

Benefits of Taekwon-Do for the Student-Athlete

By Melissa Timperley

“Taekwon-Do is a version of unarmed combat designed for the purpose of Self-defence. It is more than just that, however. It is the scientific use of ones body in the method of Self-defence; aiming to gain the ultimate use of ones body through intensive physical and mental training. Though it is a martial art, its discipline, techniques and mental training are the mortar for building a strong sense of justice, fortitude, humility and resolve” (International Taekwon-Do [ITKD], 2014b). While the physical aspects of the art are what we attribute to successful development, it is the mental training and moral aspects afforded through teachings of the “Do” which I believe have assisted me outside of Taekwon-Do as a student-athlete.

The life of a student-athlete can be demanding both physically and mentally. Finding a healthy, acceptable balance between academic, sporting elements and other segments of ones life is therefore not easy to achieve. Over-emphasis on one area can cause detrimental imbalances, with worst case scenarios including getting a low mark on an assignment, failing a paper at university, or loosing first round at a major competition, to name a few. The term ‘student-athlete’ is predominately associated with American sport scholarship recipients, however New Zealand universities also tend to use this term to describe those people who are balancing studying full-time in their chosen field while also choosing to compete at an elite level (Auckland University of Technology [AUT], 2015).

Being a student-athlete has become a relatively common lifestyle choice among Taekwon-Do practitioners on the New Zealand national team. For the past four years I was identified by AUT University as a student-athlete, continuing to compete for New Zealand while completing both my undergraduate and post-graduate degrees. Personally, becoming this student-athlete was not a conscious decision. After completing high school, the next logical step was to continue onto university, gaining the required qualifications for my chosen career path. By this stage, the art and sporting aspects of Taekwon-Do were already a huge influence within my life and therefore

unconsciously I desired to continue training and competing in the art. It was a natural progression to continue studying whilst competing after completing my senior years at Rosehill College. In the third year of my Bachelors with the increased workload, the impact of the “Do” significantly affected my approach to the academic facets. I realised adaptations in the way I approached both my training and study load were required to maintain balance, while gaining the most from both areas. But at the end of the day my reasoning for becoming a student-athlete will be very different from others. Some will consciously choose this pathway, while others may not. Some will consciously seek to find a balance between all areas of their life, while others may instead use trial and error. Some will breeze through and some will struggle. Each individual will find a different way to cope with the stresses with which are afforded by being both a student seeking higher education and an elite athlete who aims to be World Champion. However, I have constructed this essay with the belief that with the right amount of determination it is possible to be a successful student-athlete through Taekwon-Do.

This essay has been constructed to provide some insight into some of the qualities which I believe are important when finding a healthy balance between study, sport and the wider aspect of a social life. First, I will cover the benefits of managing physical exercise and academic study, before looking at how the tenets assist a student-athlete. I have then identified six key attributes which I believe are important considerations when managing this kind of lifestyle, before finally introducing two other successful student-athletes and their experiences.

Benefits of managing physical exercise and academic study

Firstly, I want to touch on why physical exercise and academic study offer a symbiotic relationship. While attending high school and university, I would attend scheduled classes from 8am till 3pm, only to continue with homework and assignments well into the evening. I found sitting while staring at computer screens for long periods was detrimental, creating regular mind-blanks. Instead of staring at the screen waiting for inspiration, I always found a small bout of

physical exertion or attending training allowed the blood (and ideas) to flow freely. Following exercise I felt re-invigorated with a wealth of ideas, ready to continue, however I never really understood the science behind the way I felt. I have always advocated physical activity while studying within a high stress setting. According to Colzato, Szapora, Pannekoek and Hommel (2013), people sometimes overcome such mental blocks and lack of inspiration through the use of bodily movements, however the effect will vary from person to person. Research indicates that while physical activity is important for our health, exercise also alters the brain enhancing the protection of our memory and thinking skills (Goodman, 2014). Studies have been conducted, proving that aerobic exercise can help increase an area in your brain known as the hippocampus, which is responsible for verbal memory and learning (Goodman, 2014). Exercise has also been found to enhance a person's mood and improve their sleep, which in turn leads to a decrease in anxiety and subsequent stress (Goodman, 2014). This knowledge of how exercise enhances the capabilities and processes of the brain and body functions should be of utmost importance to any student wishing to do well in their chosen studies, providing benefits across the board.

How the life-teachings of a Martial Art assist student-athletes

“The life of a human being, perhaps 100 years, can be considered as a day when compared with eternity. Therefore, we mortals are no more than simple travellers who pass by the eternal years of an eon in a day. It is evident that no one can live more than a limited amount of time. Nevertheless, most people foolishly enslave themselves to materialism as if they could live for thousands of years. And some people strive to bequeath a good spiritual legacy for coming generations, in this way, gaining immortality. Obviously, the spirit is perpetual while material is not. Therefore, what we can do to leave behind something for the welfare of mankind is, perhaps, the most important thing in our lives. Here I leave Taekwon-Do for mankind as a trace of man of the late 20th century. The 24 patterns represent 24 hours, one day, or all my life.”

– General Choi Hong Hi (1995)

First and foremost, Taekwon-Do is a martial art and a way of life with an emphasis on traditional core values and techniques, following a specific composition cycle. Practitioners learn fundamental movements, which then evolve into patterns, sparring, dallyon and ultimately self-defence through systems and techniques which are so closely interrelated that it is impossible to segregate the phases as the cycle is continually growing (International Taekwon-Do [ITKD], 2014a). Alongside the martial art practices, Taekwon-Do has also been developed into a sport, offering competitions for all ages with events such as patterns, sparring, special technique, power breaking, pre-arranged and team events at regional, national and international levels. I have heard some practitioners suggesting that those involved in the sporting element have failed to grasp the meaning of the martial art. However, during my time as a student-athlete I have realised how much the “Do” aspects of the art supports the training and balance of both a student and an athlete.

The term “Tae” means jumping or flying to kick or smash with the foot, while “kwon” represents the fist (ITKD, 2014b). When combined, “Taekwon” appears to focus on the physical aspects of the art and training, while the term “Do” is joined by a hyphen to symbolise its equalled importance and denotes the art or way (International Taekwon-Do Federation [ITF], 2015). Through the “Do” a practitioner is introduced to the guiding principles of the martial art, also referred to as the tenets of Taekwon-Do which are afforded as a white belt and continue to be utilised by a martial artist throughout their training. The General once stated, “Any place under heaven is dojang,” which suggests the transferable nature and use of these five tenets across all areas of life, not constraining or exercising them solely within the dojang, fulfilling our Founders wishes.

But how do these tenets and values help guide a student-athlete?

The quoted words below, help define my opinion of the tenets place in an athletes training, but can also be recognised and transferred to the student context:

“If I have defeated my opponent but have no self control, can I claim victory? If I have won every competition, am the world champion, but have no courtesy, what have I achieved? If I have

*broken a thousand bricks, but do not understand the meaning of integrity, what have I learned?
With perseverance and an indomitable spirit we can all find the true meaning of Taekwon-Do.”*

- Grand Master Rhee Ki Ha.

Grand Master Rhee Ki Ha's words show us the importance of both the physical and mental training which occurs through Taekwon-Do. We should not view these two facets of the art separately, but they should be merged in all aspects of ones life. Personally, I am not just a Taekwon-Do practitioner, a competitor or a student. I am in fact all three simultaneously, plus more. The tenets of Taekwon-Do (courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self-control and indomitable spirit) are attributes which help guide me in all areas of life – the dojang, the lecture theatre, at home or in the street - each, are fundamental elements to any member within society.

Courtesy (Ye Ui)

Our first tenet is courtesy and obviously important not just as a student-athlete but in all areas of everyone's everyday lives. Courtesy is the capability to be polite and considerate to others through your behaviour, attitude and actions (Oxford University Press, 2015). As a martial artist and an athlete in Taekwon-Do we demonstrate courtesy by showing respect to our Founder, instructors, seniors and other competitors through bowing into the dojang and to each other. Within the dojang we also display courtesy through the language we use - addressing other practitioners as sir or ma'am, or by their appropriate title when talking to one another and the traditional way we shake hands and say thank you after a display or exercise. We are taught to be fair, kind and listen intently to others in an attempt to develop and grow ourselves. If practiced correctly the actions we perform in the dojang become so ingrained in who we are as a person that they filter into our everyday life. As a student-athlete nothing changes, the way we conduct ourselves and behave filters through. Everyone deserves to be shown respect which is afforded in the saying, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." As a student we should be showing a similar politeness and respect to our lecturers who are offering us guidance in our chosen field while

passing on their own knowledge and experiences. It is through our demeanour and our actions that we are able to show courtesy to others. As a student-athlete, we are very time conscious and subsequently also empathetic of others time. Therefore, showing courtesy could be in the form of contacting your instructor, coach or lecturer when you know you are unable to make training or a class. By letting the appropriate people know they may be able to adapt their approach to suit those present at the time. Sometimes it is the small things that we rarely consider which are the big acts of courtesy and it is these small things which can really make a difference.

Integrity (Yom Chi)

Integrity is the ability to distinguish what a person believes is right or wrong and have a conscience when in the wrong (ITKD, 2014b). Integrity involves being honest and having a set of morals which define who you are as a person, a student and an athlete (Oxford University Press, 2015). It is further described as a combination of a person's outward actions and inner values, which could be why integrity is still seen as a fundamental value for enhancing a person's self-confidence (Australian Sport Commission, n.d.; ITF, 2015). Your cultural background and beliefs will greatly influence how you view the world, and therefore a reason why integrity can vary from person to person. It is therefore vital that you know yourself and what drives you.

Integrity plays a key role in both a student and an athlete's life. As students we show academic integrity by citing others work when using parts of their voice as opposed to claiming it as our own, completing our own assignments and not cheating off others. As an athlete, integrity is talked about through fair and clean competition, good sportsmanship, not cheating through the use of performance enhancing drugs, amongst other elements (Australian Sport Commission, n.d.). If provided feedback at training, integrity dictates you will work on what was discussed, aiming to improve yourself as a practitioner, rather than just saying you did. A student-athletes integrity also lies in the quality of their work or the effort they put into training. It is always trying your best, rather than cutting corners or taking the easy road out, although we are all sometimes guilty of

cruising at training. It is however being the best person that you can be in all areas of your life, living up to your own standards.

Perseverance (In Nae)

Perseverance is the tenet I most readily associate with a student-athletes conduct. In order to personally grow, whether physically or mentally, a student-athlete must persevere within both areas if we wish to achieve our goals and successfully survive. Over your lifetime you will be faced with many challenges (including setbacks) as both a student and an athlete, unfortunately (or fortunately, as some people like a challenge) this is the way of life. Whether as a student or an athlete, perseverance does not change. I am drawn to the way the International Taekwon-Do Federation has portrayed perseverance when stating, “Perseverance is the quality that will enable us to reach goals beyond our inborn skills. Nature may have endowed us with the very best ingredients but if we do not practice often enough, in the long run we shall be defeated by that practitioner who possesses the necessary tenacity and perseverance to train and train relentlessly, and overpower a more gifted rival” (ITF, 2015). From the beginning, I was never a gifted practitioner (as I was informed in later years), but I loved Taekwon-Do and couldn’t get enough of it. I am still required to persevere in order to continue growing. I like to think of the ITF’s definition as ‘me’ being both the practitioner and my rival. I am continually looking for constructive criticism, however we are our own worst critics, and also that little voice which says, “you can do it.” If my technique isn’t correct, I’ll have words with myself – “I can do better than that”. It may sound crazy but internal motivation is a proven method for success. I know the voices in my head aren’t real, but they do have some good ideas.

Albert Einstein was once believed to have said that insanity is “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” While perseverance is persistence, it is also the ability to adapt and alter your approach to continue striving to overcome the challenges life presents you, as opposed to just giving up. But how does this relate to the student? Whilst studying there

have been numerous times that I faced what I believed to be an impossible task. For example: In my third year of the Bachelors, I had a momentary breakdown due to my incomplete research project and the rapidly approaching deadline. Instead of giving up (which at the time seemed a good option), I re-focused and devised a plan to address the affronted challenges, knuckled down and got it done. With support and perseverance I overcame my self-doubts which would have led to failure. Through sweat, tears, perseverance and indomitable spirit, I achieved my goal and completed my project. Like I have said previously, the life of a student-athlete is not easy and therefore instilling perseverance is a constant. As Confucius once said, “Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but rising every time we fall.”

Self-Control (Guk Gi)

The Oxford Dictionary defines self-control as “the ability to control oneself, in particular one’s emotions and desires, especially in difficult situations (Oxford University Press, 2015).” In a Taekwon-Do setting, this tenet is essential as we ultimately learn how to channel our emotions in a positive way in order to prevent unwanted outbreaks and violence (ITF, 2015). When participating in a martial art, it is important to control oneself especially during exercises which require two people to practice without causing injury or distress to one another (such as free sparring and in some instances self-defence). In these exchanges you learn of your own abilities and limitations, but also that of others. This is what I believe to be true self-control, when you realise the level and limits of others and can adapt for the benefit of everyone. According to Lao-Tzu “the term of stronger is the person who wins over oneself rather than someone else (ITKD, 2014b).” Of course physical self-control is an important consideration for an athlete training in martial arts, however mental preparedness can be observed alongside this physical self-control. When training with others, you learn your boundaries and therefore your level of self-control which can then be transferred into other areas of life. As an athlete looking to maintain their weight for a sparring division, self-control is the ability to stick to your set nutritional plan, not sneaking the other food

you so desire. This is actually really hard for some people, myself included. It is about realising what your temptations or weaknesses are and finding ways to transfer that energy and control them.

While our athlete context would encourage this form of self-control, as a student this tenet could be viewed in a number of other ways. For example when researching information for an assignment or studying for an upcoming exam, the person who is not drawn to opening social media or any sites not directly associated with the research topic demonstrates self-control. Again you need to realise what tempts you and manage yourself accordingly. I always found allowing pre-determined breaks helped control unproductive urges. Self-control is one of those aspects that requires constant management and thought until it becomes ingrained. Of course self-control can be transferred into other areas.

Indomitable Spirit (Baekjul Boolgood)

Impossible to subdue or defeat (Oxford University Press, 2015), a person who demonstrates indomitable spirit is one who exhibits determination and courage to make wise choices and overcome fear (ITF, 2015). Sometimes your goals will seem unattainable, but despite the possibility of obstacles or potential failures, it is endeavouring to work towards success anyway. I never knew what awaited me as a student-athlete. As I previously mentioned, the choice to become one was not conscious, I just believed it to was the appropriate progression. As a student-athlete I was unsure what challenges I would face, all I knew is what I had heard, this life was not easy and would require sacrifices along the way. It is only now, whilst I am reflecting on my time as a student-athlete that I realise the role and influence indomitable spirit had on me and will therefore have on others. Indomitable spirit could almost be considered the tenet which plays an influential role, but from behind the scenes. Your indomitable spirit is essentially your strength to defy what is deemed as almost impossible, unattainable or unachievable. It plays an influential role in our everyday decisions. When faced with fear or the thought of failure in tough situations, instead of giving up and being defeated, the strength from within you allows you to instead continue forwards. Four

years ago, I decided to study further, but at this time was already competing internationally with no plans of ceasing. In order to maintain both my sporting and career aspirations, I now realise just how important my indomitable spirit was in their attainment. At the end I walk away with both an undergraduate and post-graduate degree and in 2013 achieved my dream of becoming a World Champion; perseverance was doing the work to get to the end while indomitable spirit was deciding to study and then continue competing at an international level, juggling both my sporting and academic aspirations despite some raised eyebrows. The decisions and the sacrifices made along the way are all examples of this tenet at play. Sometimes it seemed as though the lifestyle I was living was impossible, but that never stopped me waking up every day, knowing that I had to make sacrifices and that life was not going to be easy. It is knowing that even though you received a lower mark than you anticipated on an assignment and you felt like tossing in the towel, you carried on to improve on the next assignment, always striving to do better, and be better. As Eleanor Roosevelt once said “You must do the thing you think you cannot do.”

I truly believe that the tenets we learn at Taekwon-Do have helped shape me into the student, the athlete and general human-being in society that I am today. I may not have understood entirely what these tenets were when I first started Taekwon-Do (I was nine), we were provided with the words and inadvertently the teachings as part of the club process. However, it is only as time progressed and I matured, that I realise the influence they have had, the foundations they became and the necessary tools they provided to be successful as a student-athlete. Sometimes, it just takes that small moment of reflection to realise the influence the “Do” actually has on us. I urge you to stop, look and see how these tenets impact you and your everyday - your time in the dojang, at work, in a lecture theatre, in the supermarket. I think you will be surprised just how much the teaching we so frequently overlook have impacted us and become so ingrained into the people we are today. I am who I am because of my upbringing within the Martial Art system of Taekwon-Do.

Key Attributes of A Successful Student-athlete

As I stated at the beginning of this essay, the life of a student-athlete is demanding and therefore finding a balance in the academic, sporting areas and wider life is vitally important. In this section, I will highlight six key attributes, which I believe have played a vital role and key consideration during my training and studies. These attributes are time-management and prioritising, discipline, balance, support and sacrifice. The teachings of the “Do” and morals learned through Taekwon-Do can be so intertwined in each other that it is hard to describe one individually without the others. This applies to the tenets and the key attributes of being a successful student-athlete.

Time-management and Prioritising

Time-management is one of the key attributes which I believe requires special consideration when looking at the life of a student-athlete. Studying and training is demanding, effectively combining the wishes of two people with potential for huge internal conflict – “I want to train... but I need to study... but I need to train... but I should study” and so on. Some people may suffice with using a diary and sticking to the plan. But prioritising and time-management is critical no matter how it is achieved (International Olympic Committee [IOC], 2015a). At high school, you are expected to attend class. Upon starting university as a student, you are provided with the freedom to choose and manage your time wisely. If you choose not to attend class no one will chase you or force you into the lecture hall nor will they tell you when to start your assignments. This is very much like training. Most of the time you have the option to attend training, what you want to focus on and vice versa. The choices are yours, and yours alone to make.

While this attribute is essential for student-athletes, it is also a necessary element of life in general. Good time-management is prioritising and not procrastinating (IOC, 2015a). Once receiving an assignment, instead of putting it off and saying “I’ll do it later”, start it. If you complete it early, you create more time for yourself to choose what else needs focus. This could be

attending training, socialising with friends, or even starting another assignment, either way it is up to you. By putting it off, you place more pressure on yourself which may lead to unnecessary complications later. Think of your busy schedule as a complex jigsaw puzzle (Padget, n.d.). All the pieces have their place, you just have to work out how they fit and where their right place may be, creating the completed picture (Padget, n.d.). Practicing good time-management on a daily basis will guide you towards excelling in all areas, such as sport and university. Without good time-management, the amount of stress may intensify and the ability to stay on top of everyday tasks set by coaches, instructors, lecturers and others, may become unbearable. Unlike American University student-athletes, we are not bound by rules which dictate our attendance at lectures, it is entirely up to us to determine our dedication in all areas of life. We are however advised to attend trainings.

When first starting Taekwon-Do I attended everything possible to do with TKD. Unfortunately as I progressed into higher level study and international competition, I was forced into selecting trainings which were appropriate for my current focus. Some nights this meant staying home and working on the academic requirements, others it meant taking a break and training. I didn't want to skip training, but sometimes it was necessary to achieve the final outcome. As the World Championships approached, this also meant attending more competition based trainings. Some nights, I wouldn't attend official training, but this didn't necessarily mean I wasn't training. Instead I would do some training at home by stepping through some patterns or fundamental movements which I was finding difficult, doing some strengthening exercises, stretching or going for a run around the block, before getting back to it. It all depended on what I needed to achieve and the amount of time I could dedicate or what was of utmost importance at the time. Having good time-management allows the athlete to enjoy not only their sport, but also their life in general.

Self-Discipline

Discipline is a very powerful word with many connotations. As defined in the Oxford Dictionary, usually we associate the term ‘discipline’ with training people to obey rules or a code of behaviour (Oxford University Press, 2015). However, in the student-athlete context, self-discipline is developing and utilising controlled and self-motivating behaviour. To be honest, I believe this attribute is probably one of the hardest to master and yet it leads to some of the most rewarding outcomes if utilised correctly. Most people view self-discipline as giving up aspects of what they enjoy in order to dedicate themselves in the attempt to follow their goals (IOC, 2015). In order to pursue being a successful student-athlete we frequently weigh-up what is important. Usually we concur that training and studying are of utmost importance, as they are what we have decided to pursue, and therefore our dedication to these aspects increases while our social life and time for other things we enjoy may dwindle (IOC, 2015). Self-discipline is knowing that I can’t go out tonight because I need to continue working on that assignment or need to fit in a training for the competition which is approaching.

For a time, I believed this was how you needed to conduct yourself in order to dedicate time to achieving your ambitions – both academic and athletic. But over time I have learnt that being self-disciplined in no way means giving up everything you enjoy or living without these things entirely. A day away from the books or the gym will not kill you, it may mean you have to push yourself a little extra the next day. Self-discipline consequently links with the ability to find balance and while dedication is an important aspect to self-discipline it is only one aspect.

Self-discipline is the ability to weigh up your options and determine what fits best with what you wish to achieve, being able to respectfully refuse instant gratification in favour of acquiring long-term satisfaction from achieving more meaningful or significant goals. It therefore transpires by focusing on what you have set out to do, nurturing a mindset based on a conscious application of your choices and therefore strongly links with the time-management and prioritising attributes. Schedule and set aside times for when you plan to start/continue working on assignments, studying

or training. While sometimes the things you plan to do may not transpire, move forward and try again. Self-discipline is about taking responsibility and when setting time to accomplish a task, actually dedicating your time and not procrastinating with other tasks you deem more exciting. It is important to learning what motivates and drives you, using this to your advantage rather than your detriment. Schedule rest breaks and fill the time doing something you enjoy. It could be something as simple as scrolling through facebook or replying to some texts. By scheduling regular rest breaks, you will be less tempted during those times where you are completing necessary tasks. In training, self-discipline is knowing what you need to do in order to achieve your goals and taking the necessary steps to get there. It is about removing or avoiding those temptations which may hinder your progress and instilling a kind of perseverance and determination. It is about accepting responsibility for yourself and your actions, and realising that as a student-athlete you are in control. Through self-motivation, discipline and focus successfully juggling this lifestyle can be achieved.

Finding Balance in Sport, Study and a Social Life

In Health and Physical Education at secondary school we learn of the term Hauora, which is the Māori philosophy of health and a concept strongly associated with an individual's well-being (Te Kete Ipurangi [TKI], n.d.). It encompasses four dimensions:

- Physical;
- Mental and Emotional;
- Social;
- Spiritual.

Physical well-being focuses predominately on our bodies growth, development and care (TKI, n.d.). As an athlete we spend a lot of time focussing on this dimension, continually aiming to improve our physical capabilities and performance. **Mental and emotional well-being** focuses on our thinking processes and how we express our thoughts and feelings (TKI, n.d.). Some athletes spend time developing the mental aspect of training, metacognitively analysing how they process

the information in certain situations, employing self-talk strategies, amongst other forms of motivation. As a student, mental and emotional development is tested and also improved in the attempt to control a hectic workload. **Social well-being** has a strong focus on our relationships with family, friends, or other interpersonal associations. Social well-being also looks at feelings of belonging, compassion and care during social interactions (TKI, n.d.). Within study or sport we interact with others, however a dedicated student-athlete will find their social life suffers, going on the backburner due to prioritising a focus on study and training. **Spiritual well-being** is our values and beliefs which help guide the way we live, the meaning we take and what we believe our purpose is (TKI, n.d.). It is also self-awareness of our identity (TKI, n.d.).

In Health and Physical Education we were always taught to think of the different dimensions of well-being like the walls and roof of a house. Each dimension cannot function without another and therefore the concepts of hauora overlap to create a well-rounded individual. Weakness in one dimension can lead to an unbalanced individual. Finding a healthy balance is an important consideration for all athletes, however it is even more important for the student-athlete. It could therefore be beneficial to consider the different dimensions when attempting to find and lead a balanced student-athlete lifestyle. Having effective time-management in all areas of ones life is also an essential consideration towards achieving a balanced life in the aforementioned dimensions and avoiding accumulated stresses (International Olympic Committee [IOC], 2015b). Physically, consider the amount of training you are doing, overtraining can be just as detrimental as undertraining. It is important that we care for our body and therefore our nutrient and fluid intake, rest, and suitable training regime are essential factors to consider. Mental and emotional balance is vital to our thought processes. If we lack sleep, dietary requirement and fluid intake, these could ultimately affect our mental proficiency which will impact our training and study. I was never one of those students who could pull “all-nighters”. I always found the next day I was drained and struggled to concentrate. Through this example we are able to see how one area of hauora can affect another. Socially, while it is important to maintain good relationships with your mentors and

colleagues, good relationships outside of sport and study are also crucial, once again providing balance. Balance is about finding time for yourself. It is about taking the time to keep in touch with friends. While social media, such as Facebook, is generally viewed as an unwanted distraction, I found it a great tool for catching up and talking with friends both locally and internationally. The term spirituality is usually associated with known religious orders. However, I feel it is about YOU, your knowledge of who you are and being at inner peace with yourself, knowing that you are the best person you can be. Taekwon-Do, I have found, is the perfect place to learn about who you are and your capabilities, and the tenets play a strong part in this acquisition.

In order to be the best athlete and the best student we can be we need to find and live a balanced life. It is therefore important that we exercise a similar dedication to other areas of our life other than just sport and academia if we wish to achieve balance.

Support

Support comes in all different shapes and sizes. For the student-athlete, it may come from your university, family and friends, your instructor and/or coach, however it also comes from within yourself. Over my time as a student-athlete I was very lucky with my support networks and place them in high regard whenever I reflect on my experiences.

At AUT (the university I attended), they pride themselves on being New Zealand's leading sport university and therefore have in place systems to actually support student-athletes working towards maintaining a competitive sport career while balancing academic education through their chosen career path (Auckland University of Technology [AUT], 2015). The AUT Sport Development Team encourages students to achieve both on and off the sporting stage and therefore offers support through a number of services which guide the student through the process and requirements of a student-athlete (AUT, 2015). During my time at AUT, it was always comforting knowing there was someone who understood what I was going through and was therefore able to readily offer advice and support when I required it, be it academic, sporting or other. Nothing was

ever too big or too small. The Athlete Support team advised and prompted, allowing the lead up to be smooth and manageable as both a student and an athlete, removing any unnecessary stresses. I was still required to take responsibility and apply for extensions or talk to lecturers, but I was guided in the process, and I believe without their assistance and support these aspects which we rarely consider would have become a very time consuming process.

In some instances you must also seek out the support you require. In order to keep on top of my studies leading up to a big competition, I was required to take the initiative and develop a rapport with my lecturers. Every semester I introduced myself and told them about my commitments to my sport, but also to my studies – “I am a student-athlete and I represent New Zealand in ITF Taekwon-Do”, was my opening line. If they don’t know about your life outside of study or what you aim to achieve, how can they assist and guide you? Being open and upfront from the beginning meant we were able to determine what lectures and assignments I would miss during my time away at competition, but also how I could keep up or catch up if required. Lecturers are vital to your extensions (if you require them). But while they understand, I would recommend not abusing the use of extensions or other assistance tools, as you may find that when you truly need it, they are less than willing. Again, within this context time-management and balance are key to successfully managing both elements.

Athlete Development Teams and lecturers are important support networks for the ‘student’ component, while your instructor and coaches are central to the ‘athlete’ element. Communication with your instructor and coach is also important, advising them of both your academic and sporting goals and how you aim to achieve them. If they are aware then ultimately they are able to help assist and guide you in the areas which they are versed – the athletic training and management.

I truly believe my ability to find, maintain balance and subsequently manage my time over the last four years is due to the support I received on a daily basis from my family, partner and friends. It was those I am closest to which truly understood what I was going through and saw me at both my highest and lowest points, supporting me through it all. These supporters were my

sounding boards, idea checkers, proof-readers, chaperones, and huggers who constantly reiterated how proud they were. This support was not only limited to close family members, but also included university staff, fellow students, Taekwon-Do mentors and practitioners. To be honest they all helped me through it. At the end of the day they supported me throughout my entire journey and never once told me that I needed to choose. It was this support which made the journey a worthwhile experience and why I was able to continue doing what I love (Taekwon-Do, just in case you weren't quite sure) while preparing to enter my chosen career. It might not be family who provides the support, but I believe it is important to find people who understand your ambitions and can be there for you, supporting you during your journey. My family and friends did understand and were very supportive of my endeavours to achieve in both areas, even if it meant going for months on end without a face-to-face catch up. I was lucky!

Sacrifice

As athletes, you will regularly hear this term. No-one ever said juggling studies and an elite sport lifestyle was going to be easy, and its not. It requires time management, prioritising, balance, support and sometimes a little bit of sacrifice. Like anything in life nothing is for free and therefore we all sacrifice to pursue something we love. In 2006 I chose to pursue Taekwon-Do seriously in order to trial for my first World Championship team. In order to pursue this path I made the decision to sacrifice all my other sporting and extra-curricular activities, dedicating my time to training for what I believed would be the greatest opportunity of my life. Whether a student, an athlete or a student-athlete, sacrifices must be made to achieve your goals. You will soon learn what is necessary and what isn't; what you essentially 'want' to do and what you 'need' to do in order to achieve your ambitions. You don't have to sacrifice everything, it is about finding that balance and learning what is important to you and your cause (IOC, 2015b). However, you must also remember, what is important to you, will not necessarily be important to others. A lecturer may tell you that you have chosen to study and therefore your studies need to come first. Your instructor or coach

may tell you that your sport is important and therefore your training needs to come first. So, which is it? Which is more important? According to the university, in the term “student-athlete”, the student aspect is of greater importance, and this is why its is placed before the athlete (but, I think it’s because it flows better). Setting up my career was important to me, but Taekwon-Do was always my passion. While, you should take on board what others are saying, at the end of the day, finding balance and what works for you is of utmost importance and therefore you need to determine what sacrifices you want to make.

Successful Student-Athletes: A Glimpse into their Story.

Below, Estelle Speirs from the New Zealand national team and Madeleine Lind from the Norwegian national team share some of their experiences as student-athletes.

Estelle Speirs

New Zealand National Team

ITF World Champion

Studying: Double degree in Sports Business and Marketing

“I really enjoyed being a student athlete and actually found they complemented each other a lot, if I was well organised. I was a student at Massey University who pride themselves on being the countries leading sporting university. The university provided me with a huge amount of support through their “Academy of Sport” program. This meant I was given help not only with my training (strength and conditioning coaches, gym memberships, nutritional seminars) but also with my studies through our Academy manager, their role was to make sure athletes could keep up with their work load and not miss any deadlines due to competition, this meant they helped organise exams to be sat overseas if needed or extensions on assessments.”

Being at Massey also meant we had more opportunities to gain funding through travel scholarships. My first two years of study were also paid for through a prime ministers study scholarship. This all really helped as without it things would have been a big struggle not having an income, that is the only real downside is you don't have time to work outside of study like most students do as you are training instead. The day to day life of being a university student was really flexible, I took a few classes extramurally which meant it was mostly all done online, this meant I could train at times that suited me and fit my university work around my training. As long as I was well organised it worked really well. I could usually fit in a gym session during the day between classes and then be all finished with plenty of time to get to training at night. It was defiantly all about being self-motivated though and I could easily see things going wrong if you didn't plan ahead and be disciplined."

Madeleine Lind

Norway National Team member,

ITF World and European Champion.

Studying: Advertising and brand communication, market economy and teacher education

(separately)

"So, about being a "student athlete" – like everything else in life, it is two-faced. For me, the combination of school and training has never been the biggest problem. I have had really supportive schools that have never stopped me from going to competitions and being away for training. Of course, I have a responsibility of learning what I miss out on when I am gone, which can be hard at some points, but as it is my choice to go away, I have to deal with it.

To me, the "hardest" part about being a student athlete is missing out on the student life. I have lost count on how many times I have wanted to just be a regular student – throwing a party at a Wednesday, being social and attending activities in school etc. But, there is a huge "but" – all I

get to experience through TKD makes everything worth it. Yes, now, as I am at my first year in a new school, it is tempting to attend parties and all social the student life has to offer. On the other hand, I know, when I get older, I will thank myself for giving my all to the sport. Even though I have never made close friends in school, because I have to sacrifice a lot where the rest get to know each other, I will have so much more to look back at than "just" lots of parties. The reason I mention this is that a huge part of being a student (especially in Norway, and I am sure it is the same in NZ) is to make lots of new friends and have "the time of your life". I have had the same everyday for the past 10 years – school, work, training and teaching, so being a student is not really the "finally I am moving out and having the time of my life" to me. I don't know how it is to have a "normal" student life, but even though it is tempting at times, I know that what I get to experience through TKD is rare, and I will never regret I put it first.

So, as a conclusion, in Norway TKD is nothing but a hobby, so I can't put more in it than I already do – so being a student athlete is manageable, with a little discipline. Missing out on the exciting student life is hard at times, but I have the best friends from all over Norway and the world, I get to travel to the weirdest countries people can only dream of visiting and in the ring get to feel extreme emotions like nervousness, excitement, joy and happiness, - which are emotions I have not experienced this strong in any other aspects of life. I guess it is not hard to see it is way worth it!

To me the student life is a bigger "problem" than the courses, as I have never had any problems due to supportive schools. Of course, the discipline from the sport is very valuable in school when you have to balance a lot with too few hours a day."

The experiences and attributes I have discussed throughout this essay are all aspects which over the last four years I have found to be important in my growth and development as a student-athlete. Success as a student-athlete is however largely dependent on the person. Everyone is different. The way I approached being a student-athlete will not necessarily work for another in a

similar situation. We each have different ideals, focuses, dreams and aspirations which will influence our approach and our desire to achieve. Through personal experience, the elements I have highlighted are aspects which I deem to be important and therefore may help guide and enlighten others who wish to juggle the student-athlete lifestyle.

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