

The Tao of Martial Arts

strength & conditioning

Text: Ignatius Loubser, Head Strength and Conditioning Coach; hpc Images: Sven Grant's collection

In The Art of War Sun Tzu said: "Tao is what causes the people to have the same purpose as their superior. Thus they can die with him, live with him and not deceive him." The book further explain that Tao is a roadway, a path, the way something works or a recommended course of action and the way something should be done.

I know there are many ways to skin a cat. This rings true for sports performance with as many different methods and training philosophies than there are different champions and their Sensei's (Coach) and Strength coaches. Thus there are many roads to follow that will lead to Rome. This is my road map to Rome that I am suggesting for martial arts strength and conditioning.

Tao # 1

Be fighting fit

To become fit to fight you have to fight. Thus ensure that this is the 1st priority in your training and preparation. You can do all the best fitness and strength exercises and you will become very strong and fit but in the end you have to be able to use all that power, speed and endurance to "destroy" you opponent.

Tao # 2

Lift really heavy

"Your muscles already have the ability to lift a car they just don't know it yet." - Pavel Tsatsouline

Becoming really strong by lifting seriously heavy weights in whole body movements like Squats, deadlifts, rows and presses to lay the foundation for maximum power and speed.

Tao # 3

Abdominal strength

"If you want to feel the burn, light a match!"
- Dr Fred Hatfield aka Dr Squat –

Here you need maximum strength and really strong abdominals. The correct exercises may not cause you to feel a burn, but cause them to feel that they are going to rip apart after 3 reps. This helps you to duck and weave and grapple your opponent and to be able to withstand impact equivalent to a Mack truck crashing into your mid section. Doing Swiss ball crunches and bridging is not going to do the trick.

Tao # 4

Infinitus fortis. Latin meaning "Unlimited power"

Power = Strength x Speed. And to get the best benefit out of this you need to be strong so don't even start on this one if you're not strong yet. Here you need to have built up your strength by lifting heavy weights and also your speed by being able to move medium weights really fast. The infinitus fortis component is when you mix these 2 together for a very explosive mix of ultimate inter and intra muscular coordination.



Tao # 5

Endurance.

Endurance needs to be built in sparring and combining high intensity weightlifting / kettlebell lifting / powerlifting / strongman lifts with gymnastic bodyweight type exercises in a circuit or intervals like the tabatha protocol or crossfit principles.

Tao # 6

“Only perfect practice makes perfect.” - Vince Lombardi –

Practice is the repeated exercise to improve a skill and should be differentiated from training which is to improve strength speed or other anatomical or physiological components. When you are practicing techniques whether it is for grappling wrestling throwing punching kicking or killing ;-) make sure it is with perfect form, intensity and intention otherwise you are wasting time and effort.

Tao # 7

Speed tension relationship.

There is an inverse relationship between speed and tension, thus if you want more speed in a movement you need to be more relaxed and if you want more strength in a movement you need be tight. The catch is to know when to be tight and when to relax and to have full and absolute control over that. The ancient Chinese called this the ability to control Chi, Ki or Qi (Pronounced “TJCHEE”)

So to deadlift a really heavy weight you need to tense your muscles, the same if you want to lift your opponent in Judo or MMA (Mixed Martial Arts)

But in Judo to catch your opponent of guard you need be able to switch from a relaxed state to a tense state in split seconds to catch him of guard and throw him off balance to get him off his feet.

Punching works the same you need just enough tension in the right place to initiate the punch and to relax in the exact right time to move the punch at the speed of light and to tense up again at the point of impact to destroy the target always aiming a few inches behind the target.



Tao # 8

Mens mentis nixus (Latin) which roughly translated means mental stress or strain.

Remember the quantifiable measure of strain that a fighter experiences in terms of time spent fighting will not make sense if you do the math. In other words a highly conditioned fighter that can spar for 12 rounds full contact after a conditioning and fitness session a week or 2 before he goes into a fight will fully recover within 2 days after that training session. But may be out of action after 2 or 3, 3 round at 3 minutes per round (this equates to 9 minutes per fight) full contact fights purely because of the psychosomatic strain and stress of the competition. So be prepared for that!

So if you add the above into 10'000 hours of practice training and competing you should have a Martial Arts Cake that is baked to perfection! 🍰

Ignatius Loubser is currently also the strength and conditioning specialist for the Muay Thai (Thai Kickboxing) world champion and world champion silver medallist in kick boxing as well as overseeing and consulting to the South-African national Judo programme.