

Success In International Competition



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Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is not to look at what an individual has to do to succeed at international level, but to look at the team as a whole. By doing this we can see the common links, and possibly give coaches at any level some insight into the factors that induce success.

Too often we think that success is just about the individual, but what we forget is that behind the individual is a lot of support. The support can be in the form of the coach, parents or friends.

The Importance of Competitions

Competitions should be seen as a way of making new acquaintances, and to learn new techniques/ training methodologies from some of the successful countries. It does not ultimately matter whether you win or lose, but if you feel that you have gained some form of experience or knowledge from competing.

Competition should be a way of looking at how well you are doing. Remember that "the ultimate winner is the person that can conquer themselves." In other words the competition itself is a test. If the person can win himself or herself then theoretically they do not need to beat anyone else.

Although there are those who think that there does not need to be competitions to test yourself, it appears that competitions do have their own benefits. Competitions can act as a way of setting goals for certain individuals, which would mean that they stay interested in Taekwon-Do.

Critical Success Factors

From the diagram described by Gilbertson (1998), we can see that there are 7 major factors that lead to success at international level. These factors were compiled after the question "What are the successful factors for winning?"



1. Goals

When competing goals need to be set. These must be in the form of individual, and as a team. The main problem is to get everyone to see eye to eye with the team's goals. Without a shared vision a team will not be united. The shared goal may not be to win; in fact it could be just to give a personal best performance.

Also under this heading is that of communication. This has been found to be very important factor. If you don't know what is going on, you cannot be expected to compete at your best.

2. Drive

The second factor that was identified was that of drive. This is the personal motivation, attitude and desire to win by the individual. The degree to which competitors are able to push themselves is something that will be carried though into all aspects of their training.

Unfortunately this is one thing that the student will need to bring to the party (so to say). A coach can only really guide the student; it is the student's job to bring the desire and attitude to win.

3. *Financing*

As anyone can imagine, financing a team is very important. It is interesting to note that in New Zealand we are a country that is based on having lots of volunteer support. It is also interesting to note that as a result of this we do not like seeing excessive amounts of money be given to elite competitors, as this means that only a few benefit from this money. We need to find a middle ground where we do not offend any of the volunteers and provide support for the competitors at the same time.

4. *Skills*

The fourth factor identified was skills. In most cases the student already comes with their own set of skills; however it is the coach's job to fine tune the skills so that the existing skills are added to make the student even stronger.

This should start by initially showing the students skills and then later fine tuning the skills to suit the individual.

During this stage of the training don't be too afraid of making errors in training, it is only a problem when you don't learn from the mistakes.

5. *Coaching / Leadership*

The leadership roles for the team should be chosen so that you have the right person for the job. By this I mean that a person is not placed into a position just because it seems the best political choice, they should be there because they are the best logical choice.

It is true when you say the coach makes the person. The coach should be empowered to make decisions that allows him/ her to get on with the job at hand.

There needs to be a coach that is able to sustain motivation throughout the build up to the competition.

Furthermore they need to build up a relationship of trust and respect. It seems that it is better for a coach to walk the walk when training a team, as this appears to build more respect towards the coach.

6. Innovation

Although this is not a term that we would generally associate with success, we probably take a lot of this for granted. Just to generalise a bit, Kiwis are known to do things slightly differently due to our being relatively isolated to the rest of the world. Innovation can be in the form of training methodologies, like watching videotapes and trying to emulate the skills from the video, or in the form of the way we psychologically prepare the students for a competition.

7. Infrastructure

It is true to say that without having early identification programmes and development squads, we would probably have the same success as we have had.

The way that ITFNZ is organised causes an environment that actually fosters students and gets the most out of them. The support behind teams both at regional and national levels is phenomenal. I believe that the structure of ITFNZ is one that basically empowers its members to help support the competitors.

Illustrative quotes

The following quotes are from Gilbertson (1998)¹. They are illustrative of the combination of all the critical success factors as mentioned before.

- *Exceptional performance requires an individual or team to utilise all their skills, in order to maximise their performance, which will require exceptional sacrifices but offer great challenges and rewards.*

Ms Phillipa Baker - Olympic gold medallist

¹ Gilbertson DW &DK (1998) *Black Magic: what captains of industry and sport say*, VUW, currently unpublished

- *The right choice of people will help make the right decisions that will go a long way towards winning.*

Mr Peter Blake Yachting World champion

- *Shared vision, and regular commitment to the goals.*

Mr Peter Dale CEO Hillary Commission

- *The result must not give the opportunity to later say "if only".*

Sir Murray Halberg - Olympic gold medallist

Other Factors

Knowledge of the Game

Before a team can be successful it is imperative that everyone knows the competition rules. If they are told correctly a smart competitor will know how far they can bend them without being penalised by the referee. It is also important that all the competitors are used to competing under the international rules and regulations, as they can significantly differ from those the competitor normally competes under.

The old cliché "*a team will take a lot of knowledge and experience away from a tournament*" even if it is not successful is actually a proven point. The experience gained seems to filter down to others, which will make competitors stronger in the future.

In the past New Zealand had been at a stage where most competitors did not have any experience in fighting ITF style bouts. The closest we had was our own unique style of sparring, which looked like stand up and beat the opponent up. There is now more of a realisation that more thinking and strategy is needed with ITF rules, as the matches are more like a cat and mouse game.

Team work

Another factor that leads to success internationally is every member of the NZ squad being able to operate as a team. Everyone needs to know that they can depend on each other, which is especially the case in a foreign country. The creation of a team culture does not arrive overnight; in fact it can take many months to create a culture that is supportive.

The best way to get a group to act like a team is to ensure that it is mentioned that from the outset that one person cannot succeed without the co-operation and participation of their peers.

Communication

For a team to be successful it is important that there are defined communication channels. Without this a team can fall into the trap where no one knows what the others are doing. The levels that communication should exist are at regional, national, and between the coach and competitors.

Any information that is given to the coach should immediately be fed to the competitors to ensure that they know what is happening. There is nothing worse than not knowing what is going on, and if this happens team morale could start to break down.

Early Identification

As well as the critical success factors there needs to be some sort of early talent identification programme. This can help future teams be stronger, as future competitors' skills will be able to use their given skills to a higher potential.

The World Championships development squad is our current way of developing our members to be possible future competitors for New Zealand. Also in the future the development camp held by Mr McPhail looks to extend other students around the country, which will also be a boost to the development of our members.

The main idea behind doing the aforementioned activities is to make New Zealand a stronger international force in the future, and to extend our members to their fullest potential. There is also the added bonus that Hillary commission likes to fund efforts that develop people.

Conclusions

If a team is to be successful the coach needs to be mindful of the critical success factors. If they are they are likely to reap the benefits of success, and act as role models for future competitors. Any experience in competing in ITF tournaments will benefit the membership of ITFNZ both in terms of new techniques that can be learnt, and the links that can be made with other countries around the world.

I cannot stress enough the importance of developing talent from an early stage to ensure that New Zealand has future success in International competitions, and I am sure that with the backing and leadership that we have now this will be a reality in the near future.

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