

# MASTER NAR AND THE RISE OF TANG SOO DO

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**I**RELAND HAS LONG SINCE established itself in the forefront of martial arts evolution as a centre of development combined with rich martial history. From this small island we have, as a nation, had a disproportionately large impact on the international scene and the development of martial arts globally. From the development of the first European Kenpo Karate clubs and the education of some of the arts finest masters, to the establishment of European and World Kickboxing associations, we've done a lot. And this trend continues as the Korean Art of Tang Soo Do, prepares to make its international mark on our shores as well.

This is due to the work of Master Suresh Nar, currently based in Monaghan and the chief instructor and head of the European Tang Soo Do Federation (ETSDF). I had the privilege to speak briefly with Master Nar on the history of his art, it's development, and it's place here in Ireland, and with Master Nar hosting of the European Masters' Tang Soo Do Training Camp in Monaghan in November, 2008, Ireland is yet again playing host to the development of the very best students and instructors of the martial arts.

The art of Tang Soo Do, is quite recent to our shores, being first introduced by Master Des Galligan in St. Bridgid's Church Hall, Limerick, just under 20 years ago in 1990. As such, many here in Ireland are unfamiliar with the art, and with the lead up to the Masters Tang Soo Do Training Camp, I thought it high time to look more closely at this developing system.

## 'The Way of the Chinese Hand'

Tang Soo Do takes its name from the Korean pronunciation of the Chinese characters . Translated as, 'The Way of The Chinese Hand' this system has roots in various styles of martial arts including those found in Japan, Okinawa, China, and Korea. The most prominent of which are derived from Korean Tae Kwon, Chinese Shaolin and Japanese Shotokan. Many, however, confuse the name with Chinese history, and on speaking to the World Tang Soo Do Association, I was able to clear this up as they mentioned it sounded like a Chinese martial art, because the first word 'Tang' could be interpreted as representing the Chinese Tang Dynasty (617-907 AD), although it has no bearing on the history of the art.

Perhaps the most interesting historical connection is to the better-known art here in Ireland - Taekwon-Do. On tracing back the history and lineage of the art it appears the first recorded use of the term 'Tang Soo Do' in contemporary literature was by Chung Do Kwan founder, Won Kuk Lee. The Chung Do Kwan, along with the rest of the Kwans, stopped using the name 'Tang Soo Do' and 'Kong Soo Do' when they unified under the name Taekwon-Do. Many Tang Soo practitioners today see Tang Soo Do as the original art, prior to its dilution in Taekwon-Do.

## The Journey of Hwang Kee

The Moo Duk Kwan (a particular school of Tang Soo Do), being loyal to Hwang Kee - one of the original founders and great Korean philosophical thinkers and the man for removing the back belt from the system instead using midnight blue - pulled out of the Kwan unification and remained independent of this unification movement, continuing to use the name 'Tang Soo Do'.

Some Moo Duk Kwan members followed Hwang's senior student,

Chong Soo Hong, to become members of a unified Taekwon-Do. Their group still exists today and is known as Taekwon-Do Moo Duk Kwan (Moo Duk Hae) with an office in Seoul, Korea. Hwang Kee learned the Chinese martial arts while in Manchuria and was also influenced by the indigenous Korean arts of Taek Kyon, a precursor to Taekwondo and Subak. Hwang Kee also claimed he learned the philosophy of Okinawan Karate from Gichin Funakoshi's books.

Much like Taekwon-Do, historians have described ancient connections to Korean history to legitimise the art. According to texts published by Hwang Kee, the ancestral art of Korean Soo Bahk Do, from which Tang Soo Do is derived can be traced back to the period when Korea was divided into three kingdoms: Silla (founded in 57 BC), Goguryeo (founded in 37 BC) and Baekje (founded in 18 BC).

After years of fighting and a long series of wars, the Silla Dynasty, the oldest of the three, united the three kingdoms in 668 AD. During this period of civil upheaval, the primitive martial arts (including an art known as Soo Bahk) were very popular as a method of self defence, as can be testified to by the many mural paintings, ruins, and remains which depict the early fighting art and precursor of Tang Soo Do, Taek Kyon.

## The Fighting Aristocrats

Of the three kingdoms, the Silla Dynasty was most famous for its development of martial arts, and perhaps this was a contributing factor to the overall success in the wars between the three kingdoms. This is highlighted by the fact that an early group of young aristocrats who were called 'Hwa Rang Dan' was the major force behind the development of the art. These warriors were instrumental in unifying the Korean peninsula under the new Silla Dynasty (668 AD to 935 AD). The majority of the early leaders of that dynasty were originally members of the Hwa Rang Dan and most Korean martial arts trace their spiritual and technical heritage to this group, as names such as Hwa Soo Do, suggest.

In 918 AD a warlord named, Wang Kun, ultimately overthrew the united Silla Kingdom. He founded a new dynasty - Goryeo (Koryo, i.e. Korea). This lasted for 475 years until 1392 AD. During the 1000-year period of the Goryeo Kingdom and the Yi Dynasty, what we today know as Taek Kyon became increasingly popular with the military. However and more importantly, the art also became very popular with civilians and the general public.

During this period, Taek Kyon was referred to as Kwon Bop, Tae Kyun, Soo Bahk and Tang Soo among others.

Furthermore, 'Mooyae Dobo Tongji', the first complete martial arts book was written (1790) and its illustrations show the sophistication that Taek Kyon had developed in the art of combat. Despite its popularity, or perhaps because of it, the art was eventually banned by the Yi Dynasty due to fear of rebels.

As such the Korean traditional martial arts were taught in secret as one teacher selected only one student throughout the teacher's life simply to preserve the knowledge. Hwang Kee was one of these students. He left Korea and ventured into China at this time. There he came into contact with internal Chinese martial arts like Tai Chi Chuan. Eventually, he incorporated the flowing and graceful motions of the Chinese system with the linear, strong movements of traditional Korean art Soo Bahk and Japanese Karate-Do with the diverse kicking aspects of Taek Kyon. This blend resulted into what is currently known as Soo Bahk Do, the precursor to modern day Tang Soo Do.

In the late 1960s early 1970s Korean instructors were dispatched throughout Europe and Britain and as a result Tang Soo Do can be



Tang Soo Do Master Suresh Nar (right) executes a technique with Master Paul McManus.



found in most major cities. The art was first introduced into Ireland by Master Des Galligan whom met Master Nar in 1991, when he joined the Tang Soo Do Association, which was then under Grandmaster Jae Joon Kim's federation. It was Master Galligan that then introduced Master Nar to Irish shores.

Master Nar began training at 13 years-of-age. His parents didn't like the idea of him 'learning to fight' hence not only did he have to walk three miles to train he also had to save his school dinner money in order to secretly pay for his classes.

The training back in the 1970s was "very tough" according to Master Nar, as his Korean instructor had a very stern approach to teaching, so much so that if you got injured in free fighting it was your fault, regardless of the circumstances. There was no sympathy in his traditional dojang and all students were encouraged to continue fostering an attitude of perseverance. To make matters worse, Master Nar was the smallest student of his class and was subjected to the harshest of the training. However, his dedication and diligent work paid off as he is now a 6th degree black belt and one of the International Martial Arts Tang Soo Do Association's top instructors, and head of the European League.

### Inspiration for the next generation

After 31 years of training in Tang Soo Do Master Nar has received numerous commendations from some of the art's most senior exponents, including his own Korean grandmaster Ki Yun Yi (who he privately trains with once a year to ensure a direct lineage of teaching) who himself, albeit modestly, has been a driving force in the global growth and popularity of this dynamic martial art. Master Nar, speaking fondly of his kwan chang nim (grandmaster), says: "Grandmaster Yi has an aura about him which cannot be explained in words. His knowledge and technique are second to none. He truly is a grandmaster who demonstrates the tenants of Tang Soo Do through his actions. He is constantly trying to move Tang Soo Do and the International Martial Arts Association (IMAA) forward."

Inspired in seeing this determination in his kwan chang nim, Master Nar, in 2007, made a life changing decision. After 26 years of promoting Tang Soo Do in Britain he moved to Ireland, with his family, to further spread this popular Korean art, as taught by the IMAA. Given his short time in Ireland, interest in the art is growing and the All Ireland Tang Soo Do Association currently has six schools mainly around the Monaghan and Dublin areas.

The Dublin region is managed by Master Paul McManus, who has been a student of Master Nars for 19 years. To date master Nar has personally trained six students from white belt to master level and is responsible for the certification of nearly 100 black belts, and he has no plans of slowing down.

I asked Master Nar why he was so



Co. Monaghan-based 6th dan black belt Master Suresh Nar and Dublin-based Master Paul McManus lead a junior class in Tang Soo Do.

passionate about his art and his desire to promote and share something he so deeply cares about. The answer surprised me. I had expected that based on his small size as a



Eamon McNamee (right), a 6th dan Wado-Ryu Karate-do exponent, is presented with his dan certificate in Tang Soo Do by Master Suresh Nar.



Master Suresh Nar says that training in Tang Soo Do when he was a youngster gave him a 'sense of family' and the spirit of camaraderie and mutually desire to learn, educate and help others was very strong.

youth that he studied the art to defend himself as so many do. However, that wasn't the case. It was because of the sense of family he felt training in the art. The spirit of camaraderie and mutually desire to learn, educate and help others was so strong for the young Nar that he diligently trained over the years so that he could pass on this same feeling of family.

### Expanding and changing

In a time when Ireland is expanding and changing its society base, and with it a feeling of detachment and isolation from each other, perhaps Master Nar's art of Tang Soo Do, and its development of the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of its practitioners in such a nurturing setting, is exactly what we need. As Master Nar pointed out, today we have a society built on instant gratification and many martial arts cater to that with easy black belt sales. He believes in a different philosophy, one where "You cannot buy a black belt, nor borrow it. You must earn it". And for today's generation, it's important to pay your dues.

But this philosophy doesn't just apply to the new students out there but to his own black belts, and himself, as well. With keen observation Master Nar explained to me that many martial arts instructors make the mistake of seeing teaching time as their own training time. Nothing could be further from the truth. Feeling that this was too common an occurrence in martial arts, leading to the pitfalls of idleness and ego, Master Nar decided to combat this with the development of a three-day intensive seminar, designed solely for the masters of the art (those above 4th dan rank). Staring at 5 a.m. it would be a grueling challenge of physical training, spiritual discipline and mental harmony, incorporating not only a complete understanding of the art, but of the human being utilising Tang Soo Do, qi gong,

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Master Paul McManus and Master Suresh Nar.

meditation, and more, to balance and enhance each master.

With this continued development and growth, the All-Ireland Tang Soo Do



USN (Ultimate Sports Nutrition) representative in Ireland Renier Botha (left) with Galway-based Taekwon-Do instructor Shane Fitzgibbon.

## USN backs Fitzgibbon

REGARDED AS the leaders in sports nutrition, USN (Ultimate Sports Nutrition) have recently announced their sponsorship of Irish Taekwon-Do star, Shane Fitzgibbon. Originally from Tralee, Co. Kerry, the well regarded black belt has been living and teaching in Galway for the last 15 years where he runs a number of very successful clubs.

Fitzgibbon is a senior instructor in the Irish United Taekwon-do Federation (IUTF) chaired by Master Don Dalton, 7th dan, who has been Fitzgibbon's coach for over 20 years. During that time Fitzgibbon has come to feature prominently in the competition circuit, most recently captaining the ITF Ireland mens team to gold at the 2007 ITF World Championships in Birmingham, England. He also won gold and bronze medals at the WKA World Championships four weeks later.

With a B.Sc. in Biochemistry and Chemistry, Fitzgibbon has been interested in nutrition as well as health and fitness for many years. His research of USN satisfied him that this world leader in sports nutrition was the way to go. With numerous world and Olympic champions using USN across a range of sports including members of the South African rugby team, Olympic swimmers and Tour de France cyclists, USN provided all the nutritional requirements for the Irishman's specific needs.

USN Ireland representative, Renier Botha, said: "We chose to sponsor Shane because not only is he a brilliant athlete with incredible potential, but he also shows a keen interest in knowing the products before he starts using them. Shane is a valuable asset to the company and we're proud to be associated with him". Fitzgibbon also demonstrates his knowledge of nutrition and exercise science with his weekly Galway First newspaper column, 'First Fitness'. During his career the Irishman has won 10 world medals in seven years. Little surprise then that he has won the IUTF 'Irish Competitor of the Year' award again recently, for the second time. USN and Fitzgibbon are looking forward to a very successful partnership in the coming years.

Association has already hosted the Third European IMAA Tang Soo Do Championships and a European Masters' Clinic led by Grandmaster Yi. Master Nar is now in the process of organising an open Tang Soo Do seminar, which will be available to all Tang Soo Do students, groups and associations in April, 2009. Master Nar is also diligently working away on the first All Ireland Tang Soo Do Invitational Championships. This tournament, open to all Tang Soo Do groups in Ireland, will be a great opportunity for all Tang Soo Do students to enjoy that feeling of camaraderie and family that Master Nar feels is the basis and core of his art.

● For further information on forthcoming Tang Soo Do courses, seminars and tournaments, and other details of classes and location of clubs in Ireland, contact Master Suresh Nar (087) 6969215; e-mail: nartsd@eircom.net or Master Paul McManus

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- [www.meridian-acupuncture-clinic.com](http://www.meridian-acupuncture-clinic.com)
- [www.isometric-training.com](http://www.isometric-training.com)

## Graham Connolly tested

THE 2008 WORLD All Styles Combat Organisation (WASCO) World Championships took place in Lignano, Sabbadoro, Italy, recently attracting 800 competitors from over 20 countries at the three-day promotion. Participants, young and old, came together to compete from different martial arts domains including Taekwon-Do, Karate, Kickboxing, WASCO Kickboxing and Kung-Fu.

Irish 4th degree black belt Graham Connolly, and his sister Janice Connolly, also a 4th dan, both senior instructors at the Pyong-Hwa School of Taekwon-Do, Cork, won gold in both the senior male and female Taekwon-Do patterns competition. Later, Graham also claimed the top prize in the men's semi-contact heavyweight sparring division.

26-year-old Graham Connolly has dedicated much of his life to the popular Korean art and is celebrating his 20th year in Taekwon-Do, having recently passed his 5th degree black belt examination in Toronto, Canada when he competed at the Global Taekwon-Do Federation's (GTF) Grandmaster Park Jung Tae World Cup. He tested in front of a panel of masters which included Master Ha Xuan, Master Ng Hooi Lai, Master Wee Sun Ngaiw, Master Harris Bonfiglio, Master Michael Bonfiglio, Master Chris Gantner, Master Vito Palella and Master Dang Kok Wai.

During the course of the three-hour grading, Graham Connolly - along with other senior instructors from the USA and Russia - were as tested on basic techniques, patterns, one, two and three-step sparring, free sparring, self defense, knife defense and board breaking techniques. It was a comprehensive and intense examination but the Corkman provided all the right answers with examiners commending the power and precision of his techniques. The new 5th dan will be continuing his training along with his father and sister, Con and Janice, and the trio will be focusing their efforts on preparation their students and teams who will be competing at the GTF World cChampionships in Malaysia in 2009.



Corkman Graham Connolly, who graded to 5th dan recently, with Mrs. Linda Park, wife of the late Grandmaster Park Jung Tae.

## Busy MMA leg in Kilkenny

THE 2008 MIXED Martial Arts (MMA) League's - sponsored by [fightlord.com](http://fightlord.com) martial arts supplies - first trip to Kilkenny took place to a backdrop of torrential rain all across the country, though that didn't stop the faithful from making the trip to compete, with some players coming from as far away as Donegal. There was a hefty attendance from local Kilkenny MMA students, making the round the busiest debut leg at a venue since the League's inception in 2004.

Every event brings in new clubs to the League and this round was no exception with fighters from fledgling club Blackhawk MMA, Berserkers Naas, and Fit to Fight getting a footing on the League tables. Brian Coyle, of Milford Jiu-Jitsu, Donegal, stretched his ever increasing lead in the 65kg flyweight veteran division taking full points in both matches. Meanwhile, over in the 65kg rookie, division leader Kiran Singh's (Point Blank) failure to attend allowed club mate Enda Fenton and Straight Blast Gym's (SBG) Patrick Holohan to close the gap to just one point ensuring that the three will square off in the next Dublin leg (29 November, 2008) in UCD to decide the division.

The lightweight rookie division produced some great tilts. League leader Ger Coady (Kilkenny Top Pro) added more points to his tally securing the division for 2008, though he'll have to defend against the next in line. Karl Havel, who was hot on Coady's heels dropped three points to Point Blank newcomer Ronan Birmingham, meaning his assault on Coady's lead made no ground in Kilkenny. The veteran lightweight division saw two fantastic match ups between John Paul Soames and Liam Heffernan as they fought each other tooth and nail though neither could get the upper hand.

The 75kg veteran division boasted the most exciting match of the day as SBG's Andre Ramos, who had already put himself on the board giving a Jiu-Jitsu clinic in his first match up for the win, squared off against League leader and Fit to Fight coach Vincent Di Ruscio. This was a classic match up of striker vs grappler and was a tilt had every spectator in the hall on their feet. Neither could edge clear of the other's offence and the competition ended in a draw. Rookie super-lightweight leader Kevin Farrington (SBG) is now six points clear of his nearest opposition and only needs a point from either match in Dublin to secure League gold this year.

In the welterweights veteran section SBG's Emmet Nolan put himself ahead in the division with it all still to play for, while in the rookies division Mark Havel (SBG) and Antoine Mobian, of Point Blank, both earned four points in St. Canice's Hall, which means they are within two points of each other at the top of the division and will meet again for the title in the final round in UCD, Belfield.

Tom King (SBG) put the veteran middleweight division out of anyone else's reach with two more wins in Kilkenny giving him the perfect score of 12 points out of 12. Duncan Deacon (Three Castles) now sits six points clear of the opposition in the middleweight rookie division.

At super-middleweight, Point Blank's Przemyslaw Paluch still leads the rookie division despite missing the Kilkenny leg and Chris Fields (SBG) extended his lead in the veterans. There were no heavyweights to face Piotr Stawski, of Berserker's Naas, so Tom King stepped up to give the huge Polish fighter a match. Giving uway 25kg it was never going to be easy for the courageous King, and Stawski, who showed tremendous agility for such a large man, netted a rear naked choke to put an end to the contest. The League's sponsors [fightlord.com](http://fightlord.com) were in attendance and awarded SBG's Cieran Gavagan 'The Submission of the Day' award for his guillotine choke.