

Preventing WHITE BELT DROP-OUTS

by Evan Israel and John Corbett



Tang soo do instructor Tong In Chang offers semiprivate lessons to ease his new students into the martial arts.

Confusion, embarrassment and impatience are quite possibly among the major reasons why new students abandon martial arts training. In Cinnaminson, New Jersey, however, a tang soo do instructor named Tong In Chang has discovered a very personal and effective prescription for dealing with the drop-out problem. He provides each and every new student with a minimum of 10 semiprivate lessons with the idea that those early private lessons will provide the new student with an opportunity to get to know his instructor and to overcome the clumsiness and shyness that seem to be the innate characteristics of the beginner.

Tong In Chang, a black belt who recently emigrated from Korea, said he keeps interest high among his beginning students by providing them with all the careful attention semiprivate lessons afford. Explaining that his first lesson starts off with a history of the art of tang soo do, the instructor said that his individualized sessions progress through various hand techniques and simple kicks. According to the New Jersey dojo operator, his new students are thus granted an opportunity to overcome shyness, increase their personal confidence and, by getting acquainted with the "hows and whys" of the art being studied, are able to join the group classes with a strong foundation in karate basics.

"Most instructors teach a lot of techniques, fast, fast, fast," Tong In Chang said, "but I want more. I want quality. I want my students to know why they have to punch this way, why they have to move this way," he explained. "I want my students to know how they can use all the techniques . . . in all situations."

Chang, a resident of the United States for four years, said he has discovered that the American public generally was misinformed concerning the martial arts. New students who arrived shy and hesitant also believed that the teaching of martial arts focused merely on the physical—instruction in the proper movements, strategies, punches and kicks that comprise the visible art. He said the individualized instruction at the outset quickly removes students' misconceptions and leads to the creation of a firmer foundation for further work.

Chang's method begins with an introduction to the martial arts and tang soo do during which he outlines the course to follow.

"I teach them about martial arts schools and how they, the students, start," Chang said, "how they can use my schools, how they can learn to control their own minds. I teach them about discipline and having respect for instructors," he continued, "why they have to bow to black belts and instructors."



In the second class, he said, he teaches breathing control and stretching exercises. "Some people cannot make it through an entire workout, so they must be shown how to breathe," Chang explained. And, "The stretching exercises are unique to tang soo do," he added.

By the third class, the instructor said, he shows novices different stances, how to move, and then introduces hand techniques. The subsequent class offers more involved stretching exercises.

Basic self-defense techniques follow in the sixth class, according to Chang, and in the seventh semiprivate session, he goes further into hand techniques.

Front straight kicks, side kicks, front snap kicks, side snap kicks, roundhouse kicks and other variants are first offered to new students in the eighth, ninth and tenth classes, Chang said.

"These private lessons give them the necessary confidence to go into the other classes," Chang continued. "In the beginning classes, they have learned the basic combinations the correct way, instead of learning bad habits."

Chang claimed he has a lower drop-out rate than other instructors. "A lot of students quit karate because they have problems with their style, they are not sure of themselves or they did not learn the correct way," he explained. "If their techniques are not good, they lose interest. If they learn correctly and know what they are doing, then they will never give up," the tang soo do stylist noted.

In a further effort to insure that his students will not drop out unnecessarily, Chang said, he would offer students even more individualized lessons "until they gain confidence and they can keep up with the regular class."

Chang began his school, which he said now has 140 students enrolled, two years ago after having begun his United States teaching career under another instructor. He said he gave his students the same attention he received when he studied the tang soo do moo duk kwan system in his youth in Korea.

"I have been teaching nineteen years," Chang said. "And I have always taught semiprivate classes. I was taught this way by my instructor and believe this is the best way to teach students," he explained. "If the basic lessons for students are not given correctly, then when they get to the higher belts, their later techniques will be in trouble," he noted.

During a lifetime devoted to the art, the native of Osan, Korea, gained martial arts honors—a province karate cham-

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Tong In Chang engages in the rigorous tang soo do stretching exercises that he has used as part of a training program that propelled him to an All-Korea karate championship rating. In his efforts to provide the best for his students, Chang said he teaches all his school's classes personally. He does this to set a proper example for his students to aid in their mastery of the art.

pionship and an all-Korea karate championship rating. Additionally, he earned an associate's degree in physical education from Kyung-Hee University and served in the Korean army as a karate instructor.

While concentrating on eradicating certain mental faults in his new students and providing them with a sound physical basis for furthering their studies in tang soo do, Chang said, his entire teaching method stresses the building of mind power through respect and humility.

"I encourage the student to develop every aspect of the self in order to create a mature personality which totally integrates the intellect, body, emotions and spirit."

Chang tolerates no frivolity during class sessions. Each student must prepare his mind for class by clearing it of all useless thoughts and emotions—these interfere with good concentration.

"I don't allow anyone to talk or laugh during our classes," Chang added, "because the martial arts is a mind-control thing. Students' movements must be in harmony with their minds. If their concentration is not good, then I am not going to help them," he said.

Respect is imparted to his students, Chang said, because he insists that senior students—even if senior by only a day—be given due respect for their status. Chang said respect is owed seniors because of their efforts through their studies to reach what he called "universal mind." This state, he said, produces a person both confident and compassionate and one who would not shrink from helping his fellow man in time of need.

Before much progress may be made toward this higher state, students, according to Chang, must first acquire humility. A humble state of mind allows the student to overcome personal limits of endurance and attention that inhibit his mastery of tang soo do techniques.

Chang said he teaches all of his students personally so that he might appear to them as an example of dedication to the art's physical requirements and ideology.

"I want the best for my students," he said. "I set high standards for myself as well as for my students, and part of those high standards begins with the semiprivate classes."

Realizing that his personal approach places limits on the number of students he may enroll, Chang simply explained, "I don't get a lot of students, but I get enough."



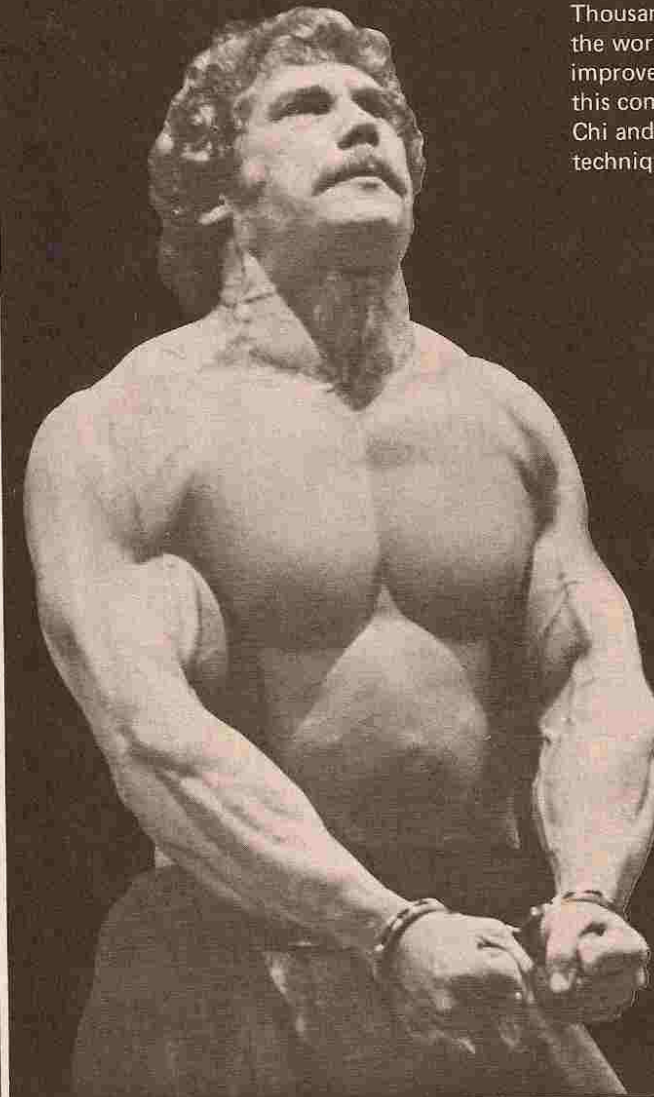
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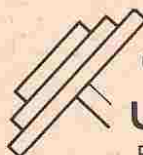
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