

# The Sporting Warrior

The warrior is mindful of the environment and the conditions that he conducts battle, Preparing, the warrior goes through the same routine time after time, and without the correct preparation failure may occur.

## **Good preparation consists of:**

- Always maintaining a relaxed posture
- The mind is emptied to concentrate the focus to ensure success
- Breathe slowly and deeply
- Visualises the exact movements to be executed with a smooth rhythmic motion.
- Remove tension from all muscles (tension is the enemy of rhythm, control and power)
- Reaction and action of movement starts from the centre
- Maintaining balance throughout the movement, balance must not be compromised for power
- The mind and body act as one
- The execution of movement occurs in a split second.

If you thought I was describing Tai chi in motion, the preparation and execution of an application or a move you would be mistaken. This is how top Professional and Amateur Golfers prepare to make a shot. The setup prior to making a shot is so important and without the same setup routine quality will be eventually desert them. Tennis Professionals do the same, as do many other sports competitors.

**Tiger woods has practised Tai chi and Qigong since a boy.  
Novak Djokovic performs Tai chi daily as part of his regime.**

Modern sports professionals use the oriental arts to give them a mental and physical edge many sports academes use Tai chi and Qigong to improve students performance.

## **Sport stars and weekend amateurs.**

Gone are the days where hours on the golf course or the tennis court, was the only training required. Gym work physical strength and stamina is now seen as only part of what is required to achieve ultimate sport fitness. The sports professional and the weekend amateur now need to have that inner strength and confidence for that crucial moment in a match. This moment or moments may will be a turning point. It is imperative that their technique holds up under pressure, this is the difference between the good players and the champions. It has been proven time after time that success, breeds success and confidence in your ability grows, all sport is defined by good decisions at the right time, a champion makes less errors and better decisions under pressure

## **How does Tai Chi help?**

The fact is that all good sport comes from good balance and posture.

Tai Chi can help with this, as we know correct posture and balance are the starting points of any move performed in a form or defending against an attack by an opponent.

Top sportsman and women use Tai chi and Qigong to help with the clarity of mind and total awareness of their own body, this means that when that crucial moment or moments in a game occur they are prepared. Being in the moment is vital in sport, recognising this and understanding this is everything. With appropriate training better decisions are made both mentally and physically, and improved results will follow.

Adrenalin is both a plus and a minus for the sporting warrior, correctly used and managed it is a powerful tool but all too often it results in poor translation of body and mind awareness in the athlete. This can lead to disaster in performance.

Regularly heard quotes from commentators and sports pundits are:

**"They had a total rush of blood to the head "**

**"Collapsed under pressure"**

**"Nerves got the better of them "**

These comments are all results of incorrect focus under pressure and collapse of technique. The failure of an athlete's ability to recognise and cope with that crucial pressure moment in a match generally results in disaster. (Lack of mind and body self-awareness under pressure)

There is no quick fix and it will take regular training to develop these new skills and apply them in the student's chosen sport. The results demonstrated by several sports champions speak for themselves though. It simply works, which warrants the effort to learn and is why more people in sport are embarking on this journey to learn Tai Chi and Qigong.

### **We as Tai chi practitioners know why it offers so many benefits.**

Bring totally aware of your own body and being fully aware of what you can and can't do.

New skills await the diligent student. Improving mind and body skills as one. It relaxes the muscles and develops overall fitness. If you cannot control your own body you won't be controlling an opponent, ball on foot, racket or golf club anytime soon.

First there is technique, which must be in the sub-conscious first and foremost. The simple focus of being able to deliver unconscious competence is the ultimate goal of top sporting professionals. The ability to simply execute without thought by second nature.

Only by having solid technique, and diligent practice can this be achieved. If you have to think too much, then flow rhythm and balance of movement will be lost. If you have not practised a correct movement thousands of times you cannot hope to perform that movement under pressure in match scenario.

I experienced the benefits of training in my golf swing when I graduated to weapons forms. I had finally started to understand the concept of centred Tai chi, this gave me a new awareness within my golf swing. I discovered that when training with weapons I had to be aware of so many things, this then translated into better overall control of the golf ball. It was obvious really I had to have smooth and balanced movement whether practising Tai chi or whether playing an awkward bunker shot with one foot almost in the air and standing on a 6 foot slope.

### **Tai chi and Golf / Tennis**

The golfing greats knew a thing or two

Ben Hogan, considered one of the golfing legends said **"the Golf swing starts from the ground up "**

You would think golf is all arms you would be wrong. The arms are small muscles and the big muscles of the waist hit the ball long distances and control the quality of ball striking. The arms are always connected to the waist. (Sound familiar)

Golf coaches refer to the centre of the golf swing being like a wheel, Tai chi provides the student with waist and centre awareness. The similarity is obvious, the training of balanced movement from the centre in time will develop better performance for the diligent student.

Tennis, the power and control come from the whole body correctly aligned into the shot, not just the arm itself. The correct weight transfer with the waist and hips controls the ball when on the racket. The feet balanced to launch into the shot all coming from the root and centre. Improving centred balance will increase the technique in which good shots are made. Professional Tennis today is airborne and speed with a balance root is king, first and foremost.

It is considered a given in both Tennis and Golf that its not about the good shots in your game, but how many bad shots you have in your game. This is what is stopping you improving and winning. Removing or limiting the damage the bad shots played in a match is the most important part of starting to understand how to improve. Correct training will in time allow you to recognise when you are likely to perform bad shots. First comes self-awareness of your mind and body then better decisions result in performance improvement.

### **Awareness of Yin and Yang**

Training in Tai Chi requires a lifetimes practice and as we know we are always aiming to improve our Tai Chi, whatever level we obtain we always strive for more. We aim to ensure that we are always able to change our focus from soft to hard, and then be able to change back to soft. This skill is very hard to perform when practising pushing hands but is one of the key skills required to push hands well.

When first learning weapons, I was at first very conscious to ensure I was performing a martial weapon form and not just waving my weapon around as in some lovely dance. My intent was Yang and I assumed that I was fighting an imaginary opponent, it took me years to realise that switching between Yin and Yang focus during moves was as important as ensuring I looked like a strong athletic weapon specialist. This trained ability translated into improving my golf scores as I learned to know when to play golf shots aggressively and when to back off and control shots passively.

I started Tai Chi in 1998, learning Wudang Tai Chi from Katherine Allen and attending Dan Docherty seminars. This journey opened up a whole new world to my understanding of what I could achieve in my sport. I did Tae Kwon Do in the 80s for many years but I had not experienced such total whole body and mind awareness training in any other exercise system that I have in now Tai Chi. I am now keen to promote the benefits of Tai Chi for sport as this will attract a younger generation into Tai Chi. Tai Chi is currently perceived in western society as a activity for older people who do these exercises for health. We all know this is only but a tiny part of what Tai chi as a martial art offers, but it is going to take time to reverse this perception.

### **The most important lesson for the Tai Chi sports warrior.**

The synergy between Tai Chi and sport is now dawning on the top sports professionals, but this has yet to passed down to the weekend sporting warrior or the new young generation of budding sports stars. In time I feel more and more sports stars will recognise the benefits of training in Tai Chi and Qigong. The smallest things offer tremendous benefits. Simply by standing straight, in a relaxed posture with awareness of balance, this will promote relaxed breathing and ensure oxygenation of the blood occurs. Muscles will be energised and therefore the body is optimised for performance. Focused preparation and readiness for whatever is thrown at them, always aiming to execute to perform at their best, this is what the sporting warrior is always aiming to aspire to.

I believe that with the correct combination of Tai Chi / Qigong training, and then aligning this with a students chosen sport their performance will be enhanced. Sport can learn so much from Tai Chi, but our challenge as instructors is to understand their goals for improvement. We must be able to teach the student new skills in which they can relate to, whatever their chosen sport discipline is.

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Low handicap golfer for 30 years (2 handicap)

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