

Cooperation and Teamwork in Hapkido

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I have always thought of hapkido as an individual sport. This may seem contradictory considering that most of the workout is spent in direct contact with another person, but since the focus is on developing personal self-defense that will allow an individual to take control of a situation from any attacker, hapkido appears to be an individual enterprise. In class we base our movements on the idea that the attacker is a collection of small elements joined together that will move as a whole if the little parts are manipulated correctly. We don't necessarily think of the other person. Allowances are made for size, mass, and ability of the partner because the technique needs to be effective, but the only obvious teamwork involved is the effort made to minimize injury to the partner by performing the technique right. Hapkido also lacks most elements associated with a team sport; there is no cumulative score and no "team" working together to win an event. The only measure of performance is whether or not the technique worked.

I have recently been contemplating the cooperative aspects of hapkido and how they translate into teamwork in the art. The further away I get from being a beginner, the easier it is to forget how much cooperation is involved in learning and practicing this art. We learn to relax so that a technique will be easier to perform for our partner and so that we won't get hurt. We learn to try to move with our partner so they will feel how the technique works. Working with a different partner can be a significant change if one cooperates well and the other fights the technique. Without that cooperation it is very difficult to develop an understanding of the movement. At the lower ranks a partnership in class really is a team because so little can be accomplished without the two working together.

This aspect of teamwork must change as we advance so that the quality of the artist is improved. As we move up in ranks we must make more and more of the technique happen because of our efforts, not because of our partners cooperation. In some ways our early learning can be a problem as advancement occurs because it is hard to limit cooperation and force the thrower to do the work. A partner who resists the throw can be really helpful because it shows whether or not the technique is correct. At a higher rank we must cooperate by limiting how much we help and thus encourage correct technique. Throughout the whole experience we are each others teammates even though we are not planning on competing in an event together.

There are many places in my hapkido training where I find teamwork to be important. Primarily there is the energy that we all bring to a workout. My energy level may fluctuate from practice to practice, but as part of a group all working towards the goal of high level performance in the art, I am able to draw from those around me. By seeing other students push themselves on a hard night, or performing a throw more smoothly or with better control, I am able to find strength to push myself to work harder and to keep driving myself to improve. The bigger the group working out, the more I am able to push myself to a higher level of effort. I know that I get much of that extra strength from the people around me. There have been many workouts where I was able to push my partner to work harder by setting an example of perseverance and indomitable spirit. Without their interest in performing as well as their partner, they may not have been able to work harder. It is true that personal pride is a large part of individual accomplishment, but much of that accomplishment is the result of a desire to be as good as the rest of the people we are working with, to keep up with the team.

Master Pak has been asking for several years how to develop hapkido into a competitive sport and until recently it has caused me confusion. Every time I tried to envision it I imagined very short events which ended in someone being broken or knocked unconscious. I know I was thinking of hapkido competition being based on taekwondo competition where a team is comprised of individuals whose points go towards the whole. The team that won in this type of hapkido competition would be the one with the most members still able to function at the end of the event because the winner of each individual competition would be the one who could still move. It seemed that there wasn't a good way to develop it into competition. Hapkido to me is just not a competitive sport.

I finally realized how it can work when the Sun Moon University students visited us earlier this fall. They had just come from winning a hapkido tournament at Harvard, and anyone who saw the demonstration they gave should have a better understanding of how teamwork and hapkido go together. The demo they gave was very fast-paced and highly dangerous. If the players involved did not have a team ethos and a spirit of cooperation they would not be able to perform at the level they did. They were well synchronized and had obviously spent a lot of time working together to attain such a high level of performance. It is true that they were very hard on each other, but that is part of what has drawn us all to hapkido. They also worked very well together as

a team and their skill was rewarded when their demonstration was chosen as the winner. Hapkido competition between teams can work without everyone leaving on a stretcher.

The more I have thought about the subject, the more surprised I am that I didn't consider hapkido to be a team activity in the first place. It has been demonstrated that hapkido can be performed as a team in competition, but it is more important to realize the team aspect of each workout. We perform as a team when one person throws and the other falls. The amount of cooperation may vary depending on rank, but the idea is the same. We are looking out for each others good even when we beat on each other because we are helping each other to develop into better martial artists and people. Our cooperation with each other is what gets us off to a good start and helps us to understand the value of helping each other and those who start after we have moved up in rank. So while we may not be functioning in the traditional sense of a "team," we are still part of a team. Our common goal is the improvement of everyone involved as individuals and as a part of our hapkido family.

Teamwork and cooperation really are a strong part of hapkido. Without them it would be very difficult to learn the art to begin with and advancement would be hard to accomplish. Partners are in close contact with each other throughout class and the cooperation between the two is what makes learning possible. Hapkido is a means to personal self defense, but it comes from cooperation and teamwork.