

Sport sparring concept in taekwon-do - The Christmas tree diagram

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Abstract. *Combat is a complicated and complex phenomenon. In this process we take actions of different degree of effectiveness. Assessment of these behaviours and understanding the underlying mechanisms are the basis for a sport program created to increase the fighter's competitive level. Competent trainers know that there are five elements that influence a result of a sport fight: being familiar with the rules of the sport fight, strategy, stance, dodging and blocking and applying techniques while you are in motion. Many inquisitive trainers wonder: why a competitor with a great technique, could not apply it during a tournament? Why a competitor who usually does excellent during exercises cannot repeat the same things during the competition? Why the competitor's results change (during one tournament victories are achieved and medals are granted while on other occasions he or she loses even to a weaker opponent) ? Supreme trainer is usually a good teacher and observer. Coach pays attention to learners' mistakes, and tries to correct them. The concept of free sparing enables to break down the process of scoring points. When analyzing a fight it helps to notice, which of the preparation components are insufficient and what else needs to be improved. This is a great tool for a competent trainer, which helps to understand the real, often hidden cause of failure. Appropriate preparation for the fight has many interrelated aspects. But understanding the core of the problem is a first step to find a recipe for victory. We need to remember that record achievements and spectacular victories result from hard and wise work of the trainer and the competitor.*

Keyword: *evaluation of the fight, seeking victory, martial arts, taekwon-do*

INTRODUCTION

Modern oriental martial arts are not only an exotic part of physical culture, but now they also play an important role in global culture and can be regarded as a world wide social and cultural phenomena [1]. Some martial arts became Olympic sports (judo, taekwon-do). The arts are constantly analyzed by science. Researchers investigate their different aspects, looking at them from the sociological, cultural and psychological angles. Finally, they study the biomechanical and physical qualities that can be observed among the martial artists. Martial arts are an important element of the physical culture of many societies. They are a recommended form of spending free time, because making a wise use of sports and martial arts in youth education helps to decrease anxiety and aggression and it is beneficial for the society; it

spreads respect for ethical principles [2,3,4,5].

Combat is a complicated and complex phenomenon. In this process we take actions of different degree of effectiveness. Assessment of these behaviours and understanding the underlying mechanisms are the basis for a sport program created to increase the fighter's competitive level [6]. In karate, kickboxing, taekwon-do, a series of actions leads to the final victory. Expert competitor use means to achieve the general aims (victory) and the specific targets (gaining space, position, point) with the least effort [7].

Sport fight in the traditional form of taekwon-do (International Taekwon-do Federation) can be regarded as a form of fencing with arms and legs involved. The aim is to hit selected parts of opponent's body with a fist or feet using a controlled amount of force [8,9,10]. Referees give points to competitors, bearing in mind the difficulty of a given move. Finally they decide who the winner is. The fight takes place on 8 m x 8 m mat. There are different weight classes, separate for men and women. Each fighter wears a dobok (an uniform characteristic to this fighting style), gloves and foot patches.

Every poorly-judged movement puts the competitor in danger of losing a point or wasting a chance to deliver an effective hit. That is why elite competitors usually make simple but controlled movements [7]. They cannot afford a moment of distraction or chasing the opponent. They make precise movements that are well calculated in time and space.

Taking part in one of many seminars concerning competitive taekwon-do, a concept of free sparring by Master Tran Trien Quan (fig. 1) intrigued me. His concept was in the form of Christmas tree diagram. The whole idea seemed quite exotic to me, but this caught my attention. After a closer look I recognized its usefulness for the purposes of training and guiding sportsmen. Obviously, this is just a fragment of the complex issue of gaining a victory. Still I would like to present this concept to a wide audience.

Before the fight

Training is the means of preparing the fighter. During a competitive taekwon-do fight the competitor tries to achieve three main aims [10]:

1. Gaining points.
2. Preventing the opponent from scoring points.
3. Not committing fouls and anticipating the opponent's attacks.

To achieve these targets the fighter is required to be properly trained [7]. Before the fight the competitor needs to be well-conditioned. The athlete needs to possess features to be able to adequately react to rival's actions, but most of all, the competitor needs to have tools to score points.

There are five main elements that form the basis for preparation for taekwon-do sport event: flexibility, reflexes (speed), muscle strength, endurance, and mental attitude [10]. Without proper mental training the competitor has no chance of winning [11]. Self-confidence is one of the most important elements [12]. If the fighter doubts his or her ability to defeat the opponent, the fight is lost even before it begins. Surely, ability to think clearly and relaxing in the face of danger is important. We sometimes speak of supreme combatants who are able to review the current situation. Even during heavy assault they keep their nerve and despite the pain they can make cold calculation of the opponent's actions and they manage to find their weak spot, to swing the balance in their favour. Advanced martial artist use mental visualization in their training. They imagine advantages situations when they can score points and difficult moments when they seek the key to the victory[13]. Endurance is another feature when you fight many rounds. We are less vulnerable to injury [14]. But mere preparation does not grant us victory, it is just the foundation.

During the fight

Competent trainers know that there are five elements that influence a result of a sport fight: being familiar with the rules of the sport fight, strategy, stance, dodging and blocking and applying techniques while you are in motion [10].

Detailed knowledge of sport fight rules matters. It often happens that when two very skilled fighters compete and they score a similar number of hits (the fight is close to a draw) the number of points lost because of stepping outside of the mat or doing any prohibited moves may be decisive [7]. Obviously, the strategy or tactics play a crucial role. It always depends on the fighting style of the opponent. Generally, you need to direct the fight in such a way so as to prevent the rival from making use of his or her strong points and at the same time you try to put the opponent in difficult situations. Appropriate stance is an important element of a fight. Different fighting contests favour various stances. They will differ for boxing, where you only can hit with your hands and it will be specific for taekwon-do of World Taekwon-do Federation, where kicks are the main tool of a fighter [15]. Each stance is adequate to different rules and gives peculiar possibilities. Obviously, for a fight you have to possess a proper technique of blocking, dodging and attacking.

Competitor that is familiar with these elements and prepared to satisfy these requirements goes into a fight. Now losing or winning is up to the contestant, who is to score points. Obviously the rival will not make things easier, quite contrary – opponent will do all that is possible to prevent you from scoring points. If you are to gain advantage, you have to react rapidly to changing situation, apply techniques adequate for the current situation. You have to control the distance, precisely hitting the areas you are allowed to strike and you must do all this in the right moment.

When speaking of quick reacting we can distinguish a few aspects of quickness. Speed of motion, speed of single blows / kicks, speed with which you deliver a series of blows, speed of reaction to rival's strikes or behaviour. We need to make swift decisions that are quickly verified in the course of a fight [16]. Often a sport fight technique is different from the basic one [17]. Usually it needs to be applied in unfavourable, unpredictable conditions, which is the reason why the behaviour is different than in standard situations. In real fight we describe a technique as an efficient when it reaches the target, surprises an opponent and has big momentum. Whether the blow reaches the target depends on keeping the right distance. It matters both for offensive and defensive actions. Constant changing of distance is a strategy for fighting. For example, you first provoke the rival to attack you from a far distance and then you shorten the distance and deliver the blow when the rival is engaged in the offensive action and cannot defend against you.

Precision is just as important. It enables you to strike the right target, which scores you a point. By hitting the wrong areas you lose the advantage. We also speak of timing. The fighter may have a good sense of timing, which means blocking or hitting in an appropriate moment, not too early and not too late. The best moment is when the opponent is least expecting the blow. Competitors with great sense of timing are able to perform a technique in proper time and place, using the chosen stance.

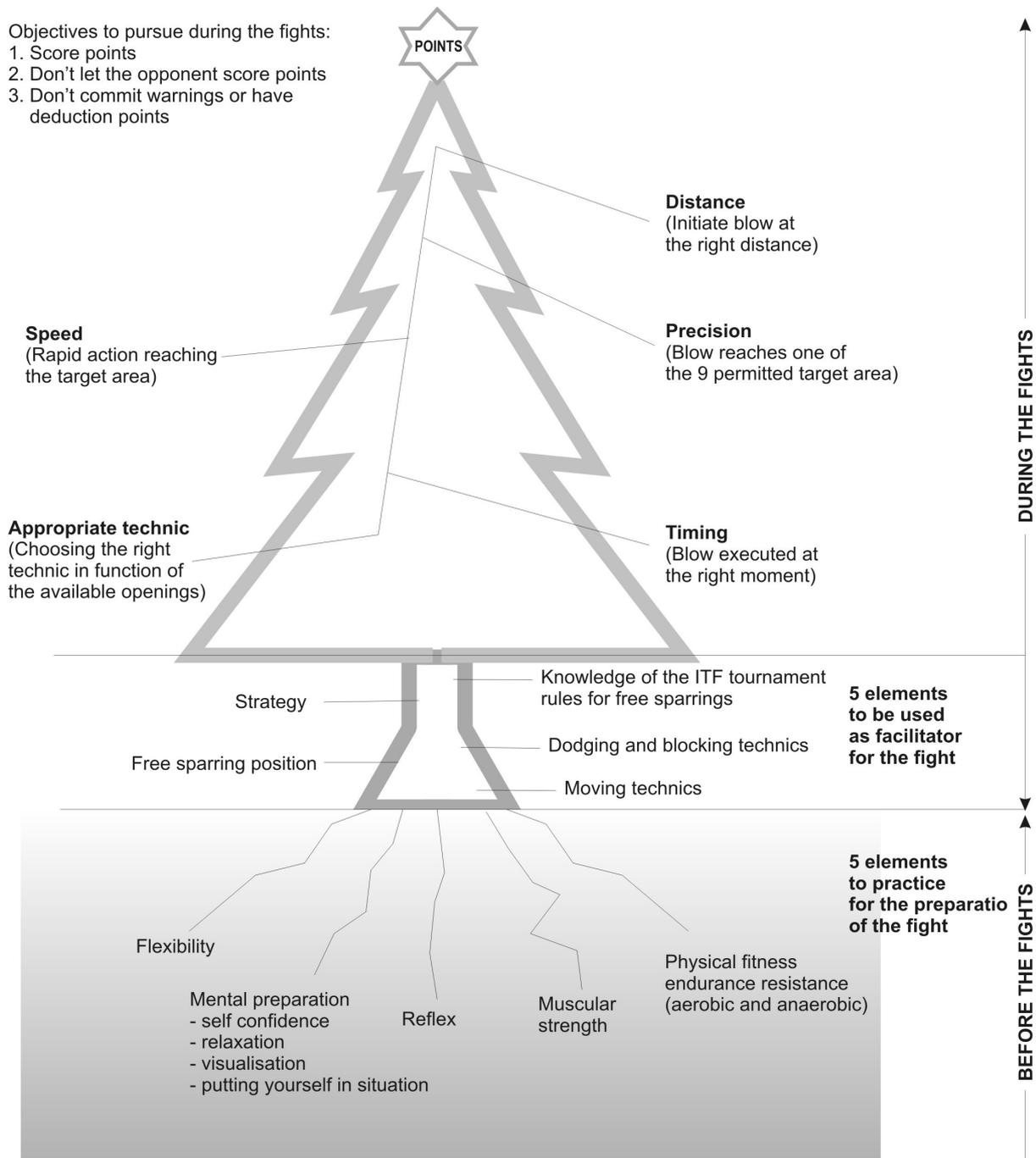


Fig. 1. Concept of free sparring for example Christmas tree – developed by Tran Trien Quan.

DISCUSSION

In complex disciplines like martial art sports the assessment of the competitor's tactical and technical preparation is not easy [18]. Often it is said that "competitor won, because he or she was well prepared, while other lost because he did not train well enough". It is a huge oversimplification of the problem. Many inquisitive trainers wonder: why a competitor with a great technique, could not apply it during a tournament? Why a competitor who usually does excellent during exercises cannot repeat the same things during the competition? Why the competitor's results change (during one tournament victories are achieved and medals are granted while on other occasions he or she loses even to a weaker opponent)? [19].

Every novice learner of the martial arts hopes to become a supreme athlete. Attending the trainings, showing ambition and enthusiasm are the first factors that help achieving the long-awaited aim [20]. The learner is under trainers' supervision and guidance. Supreme trainer is usually a good teacher and observer. Coach pays attention to learners' mistakes, and tries to correct them. The concept of free sparing enables to break down the process of scoring points. When analyzing a fight it helps to notice, which of the preparation components are insufficient and what else needs to be improved. This is a great tool for a competent trainer, which helps to understand the real, often hidden cause of failure. Effective kick or blow is a means of gaining advantage in taekwon-do, karate or kick boxing. Exploring the subject of advantage gaining is the first step in understanding the key of the final victory.

In many books on martial arts you can read about the way you should deliver a punch or a kick. But you will not find a complex explanation of how to win a fight. Master Tran Trien Quan's explanation concept of free sparing is an interesting way of explaining a difficult problem of point gaining in taekwon-do sport fight using a simple Christmas tree. Modern sport is a great creative process. Obviously, the diagram does not give a recipe for victory. It just shows one fragment of the problem. The presented reflections on the subject can lead a way to further studies and can serve as practical help for trainers, who can validate the popular views concerning martial art fights.

Many researchers still try to pinpoint the ways of gaining a victory and try to understand the mechanisms that lead to it [21,22,23,24,25]. Appropriate preparation for the fight has many interrelated aspects. But understanding the core of the problem is a first step to find a recipe for victory. We need to remember that record achievements and spectacular victories result from hard and wise work of the trainer and the competitor.

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