



The Roundhouse: Headlines from Around the Do-jang.

A recent article by ITF President Master Trần Triều Quân addresses the diminished value of the "black belt" because a few martial arts organizations have lowered their standards. Master Quân sites examples of schools that issue impressive black belt certificates based on nothing more than a payment of fee. Out of curiosity, I surfed the net and was shocked to discover a Second Degree Black Belt certificate made out to John Q. Doe being advertised on eBay for \$19! Now that we have an ever-increasing number of brown belts at our Do-jang, we'd like to use this issue of The Roundhouse to discuss what it means to be a high-quality black belt in the Bailey's Traditional Taekwon-Do organization.

"FEAR is nothing more than False Evidence Appearing Real."

-- Anonymous

Thanks to digitally mastered martial arts films filled with spectacular stunts and gratuitous violence, there is a general misconception about black belts. Some falsely believe having a black belt makes a person dangerous. Others assume all black belts are martial arts experts with superhuman skills. Founder of Taekwon-Do General Choi said, "a black belt meant that person was capable of defending himself." I would add that a black belt in our organization is someone who exemplifies the Taekwon-Do Oath:

I shall practice Taekwon-Do only for self-defense and physical fitness.

I shall be more helpful to my community.

I shall respect others.

I shall never betray a trust.

"Whether you think you can or think you can't -- you are right."

-- Henry Ford

Did you know that, according to an ITF study, only 5% of the students who begin to learn Taekwon-Do go on to earn a black belt? Those students who did had the following personal characteristics: 1) Perseverance, 2) Physically and mentally active, 3) Good judgment, 4) Leadership, 5) Polite and respectful, and 6) Confidence. All of those qualities, along with years of hard work and dedicated training, can earn you a 1st degree black belt, too.

But it's important to keep in mind that a black belt is not the ultimate goal. It is simply one step in a lifetime of practicing Taekwon-Do. The perceptive student will, at this stage, suddenly realize how very little he or she knows.

"It is not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves."

-- Sir Edmund Hillary

Earning a black belt has been compared to climbing a mountain. The colored belts are preparing you for the climb by teaching you necessary techniques and improving your physical condition. By earning your 1st degree black belt, you move to the next level, like mountain climbers setting up a base camp. Only then are you ready to attempt to climb the mountain, where you can reach higher and higher toward your advanced black belt degrees.

"We cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are."

-- Max de Pree

As a 1st degree black belt at Bailey's Traditional Taekwon-Do, you enter a new era of responsibility. Your conduct reflects on all black belts in the organization, and you must strive to set a model example -- both inside and outside the Do-jang. As Mr. Bailey says, "You don't wear a black belt. You ARE a black belt." During a 1st Dan's tenure, students are expected to certify as a judge, attend tournaments & tests, share in teaching responsibilities, and participate in community TKD demonstrations. Expectations increase with each Dan advancement. The higher the rank, the greater the responsibility to demonstrate not only that you have mastered certain technical skills, but also that you are applying the Tenets of Taekwon-Do in all facets of your life.

How high you go is up to you.