

The Doc Is In :

Keys To Improving Your Game

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If you have been reading this column with any regularity then you know that I have written a number of articles aimed at improving your game, whether you are a student, competitor or fan. Continuing in that vein, let's explore the character attributes of accountability and responsibility and their relationship to the martial arts.

It's been my experience that winners in life have very little difficulty accepting that they are responsible for their actions and that they will be held accountable. However, such thinking certainly seems to be in short supply throughout the general public. Have you noticed how frequently smokers blame their diseases on the tobacco industry? Alcohol and drug addiction are now considered diseases. And, obesity wouldn't exist if it weren't for the likes of McDonalds and all fast-food restaurants. You get the idea; it's not my fault, I'm just a victim!

One of the most important lessons learned from studying any of the martial arts is that you are not a victim, and, you are accountable for what you learn or fail to learn, and what you do or fail to do. For example, pain and injury will be a constant companion if you fail to tuck properly when rolling; fail to check a low kick; fail to break fall when thrown; try to load up on every punch; fail to acknowledge a locked-in submission; and, failing to get in the best condition possible when preparing for competition.

In daily living, in order to avoid pain and displeasure, there are a number of absolutes that must be learned. For instance, let sleeping dogs lie; look both ways before crossing the street; and size matters in physical confrontations. Or, as the late, great, singer-songwriter, Jim Croce sang; "You don't tug on Superman's cape, you don't spit into the wind, you don't pull the mask off that ole Lone Ranger, and you don't mess around with Jim."

Because I want you to learn to take responsibility for yourself and don't want to see you in pain, here are some absolutes for competitive sparring. When learned, each technique will contribute to making you a better fighter, better martial artist, and a more mature individual.

First and foremost, get off first. Set the pace of the fight. This forces your opponent to fight defensively, and in very close rounds, favorably impresses the judges that you are the more aggressive fighter.

If you are a tall fighter stay tall. In other words, don't give up your reach advantage by allowing your opponent to get in close enough to hit you and smother your punches. Keep your opponent at the end of your jab to minimize a right hand counter. Don't lean-in far enough to give your opponent an easy target.

If you are a smaller fighter stay small. By moving and staying compact you become a difficult target to hit. Once you have worked your way inside of the opponent, throw punches in bunches. Don't allow the opponent to easily tie you up. If you do, all of your hard work to get inside will have been for nothing.

Don't float your strikes! After punching or kicking, bring your strike back as fast as it was delivered. This will minimize being hit with a solid counter punch. Don't fly your strikes! Put your weight behind them. Use your body as one integrated unit; shoulders, arms, hips, and legs all load-up to explode at the same time.

Nothing will make you tired faster than not breathing properly. Learn to breathe with your punches. Expel your energy as you punch. Not only will your punches pack more power, but also you will minimize the chances of getting countered to the body with the lungs full of air.

I have a number of other techniques to share with you; however, they will have to wait for another time. Meanwhile, be responsible for your success, practice with a purpose. And remember, a professional fighter is an amateur who didn't quit.