



MARTIAL ART & TAEKWONDO SCIENCE ACADEMY

무도와 태권도 과학 학원

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29. Getting the Most Out of National Competition

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You qualified at the Association level; you trained for months, and finally you're off to the AAU Taekwondo Youth & Adult National Championship in New Orleans, or the AAU/USA Junior Olympic Games in Orlando. So, how do you get the most out of the experience? Here are a few suggestions.

First, bring the right gear! Every year there's someone who enters a ring with the wrong gear for Olympic or Point Sparring, or they forget their mouthguard or protective cup. Don't let this happen to you. Once you're in the ring you've got only two minutes to fix any errors before you get disqualified, and believe me, you'd have to be Michael Johnson to run back and buy the right sparring boots and then make it back to the ring. Especially, since you don't have any money on you. Come in with the right gear. Yes, the color of the gear does matter. No, you can't have black trim on your dobok even if you're a black belt. Check the AAU Handbook, it's a lifesaver.

Second, don't sweat the small stuff. I'm amazed how well things run at the AAU's national competitions. There are no kids waiting to spar at midnight like at some competitions. However, everyone can't be weighed-in at once, and everyone can't compete at 9:00 AM. So, bring a GameBoy or that old standby-a book. The day will go faster that way. Relax, make friends. People are coming from all over the country and this is your chance to meet them.

Forgive the officials. Believe it or not they're not out to get you! What you do have are people who love Taekwondo enough to sit through long days and trying their best to make the right call-on a volunteer basis. These are people who paid their own way so you can have a venue to show your best. Yes, they may blow a call here or there, but if you get a chance to sit in one of their chairs, you'll see how many hundreds of calls they get right. Remember, highly paid NBA, NFL and WNBA officials don't get every call right either, but I'll stack our officials up against anyone elses for trying their best!

Enjoy yourself. Take time off to see the sights around New Orleans and Orlando. You couldn't have better places for fun in your time off.

And finally, every competitor wants to win, that's the first step in becoming a top competitor, but remember this is amateur competition. There's no million-dollar prize money. If you lose, show the respect, good sportsmanship and humble posture that is at the heart of the martial arts. Hey, there's always next year. Good luck, no wait, there's no luck needed, because you're prepared to win! Go get em.