



3. Timing

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What is timing? Timing can be defined as simply being in the right place at the right time. This can be said for all aspects of life and is not limited to the Taekwondo arena. Timing is the ability to understand when and where to be so that you may take full advantage of an opportunity that is present at that moment. In order to understand timing, it is important to first understand several other concepts.

An opportunity is chance that is present at a particular point in time for success or the achievement of a goal. In the case of a Taekwondo athlete, the goal is to score a point. Therefore, all timing leads to the acquisition of points. This is not as simple as it sounds, for there are several ways in which such opportunities occur.

Opportunity presents itself at different times and as the result of different occurrences or circumstances. The one truth is that opportunity is a causal effect of action or inaction. It is the direct effect of you or your opponent's action or reaction to the circumstances that are present at a given time during a match. This is the good news, because it means that it can be created and taken away. You can create opportunity by your actions or by causing reactions in your opponent.

Opportunity either exists or does not exist or is in a state for coming into being or ceasing to be. Competitors are always trying to take advantage of an opportunity when it exists. If it does not yet exist, they are waiting for it to come into being so they can access it. Or, finally, they are trying to create opportunities to take advantage of. I call this the "TAKE, WAIT, or CREATE" model. As an athlete you can take an existing opportunity, wait for one to appear, or create one. As much as there is a past, present, and future, so it is for opportunity.

Since good competitors keep their opponents from creating opportunity, we must spend most of our time waiting or creating the same. It is in this way that timing comes into play and is the final essential piece of the point puzzle. An opportunity that is realized is usually the result of bad timing, or the inability to meet the opportunity when it presents itself. One is said to have good timing if they can perform the two basic functions of a Taekwondo competitor: Remove opportunity that an opponent is trying to access and take advantage of an opportunity that an opponent has allowed.

So, how does it all work, and more importantly, how do you improve your timing? I use the same method for my practice and training regardless of the skill or attribute that I am trying to improve. First, I conceptualize the action in its' perfect form and try to

understand its' uniqueness. What is the primary function of timing? Second, I break it down into its' component parts. What is timing about and what attributes are necessary in order to have good timing? Finally, I develop a series of drills to improve my skills with regard to the attributes of good timing. This plan of attack will work with any skill or training. First, study and understand your goal, then break it down into smaller parts and finally develop drills to improve the smaller part and refine the larger whole.

Good timing requires several physical and intellectual skills, and these can be improved through a series of drills. However, keep in mind that we are dealing with the final phase of point scoring; the existence of an opportunity or the accessing of one that is about to come into being. This column is not about creating opportunity, but merely taking advantage of one that does or will exist. So, back to the fundamental premise. Timing requires adequate or superior speed. Drills that will increase your speed will ultimately improve your timing. Next, timing requires a spatial understanding of your body and attacking implements with regard to your opponent's target areas and movement. In other words, you must be able to position yourself quickly and appropriately so that you will be able to launch an effective attack or counterattack. Finally, you will need to understand your opponent's habits or predisposition towards certain movements. This will help you to create opportunities and score points.

A good starting place is match analysis of good players and games. Watch high-level players or videotapes of international competitions and study the athletes' attack and counterattack patterns. Take special note of timing relative to when and how the attack or counterattacks are executed. Do not focus on the point, but rather use the point as the starting place from which to build outward. By viewing the tape and moving backward from the occurrence of the point, you will start to see certain patterns arise. These are the occurrences or the circumstances, which cause the point into being. Next, visualize yourself in a similar situation performing a similar attack or counterattack. Imagine the different scenarios that might occur during the execution of the same. Now it's time to take this into the gym and develop drills to refine these motion patterns. Working with a partner, develop drills that present opportunities for you to access. In the first phase of the drills your partner will allow you ample time to access the opportunity. The second phase will have your partner presenting the opportunity and then removing it. Finally, in the third phase your partner will try to prevent the occurrence of such opportunities while you are trying to access it. In next month's column, I will detail and outline a full and complete method to bring closure to your timing adventure.