person deals with the world around him.

"The meditating is very important," Trulson says. "We have it at the beginning and the end of each practice session."

"It serves a number of purposes. It makes you focus your attention on the exercise to come. (It is necessary) because, if you lose your concentration for a split second, that's all it takes. You could lose a point (in competition) or it could be a matter of life or death."

Meditation positions used by the club members are either a kneeling position or crossed leg position. The meditation position is important, Trulson says, because any physical strain will distract the student.

Each sense of the body is deprived of outside stimulus to allow for an inward focus, Trulson says. Eyes are closed, the practice gym is completely quiet and Trulson tells his students to concentrate on what is in their minds.

"Most are students that come to the class," Trulson says, "so I tell them to forget about tests, girlfriends and automobiles."

"I have them think of their goals and why they are here. A lot of people, after a couple of meditation sessions, find they can define goals a lot better."

Trulson has scientific research to back up his own personal ob-

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— Dr. Michael Trulson, martial arts instructor

servations in the personality development of martial arts students.

His study indicates that martial arts training leads to a positive increase in 15 measured personality traits.

Trulson published the results of his study in the January, 1985 issue of *Psychology Today*.

Trulson administered a standard personality test, the Jackson Personality Inventory, to measure the change in some listed characteristics. Trulson cautions that the data collected will be followed up with more research.

Trulson tested high school and college students, businessmen, housewives, doctors and unemployed laborers.

The test subjects were not told it was a study related to martial arts.

The results, based on 15 personality characteristics, found an increase in the responsibility of the martial arts subjects.

Trulson says there was a positive correlation between the length of time a person had been involved in martial arts (the rank attained) and the strength of their responsibility increase.

Trulson also found an increase in self-esteem, social adroitness (handling awkward situations) and energy level in the subjects studied.

"I found a decrease in the willingness to take risks, they're more conservative," Trulson says. "I'm still studying it. I think it could be related to the training (martial arts students do) to protect themselves."

Trulson says the decreased risk-taking is an obvious spin-off

of the tae kwon do training.

He says students are taught the best way to protect themselves is to avoid situations that might force them to use their self-defense training, keeping their guard up.

Linked with this tendency to avoid confrontation, Trulson says the subjects he studied showed less aggressive tendencies, contrary to popular belief.

"That's less aggressive not more passive," Trulson clarifies. "The general public views the martial arts as aggressive, violent behavior. I teach my students they have a responsibility to avoid confrontation at all costs."

Scott Negron, a member of the A&M club, says he's noticed changes in his own personality that he attributes, in part, to tae kwon do.

"Once you are up to a higher belt," Negron says, "you are, in effect, a dangerous weapon."

"If you had a bad day or a bad test, you don't want someone to blow his fuse and go out and break someone's rib or something. It takes a whole lot to get us (martial arts students) into a fight. We can take a lot of humiliation."

Negron has been involved in martial arts programs for five years, and he will be testing for his black belt in the fall. Negron says one segment of the testing for the black belt is to see the level of emotional pressure an applicant can take.

"Either I don't fight at all," Negron says, "or I fight for good."

The test subjects showed an increase in the respect for orthodoxy, or a tendency of the subjects to be less "radical," Trulson says.

"(Students are taught) to have a respect for traditional customs and beliefs — the Oriental views," Trulson says. "That doesn't mean they go along with everything."

There is heavy emphasis placed on discipline and respect. Students bow to instructors and instructors bow back. It is a mutual thing.

Trulson says tae kwon do teaches a person to respect human life above all other things, a definite "sweet spot" of the sport.

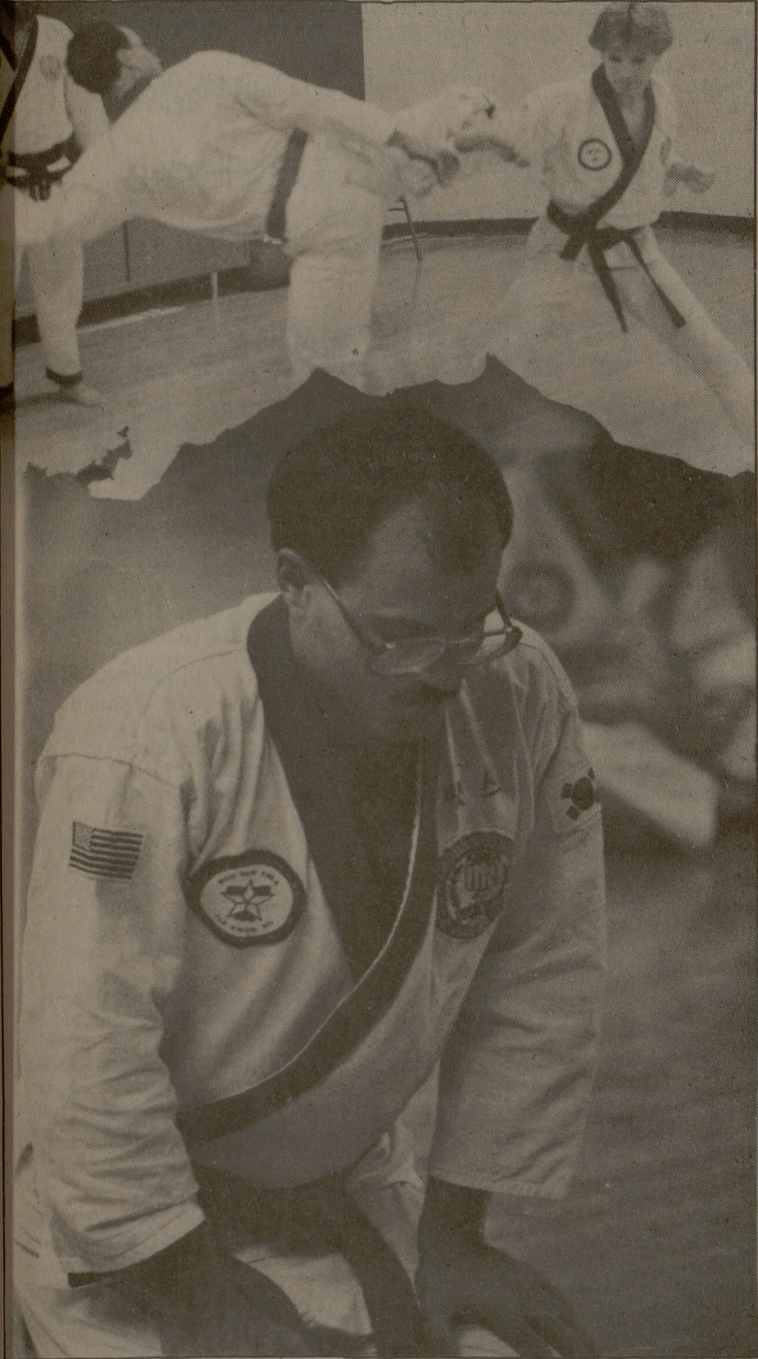


Photo by GREG BAILEY

Meditation, as illustrated above, is a major part of tae kwon do.

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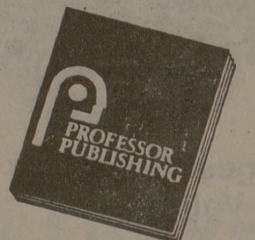
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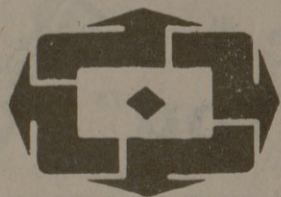
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