



7 STEPS TO BREAKING A WORLD RECORD!

BY LEIF BECKER

SMASHING a world record and claiming the title for yourself takes more than an exceptional physical effort. You must first decide to alter your life and endure all the trials and tribulations that the endeavor entails. Conditioning yourself on a physical, mental and spiritual level is an obvious requirement, but it's only the tip of the iceberg.

The following is my to-do list for martial artists who desire to shatter a world record in speed breaking. I compiled it during the run-up to my second successful performance, which took place at *Black Belt's* 1st Annual Festival of Martial Arts, where I broke 487 boards in one minute. As you'll see, it's not just a training program; it's a guide for managing your mental and physical workouts.

Balance

It's No. 1 on the list because it's the foundation of success. It allows your abilities to be utilized to their fullest potential. It enables you to pull from the strength you have inside. Without it, you

cannot do all you're capable of.

My worst attempt at a world record came from not being balanced within. Before I began, I stood in front of the boards, wondering why I was there at that moment and how I could do something that thousands of people would want to see. I created resistance within myself and wound up in the hospital having X-rays taken of my battered hand. Physically I'd trained harder than at any other time, but I didn't allow myself to relax and achieve internal balance. I attempted to break the record using physical ability alone, and the experience taught me that I was on the wrong path.

Form

Actually, that should read "form and forms." Over the decades, plenty of martial artists have debated the practicality of forms. To practitioners who truly know the techniques behind the forms—much more than just blocks and strikes—they're extremely valuable. That's because forms teach proper form, and when you break,

// Most injuries occur because the breaker lacks sufficient understanding of mechanics and delivery. //

form is all that stands between a successful attempt and an injury.

Body alignment and power development are two breaking essentials that you can develop through the study of forms. Most injuries occur because the breaker lacks sufficient understanding of mechanics and delivery. Form is a constant study of where power lies and how it needs to be directed to effect the proper delivery of force into an object.

Successful breakers continually work on form. Before a world-record attempt, I fine-tune my form by practicing the movements of each break every other day for three months.

Conditioning

It's an easy subject to discuss but a tough one to undertake. The best way to begin is to find the right trainer. He'll tell

Leif Becker poses with the International Sport Karate Association championship belt he received in 2005 for breaking 415 boards in one minute.

you what to do to strengthen your body, and he understands that conditioning is about more than developing strength. He knows how to bolster your explosive power and stamina.

My trainer, Raphael Velez, a world-class martial artist in his own right, opened my mind to the importance of strength, power and stamina. He constantly reminds me that conditioning is not just about lifting weights; it's also



PHOTO COURTESY OF LEIF BECKER

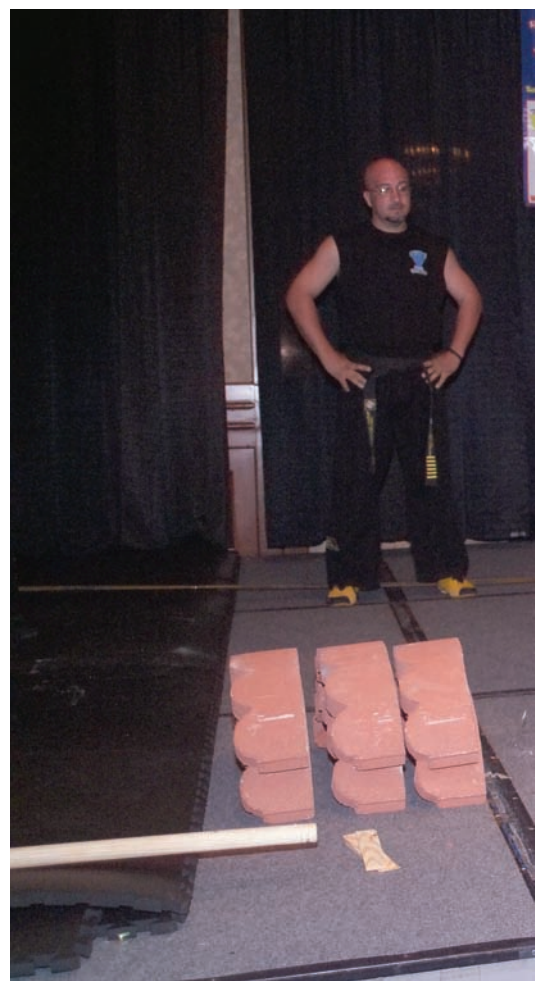


PHOTO BY RICK HUSTEAD



One of the details that must be addressed before a world-record break is how you'll move down the line of boards, Leif Becker says. Low-intensity practice at home can help you learn the motions.

about running long distances and short sprints up to six days a week. He helps me stay focused on achieving my goals instead of on my day-to-day preparations.

Listed below are three drills that will develop the attributes you need for breaking:

- **Walk-jog-sprint drill:** This is the most effective endurance drill I know. Measure off a distance of 100 yards and begin by walking from one end to the other. Then jog it twice and sprint it three times. Once you've gotten used to doing three sets, work up to 10. Traversing the distance in this manner will put you light-years ahead of someone who merely runs or jogs.

- **One-minute drill:** This one develops endurance and strength. First, decide on a specific movement or lift—it can vary depending on what your workout is focusing on that particular day. Perform it continuously for one minute. If you normally lift for power, you'll need to



The study of form enables a martial artist to master the mechanics necessary to transfer the maximum amount of energy to the object of the break, the author says.

decrease the weight to complete the full minute. This exercise is crucial for developing the mind-set you need to complete a one-minute breaking event.

- **Conditioning drill:** Using a *makiwara* board or something similar, practice regularly to build the part(s) of your body that you'll use for the break. When I'm preparing, I strike wood and concrete blocks months in advance to ensure that I'm mentally and physically ready for a full minute of intense action. I set up the materials in multiple locations at the *dojo* and at home and complete the drill two to three times a day.

Timeline

Once you vow to set a world record, you must create a timeline for your attempt. Start by evaluating your current levels and abilities, then develop the areas that need work. Gauge your progress by organizing breaks that involve fewer boards. In the beginning, I started with 80 boards—just to see what I could do. A month later, after sensing that I could move on to bigger numbers, I attempted 200. Finally, after reviewing videotapes, I decided to find an event at which I could try 500 boards for the world record.

An essential component of conditioning, the author says, is toughening the body part you plan to use to perform the break.



PHOTOS BY RICK HUSTAD



The setup for a complicated breaking demo can entail hours of stacking, spacing and positioning.

Three years and four attempts later, I had the record.

Establishing a timeline that spans several lesser breaks does more than just let you monitor your advancement. It also shows you how all the details must come together for the big break. They might include the way you set up the board stands, the direction you move as you break and the orientation of each piece of wood. Furthermore, you'll be able to calculate how much time you need to set up—as long as five hours for 500 boards—and where you'll be able to perform.

Sanctioning Body

This is a must because without the right documentation, your feat isn't a world record. Even if you succeed, it'll be just another demo that eventually gets forgotten.

Know the Details

As soon as you begin your preparations, dig for the details you need to know to succeed—and to make sure your record will remain in place. Sometimes a record is subsequently thrown out because the conditions didn't exactly match the previous record. For breakers, that means paying close attention to the size of the boards and

whether spacers should be used.

Honesty

Anyone looking to create a new record must be honest about the amount of effort he's willing to put into the attempt. Anything less than everything is simply not enough.

Mental, physical and spiritual balance will help you stay composed on the day of the break, despite the presence of officials, onlookers and reporters.

In my case, I never thought that I would stop trying. After my first attempt to set the record—I fell short by 70 boards—I began to analyze what I'd done wrong and what I could change. Such honesty is a necessity if you're going to complete the journey.

Ask yourself these key questions: Where am I in my training right now? Where am I willing to take my training? Am I willing to put my training above everything else in my life? Can I look at each part of this journey as just that—a journey?

Any thoughts that are holding you back must be addressed and removed. Dispense with any thoughts of pain or doubt. Instead, think of the adrenaline dump and the rush of success as you smash through stack after stack of pine boards—and become part of martial arts history. ❧

About the author: Leif Becker is a fourth-degree black belt in the Atlantic Pacific Tang Soo Do Association and a two-time world-record holder for the most boards broken in one minute. His first world record was completed on the Late Show with David Letterman (415 boards in one minute), and his second followed a year later at Black Belt's 1st Annual Festival of Martial Arts (487 boards in one minute). For more information, visit www.blackbeltmag.com.

