



Tasmanian club kicking high at Taekwondo Nationals

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By Carol Raabus

"It's exciting and you get fit and it's fast."

That's how Connor Eagling, 13, describes the ancient art of Taekwondo.

Connor is one of eight members of the Dale Eagling Taekwondo club to be competing at the Australian Nationals in Adelaide. This is his second time competing at the national competition. He says he's a bit nervous about it, but he know how to prepare himself for it.

"Try to think about the fight a bit, how it will be," says Connor.

Connor kind of just ended up doing Taekwondo. It's hard not to when the rest of your family does it too. Hugh Eagling is Connor's father, and he's also the Master Instructor of Dale Eagling Taekwondo.

"My farther founded Eagling's Taekwondo in 1971. That was really pioneering all martial arts into the state, there were no martial arts here before that," says Mr Eagling.

Hugh Eagling has been an instructor of Taekwondo for about 22 years.

"I get a lot of pleasure out of teaching and seeing people progress through the art. It makes a huge difference in people's lives. And I love to see that, especially with the kids coming up through, giving them confidence and the ability to defend themselves."

The club has over one hundred members in southern Tasmania, but only a small number do the extra training and compete in the competitions held around the state and the rest of Australia.

"All the mad ones compete," says Mr Eagling laughingly.

"About probably five per cent of the club actually compete. Most people who do Taekwondo really want to do it for fitness and self defence, not to go out into competitive sparing."

One of the "mad" people who likes to compete is Brandon Servant, 23. He got into Taekwondo as a way to keep fit. He started training for competition almost straight away for the extra fitness aspect, and he says he has learned more about the art and himself through competing.

"It makes you think differently about how to defend yourself," says Brandon.

"People looking at it might think it's pretty violent, pretty full on, but ... you're only aiming to get points, that's all, you're not trying to kill the other person. You've got to be very precise, very quick and also look at defending yourself, so getting out of the way and keeping it all together."

Brandon is competing in sparing at the Nationals. With all the different belt colours and weight divisions combined, there are about one thousand people competing in sparing. About the same number is competing in technical. The technical competition involves learning and demonstrating a number of patterns, made up of a series attacking moves and counter attack moves.



John Redgrove, Peter Sowter, Dan Gledhill, Hugh Eagling, Sally Bound, Connor Eagling, Mai Raabus, Nichola White, Kristen Haines, Brendon Servant. | Carol Raabus

Nichola White, 18, is competing in the technical competition this year. Nichola started Taekwondo when she was about 5 years old.

"Because I've been doing it for so long, it's sort of more than a sport to me. The morals of Taekwondo sort of make up who I am as a person. It's had a very big influence on my life," says Nichola.

Nichola is a first Dan, which is the first level of black belt. Once a person has progressed to black belt training, they have to learn more than just the physical patterns and how to kick someone in the head. They also have to learn the history and morals of Taekwondo. Nichola says this side of the sport gives it more meaning to her.

"One without the other... you may as well go and play hockey or basketball if you don't want to learn the spiritual side," says Nichola.

All the members of Eagling's Taekwondo says they get more than just fitness and health from Taekwondo. They also get a sense of discipline, self confidence, control and fair play.

Fair play may not sound like a strong component of a sport where one of the ways to gain the most points is to kick your opponent in the head, but it is one of the things stressed by the coaches and referees.

"They have to play within the rules and that includes areas that they can attack and areas that they can't attack," says John Redgrove, a member of Eagling's Taekwondo and a referee at the Nationals.

"The role of a referee is two fold really; one to ensure safety for the players and to keep the game moving and also to see fair play."

The Australian Taekwondo Nationals start on Thursday 20 September and finish on Sunday 23 and are being held in Adelaide this year.

The team from Dale Eagling Taekwondo say they are not entering the competition just to win medals. They all say that through the hard training and discipline of the competition, they learn a bit more about themselves and not only become better at Taekwondo, but also become a better person. In the end, they just want to have fun. And hopefully not come home with broken bones.

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