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Complete Guide to TKD Belt Levels: A Journey of Growth and Mastery I first started Taekwondo, I thought TKD belt levels were just colors:white to black, nothing more. But as I trained, I realized each belt wasnt just a step up; it told a story of growth, grit, and small wins that added up. Ive gone through the ups and downs of testing, failing, and trying again, and every color along the way meant something deeper. In this guide, Ill break down what each level really means, beyond just the techniques. If youre just starting out or supporting someone who is, this will help you see the journey with fresh eyes. Check out the latest prize in Taekwondo equipment on Amazon. Success with High Performance TKD: My Journey TKD belt levels refer to the ranking system in Taekwondo. They serve as a visual representation of a students progress. The levels start with beginner ranks and move toward mastery. Each belt has a unique color. These colors carry symbolic meanings, reflecting the practitioners growth. Progression through the levels involves rigorous training, dedication, and testing. The TKD belt levels system was inspired by traditional martial arts. The concept originated in judo and was later adopted by Taekwondo. It is designed to motivate students and provide a structured learning path. The belt colors represent stages of growth, similar to a plants life cycle. For example: White symbolizes the seed, Green signifies growth, Black represents mastery, and white belt is the starting point. It represents purity and a beginners mind. At this stage, students learn basic stances, kicks, and punches. The yellow belt symbolizes the earth. It reflects the articles being laid for future growth. Techniques become more advanced, and students learn fundamental patterns (poomsae). Green signifies growth and progress. Students demonstrate improved techniques and begin learning sparring skills. The blue belt represents the sky. It reflects reaching new heights. Advanced techniques, patterns, and sparring strategies are introduced. The red belt symbolizes danger. It reminds students to control their power and use skills responsibly. Focus on precision and discipline increases. The black belt represents mastery and maturity. It is not the end but a new beginning. Practitioners with a black belt are considered advanced and continue to refine their skills. Check out the latest prize in Taekwondo equipment on Amazon. Success with High Performance TKD: My Journey The colored belts are called Gup ranks. These levels guide students toward the black belt. Each Gup rank requires specific skills and knowledge. The black belt has multiple levels, known as Dan ranks. These levels signify continued learning and mastery. For example: 1st Dan: Beginner black belt. 2nd Dan: Intermediate level. 3rd Dan and beyond: Advanced mastery. Progressing through TKD belt levels requires passing tests. These tests evaluate: Techniques: Mastery of kicks, punches, and blocks. Poomsae: Precision in performing patterns. Sparring: Skill in controlled combat. Theory: Knowledge of Taekwondo principles. Testing fees and schedules vary by school. Students must demonstrate discipline and commitment to succeed. Check out the latest prize in Taekwondo equipment on Amazon. Success with High Performance TKD: My Journey The TKD belt levels system motivates students. It sets clear goals and milestones. Each level brings a sense of accomplishment and encourages continuous improvement. The colors of TKD belt levels hold deep meanings: White: A fresh start. Yellow: Laying the groundwork. Green: Growing skills. Blue: Expanding horizons. Red: Power and caution. Black: Mastery and humility.White Belt with Yellow Tip Yellow Belt with a Green stripe Green Belt with Blue stripe Blue Belt with Red stripe Red Belt with Black stripeWhite Belt with Yellow Tip Yellow Belt with Yellow stripe Green Belt with Green Tip Green Belt with Blue Tip Blue Belt with Red Tip Red Belt with Black Tip Black Belt with Blue Tip 1st Dan 1st Degree Black Belt 2nd Dan 2nd Degree Black Belt 3rd Dan 3rd Degree Black Belt 4th Dan 4th Degree Black Belt 5th Dan 5th Degree Black Belt 6th Dan 6th Degree Black Belt 7th Dan 7th Degree Black Belt 8th Dan 8th Degree Black Belt 9th Dan 9th Degree Black Belt 10th Dan 10th Degree Black BeltConsistent Practice Dedication is key. Regular practice helps you improve faster. Learn the Theory Understand the history and philosophy behind techniques. Seek Feedback Listen to your instructors. Correct mistakes promptly. Set Goals Break down your progression into achievable milestones. Stay Disciplined to Respect the art and its traditions. Progression through TKD belt levels is not always smooth. Challenges include: Mastering difficult techniques. Overcoming test anxiety. Balancing training with other commitments. Overcoming these obstacles builds character and resilience. Check out the latest prize in Taekwondo equipment on Amazon. Success with High Performance TKD: My Journey The progression through TKD belt levels is a crucial aspect of Taekwondo training. Each belt represents a milestone in skill, knowledge, and discipline. The significance of these levels helps practitioners set goals and appreciate their journey.This article will provide an in-depth exploration of TKD belt levels to ensure guidance. 10th Geup (Gup) White Belt 9th Geup White Belt with Yellow Tip 8th Geup Yellow Belt 7th Geup Yellow Belt with Green Tip 6th Geup Green Belt 5th Geup Green Belt with Blue Tip 4th Geup Blue Belt 3rd Geup Blue Belt with Red Tip 2nd Geup Red Belt 1st Geup Red Belt with Black Tip1st Dan 1st Degree Black Belt 2nd Dan 2nd Degree Black Belt 3rd Dan 3rd Degree Black Belt 4th Dan 4th Degree Black Belt 5th Dan 5th Degree Black Belt 6th Dan 6th Degree Black Belt 7th Dan 7th Degree Black Belt 8th Dan 8th Degree Black Belt 9th Dan 9th Degree Black Belt 10th Dan 10th Degree Black Belt Taekwondo organizations like the World Taekwondo Federation (WTF) and the International Taekwon-Do Federation (ITF) have standardized belt systems. However, variations exist across schools. Always confirm the ranking structure with your instructor. Achieving a black belt is not the end. It is the start of a deeper journey. Advanced Dan ranks focus on Teaching skill. Taekwondo offers unique strengths and challenges. Taekwondo and Wing Chun, two popular styles, offer different approaches to combat. Starting kids in Taekwondo is a journey of growth, discipline, and confidence. Parents often wonder: When you are a beginner or an advanced practitioner, the belt system serves as a roadmap to mastery. Embrace the process and continue striving for excellence. Check out the latest prize in Taekwondo equipment on Amazon. Success with High Performance TKD: My Journey Train hard, learn the forms, and pass tests. Each belt needs skill, time, and focus. Learn more about belt testing tips and requirements. Yellow belt is a beginner rank. Its the second or third belt, depending on the school. It shows growing skill. Learn more about early Taekwondo levels. The red belt comes right before the black. It shows strong skill and readiness for mastery. Learn more about red belt training and tips. A 10th Dan is the highest rank. Its given to grandmasters with a lifetime in Taekwondo. Very few earn it. Learn more about Taekwondo legends. There are typically 10 color belt levels (Gup) and 9 black belt levels (Dan). Learn more about what each belt means and how to earn them. Belt divisions are Gup (color belts) and Dan (black belts). Gup ranks go down from 10 to 1, then Dan ranks go up from 1 to 9. Learn more about both. It often goes: White, Yellow, Green, Blue, Red, Black. Some schools add stripes. Learn more about belt colors and what they stand for. Yes, many teens earn black belts with training and focus. Some groups give Junior Black Belts. Learn more about age and belt ranks. It can take 35 years to reach black belt. To earn all Dan levels takes decades. Learn more about timelines and training paths.Founder, Owner, and CEO of TaekwondoKing.He is one of the top 100 martial artists in Bangladesh and among the top 20 referees in Bangladesh.Ehatasamul Alam is an esteemed Taekwondo 3rd Dan Black Belt with over 15 years of experience in this dynamic martial art. Born in Rajshahi, Bangladesh, Ehatasamuls journey with Taekwondo began at the tender age of seven. His passion led him to compete at national and international levels, where he has bagged numerous awards and honors. He is also a member of the Taekwondo National Referee Panel.With a Bachelors degree in Sports Science from the prestigious Rajshahi University, Ehatasamul has a deep understanding of the technical and scientific aspects of martial arts and some other martial arts. In 2022, Ehatasamul created the TaekwondoKing.com blog to share his knowledge and experiences. His articles focus on Taekwondo training techniques, competition strategies, and the arts rich history and philosophy. He also writes about the importance of mental fortitude and discipline, key aspects of his teaching philosophy. His goal is to inspire both beginners and seasoned practitioners worldwide through insightful and engaging content.If you need any help, contact Ehatasamul Alam at any time.Bad breaking in Taekwondo is one of the most nerve-wracking parts of belt testing, especially when youre standing in front of a crowd, heart racing, aiming for that perfect strike. I felt the pressure during The goal of anyone that starts to practice TaekWonDo is get a black belt. This, at first, seemingly impossible task, took me 3 years. Once I tested and passed for my black belt, the next The South Korean flag, known as the Taegeukgi, is more than a national emblemIts a powerful symbol of balance, harmony, and cultural heritage. For Taekwondo practitioners, the flag holds special significance, reflecting the martial arts Kicking, punching, and stretching in a Taekwondo class might sound intense for an adult beginner, but its totally doableand worth it. You sign up at a local school, slip on a uniform, and start learning Its a common misconception that Taekwondo is all about kicks, with little focus on punches. In reality, punching is a fundamental skill in Taekwondo curriculums, critical for advancing through ranks. Even today, as training techniques One-step sparring in Taekwondo is a controlled drill where you practice self-defense moves against a single attack. As a beginner a few years into Taekwondo, I wondered about its purposewhy practice these choreographedOne-Step Sparring in For parents of children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), finding activities that support focus, behavior, and confidence can feel like a daunting task. ADHD, a common neurodevelopmental condition, affects a childs ability to concentrate. Taekwondo is often celebrated for its high-flying kicks, but dont sleep on its hand techniques. Punches and strikes are a critical part of the Korean martial art, offering a dynamic edge in sparring and self-defense. Choosing a martial art can feel like picking a path through a forest of options and challenges. Taekwondo and Wing Chun, two popular styles, offer different approaches to combat. Starting kids in Taekwondo is a journey of growth, discipline, and confidence. Parents often wonder: When your child is ready to step onto the mat. Age five stands out as a sweet spot for most. The black belt is usually what you hear about in popular culture when talking about martial arts. But when you walk into a Taekwondo school, you are met with a kaleidoscope of different belt colors. What do all those different Taekwondo belt colors mean? Where did the idea come from? Is there some rhyme or reason to how the colors are ordered? It gets even more confusing as you might notice that Taekwondo belt order is not consistent among different schools. Lets take a moment to discuss. From the history of the Taekwondo belt system to the meaning of the colors, to how long it takes to reach the coveted black belt, we break it all down here! Though the art wasnt named Taekwondo until the 1950s, traditional Taekwondo is based on a rich history of martial arts going back centuries. Over so much time, its no wonder that there are legends and confusion surrounding some of the traditions. One of those traditions is the colorful belts that are worn by Taekwondo students. The legend is that there used to be only white belts. As the student trained over time, their sweat-stained belt turned yellow, dust and dirt darkened it, and eventually, the belt turned black. Legend also states that it was forbidden for students to wash their belts because they would wash the experience off. Youll hear a similar legend circulating in Karate, Kung Fu, and many other martial arts schools. In reality, all martial arts belt systems are based on the ranking system devised by Judo founder Master Jigoro Kano. As a school teacher, Kano recognized the need for a way to categorize students and show their experience level. Some of the older Samurai arts would award student certificates based on a five-level ranking system. However, there was no outward indication of their skill level. Kano got the belt idea from Japanese competitive swimmers. The more advanced swimmers wore a black ribbon around their waist. Kano started using belts in his school in 1883. At first, there were only white belts and black belts. White belts were given to students and instructors or advanced practitioners were given black belts. Eventually, Kano added three levels under the black belt. These original belts did not look like what we see today. Instead, they wore a wide black (called Obi) that was used to keep a kimono closed and hold a samurais sword. A few decades later (around the 1930s or 40s) European martial artists started using different colors. It caught on and spread to virtually all modern martial arts styles. Surprisingly, not a very mystical or mysterious story, right? It makes sense why the legend version is still popular. There is no standardized belt system in Taekwondo and different styles or schools use different colors. However, there are general 11 belts 10 color belt levels called geup (or geop) and the coveted black belt. There are 10 Taekwondo levels of black belt 1st through 10th dan. However, very few living people have attained the 10th dan in any style of Taekwondo. Most of these honors have been bestowed posthumously. It takes approximately 55 years of Taekwondo practice to advance through all these ranks, which explains why so few ever complete the journey. There are various styles of Taekwondo practiced around the world today. However, most fall under the umbrella of one of the three major Taekwondo governing bodies. Lets look at each in turn. This organization was founded by General Choi Hong Hi in 1966. He taught traditional Korean martial arts to military members in the 40s and 50s before and during the Korean War. After the war, he founded the Oh Do Kwan school and dedicated himself to teaching martial arts. During this time various martial arts masters (9 kwans or schools) were coming together to unify and streamline Korean martial arts. In 1957, General Choi proposed the name Taekwondo and in 1959 the 9 kwans formed the Korean Taekwondo Association (KTA). Choi is considered the father of modern Taekwondo. Soon after, General Choi fell out of favor with the Korean government and people over political differences. He left Korea and went to Canada where he founded the ITF as a separate organization. He continued to promote Taekwondo even though he no longer had the backing of the Korean government. After the upheavals and disagreements with General Choi, the KTA continued to oversee Taekwondo in Korea. In 1972, a joint effort of the Korean governments Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism and the KTA led to the founding of the Kukkiwon, the national academy of Taekwondo. The next year, in 1973, the KTA and the Kukkiwon then founded the World Taekwondo Federation to promote Taekwondo as a sport. This organization was renamed World Taekwondo in 2017 because of negative connotations with the initials WTF. Because of its work promoting Taekwondo as a sport, WT-style Taekwondo is more focused on the sports aspect of the art. It is unsurprisingly the style of Taekwondo that appears in the Olympics and the organization hosts various championships and tournaments around the world. US soldiers were introduced to Korean martial arts when they went to fight in the Korean war. They brought some of the techniques back with them and interest in the art began to spark in the US. In 1969, South Korean Haeng Ung Lee founded the American Taekwondo Association in Omaha, Nebraska. This organization and style of Taekwondo quickly grew in the US as interest in Taekwondo blossomed during the 70s. Today, the organization has grown to include more than 300,000 active members in 21 countries. It is still the most common type of martial arts taught in the US. Though Taekwondo belt colors are similar, the order and ranking vary between the major organizations and styles. You can check out an overview of the colors and ranks in this video. The meaning of the TKD belt colors Now lets break down the belt ranking system of each of the three main Taekwondo types we just mentioned. Well start with the International Taekwondo Federation, the organization founded by General Choi. There are 10 levels though only 5 color belts. The tip of the belt is marked with the color of the next belt to denote the extra level in between each color. The Taekwondo belt order used by the ITF are as follows: White belt White belt / yellow tip Yellow belt Yellow belt / green tip Green belt Green belt / blue tip Blue belt Blue belt / red tip Red belt Red belt / black tip Black belt After this, there are 10 Taekwondo black belt levels. It takes decades to advance through these ranks and only a handful of people attain the highest black belt level. Students generally must remain at each level for a minimum period of time. At that point, they are given the opportunity to test for the next level. If they do not demonstrate the required advancement of their skills (or proper etiquette and attitude) they will not pass the test. In rare cases, exceptional students may skip a level (or pass two tests at once). Usually, this only happens to lower level belts and is more common with students who already have martial arts experience. The Taekwondo belts meaning follow the life cycle of a plant. Lets explore what each color represents and how long it takes to achieve. White is the color of innocence. The student has no knowledge of Taekwondo and no test is required to earn this belt. They are starting their journey. Students must stay at the white belt for 3 months. To get the yellow stripe, students must learn the Saju Jirugi and Saju Makgi patterns and demonstrate an understanding of basic techniques. Students with the yellow stripe must train for another 3 months and learn the Chon Ji pattern to move on. Represents the ground from which a tree will sprout. Roots are being laid during this stage as the student learns the basic foundational skills of Taekwondo. Students train at this level for 4 months and learn the Dan Gun pattern to earn their green stripe. Once earned, they must train for another 4 months and learn the 24 moves of the Do San pattern. The tree has sprouted and is growing. The students skills in Taekwondo are beginning to develop more rapidly, though there is still much to learn. To get the blue stripe, students must train for 4 months and learn the Won Hyo pattern. Another 4 months of training and learning the 38 moves of the Yul Gok pattern are needed to move on. The tree is growing quickly, stretching towards the sky. The students mastery of Taekwondo skills is progressing. Again, 4 months of training is expected at this level as well as mastery of the Joong Gun pattern. Once the red tip is earned, another 5 months of training and the 37 moves of the Toi Gye pattern are required before moving to the advanced red belt. Red is the universal color of danger. It is a warning both to the student, who is cautioned to exercise control, and to the opponent. The students skills are becoming formidable, but they need mental discipline. This level requires a significant amount of mental preparation. Students must demonstrate an understanding of when it is appropriate to use their skills and when to refrain. Students should stay here for a minimum of 6 months and learn the Hwa Rang pattern to get their black stripe. The coveted Taekwondo black belt is near at hand, but students must train for another 6 months before they are eligible to advance. Mastery of the Choong-Moo pattern is also required. Black is the opposite of white. The tree has matured and the student has developed a deep proficiency in Taekwondo. The student leaves darkness and fear behind. Like the ITF, the World Taekwondo system has 10 color belt levels. There are a couple of main variations used throughout the world. One is the same as the ITF with the colored tip being replaced by a colored Taekwondo belt stripe. The other main variation World Taekwondo belt order is as follows: No belt White Yellow Orange Green Blue Purple Brown Red Red / Black stripe Taekwondo students must stay at each level for at least 2 months, with the exception of the two red belts. Students must train at those levels for 4 months each before testing for a black belt. The WT system does not widely use the symbolism of the tree as the student progresses, though the colors are similar. The first two levels (no belt and white belt) don't require students to learn a form to progress. Of course, the student must demonstrate a basic understanding of the techniques in order to pass the test. To move from yellow to orange, students learn Taegeuk Il Jang. Orange to green requires Taegeuk Yi Jang. To earn blue, students learn Taegeuk Sam Jang and purple requires Taegeuk Yuk Jang. To get the brown, taekwondo students learn Taegeuk Chil Jang and Taegeuk Pal Jang is required for red. To move from red / black stripe to black belt, proficiency in all previous forms is required. Finally, lets look at the belt order system used by the American Taekwondo Association (ATA). As with the others, there are 10 levels of color belts. Students can move to the next color belt level every 2-3 months depending on their proficiency. Like the ITF, the colors are meant to represent the students growth by comparing the student to a tree. However, there are more colors and thus more nuance in the meanings of each belt. The ATA belts colors are: White Orange Yellow Camouflage Green Purple Blue Brown Red Black Represents innocence and ignorance. The student does not know anything about Taekwondo, they are a blank slate ready to learn. One of the requirements for advancement is to learn the Songham 1 form. The sun is rising on the little plant. The seed of knowledge has just begun to sprout and is feeling the warm kiss of sunlight for the first time. However, as the sun has not shone strongly on the plant yet, the student is not aware of the full extent and power of Taekwondo techniques. Students must learn the 23-move Songham 2 form to advance. The sun is shining stronger on the little tree. Students are more aware of how much they have to learn. They must learn the 28-move Songham 3 form and demonstrate proficiency in basic techniques to move to the next level. There is a forest of trees that the little tree must fight its way through to break through the canopy. So also the students must struggle to find their place in the world of Taekwondo. The 31-move Songham 4 form is required as well as demonstrating ability in basic sparring to progress. As the tree is growing stronger, the students knowledge is deepening. At this point, all basic techniques should be mastered and the student should be able to use the techniques harmoniously together. The Songham 5 form has 34 moves and sparring will be a requirement from here on out. The student has reached the first intermediate belt level. Purple represents the steep mountain the student has arduously begun to climb. The In Wha 1 form for this level contains 44 moves and they must perform well in sparring. As the tree stretches up toward the blue sky, the student must focus their effort to progress. There are 2 fewer moves (42) in this belts In Wha 2 form than the last one. However, the difficult moves require more precision and concentration to execute. This belt is considered advanced. As the tree anchors its roots strongly in the brown earth, students must revisit basic techniques in preparation for the black belt test. Any holes or weak areas in their training should now be addressed. The 46-move Choong Jung 1 form is required to progress. The sun is setting, and darkness is falling. The first phase of Taekwondo training is coming to a close. Students must demonstrate mastery of physical techniques, though they may still lack control. However, to earn the next belt, their physical and mental preparation should be nearly perfect. The required Choong Jung 2 form has 46 moves. Many people start Taekwondo training with the goal of earning a black belt. And its not surprising. Black belts typically come right before black belts in the Taekwondo belt order system. Some schools may use a red and black striped belt before awarding 1st dan (black belt). Regardless, black is always higher than any other color belt. The black belt is usually what you hear about in popular culture when talking about martial arts. But when you walk into a Taekwondo school, you are met with a kaleidoscope of different belt colors. What do all those different Taekwondo belt colors mean? Where did the idea come from? Is there some rhyme or reason to how the colors are ordered? It gets even more confusing as you might notice that Taekwondo belt order is not consistent among different schools. Lets take a moment to discuss. From the history of the Taekwondo belt system to the meaning of the colors, to how long it takes to reach the coveted black belt, we break it all down here! Though the art wasnt named Taekwondo until the 1950s, traditional Taekwondo is based on a rich history of martial arts going back centuries. Over so much time, its no wonder that there are legends and confusion surrounding some of the traditions. One of those traditions is the colorful belts that are worn by Taekwondo students. The legend is that there used to be only white belts. As the student trained over time, their sweat-stained belt turned yellow, dust and dirt darkened it, and eventually, the belt turned black. Legend also states that it was forbidden for students to wash their belts because they would wash the experience off. Youll hear a similar legend circulating in Karate, Kung Fu, and many other martial arts schools. In reality, all martial arts belt systems are based on the ranking system devised by Judo founder Master Jigoro Kano. As a school teacher, Kano recognized the need for a way to categorize students and show their experience level. Some of the older Samurai arts would award students certificates based on a five-level ranking system. However, there was no outward indication of their skill level. Kano got the belt idea from Japanese competitive swimmers. The more advanced swimmers wore a black ribbon around their waist. Kano started using belts in his school in 1883. At first, there were only white belts and black belts. White belts were given to students and instructors or advanced practitioners were given black belts. Eventually, Kano added three levels under the black belt. 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The sun is setting, and darkness is falling. The first phase of Taekwondo training is coming to a close. Students must demonstrate mastery of physical techniques, though they may still lack control. However, to earn the next belt, their physical and mental preparation should be nearly perfect. The required Choong Jung 2 form has 46 moves. Many people start Taekwondo training with the goal of earning a black belt. And its not surprising. Black belts typically come right before black belts in the Taekwondo belt order system. Some schools may use a red and black striped belt before awarding 1st dan (black belt). Regardless, black is always higher than any other color belt. The black belt is always higher than any other color belt. The black belt is usually what you hear about in popular culture when talking about martial arts. But when you walk into a Taekwondo school, you are met with a kaleidoscope of different belt colors. What do all those different Taekwondo belt colors mean? Where did the idea come from? Is there some rhyme or reason to how the colors are ordered? It gets even more confusing as you might notice that Taekwondo belt order is not consistent among different schools. Lets take a moment to discuss. From the history of the Taekwondo belt system to the meaning of the colors, to how long it takes to reach the coveted black belt, we break it all down here! Though the art wasnt named Taekwondo until the 1950s, traditional Taekwondo is based on a rich history of martial arts going back centuries. Over so much time, its no wonder that there are legends and confusion surrounding some of the traditions. One of those traditions is the colorful belts that are worn by Taekwondo students. The legend is that there used to be only white belts. As the student trained over time, their sweat-stained belt turned yellow, dust and dirt darkened it, and eventually, the belt turned black. Legend also states that it was forbidden for students to wash their belts because they would wash the experience off. Youll hear a similar legend circulating in Karate, Kung Fu, and many other martial arts schools. In reality, all martial arts belt systems are based on the ranking system devised by Judo founder Master Jigoro Kano. As a school teacher, Kano recognized the need for a way to categorize students and show their experience level. Some of the older Samurai arts would award students certificates based on a five-level ranking system. However, there was no outward indication of their skill level. Kano got the belt idea from Japanese competitive swimmers. The more advanced swimmers wore a black ribbon around their waist. Kano started using belts in his school in 1883. At first, there were only white belts and black belts. White belts were given to students and instructors or advanced practitioners were given black belts. Eventually, Kano added three levels under the black belt. These original belts did not look like what we see today. Instead, they wore a wide black (called Obi) that was used to keep a kimono closed and hold a samurais sword. A few decades later (around the 1930s or 40s) European martial artists started using different colors. It caught on and spread to virtually all modern martial arts styles. Surprisingly, not a very mystical or mysterious story, right? It makes sense why the legend version is still popular. There is no standardized belt system in Taekwondo and different styles or schools use different colors. However, there are general 11 belts 10 color belt levels called geup (or geop) and the coveted black belt. There are 10 Taekwondo levels of black belt 1st through 10th dan. However, very few living people have attained the 10th dan in any style of Taekwondo. Most of these honors have been bestowed posthumously. It takes approximately 55 years of Taekwondo practice to advance through all these ranks, which explains why so few ever complete the journey. There are various styles of Taekwondo practiced around the world today. However, most fall under the umbrella of one of the three major Taekwondo governing bodies. Lets look at each in turn. This organization was founded by General Choi Hong Hi in 1966. He taught traditional Korean martial arts to military members in the 40s and 50s before and during the Korean War. After the war, he founded the Oh Do Kwan school and dedicated himself to teaching martial arts. During this time various martial arts masters (9 kwans or schools) were coming together to unify and streamline Korean martial arts. In 1957, General Choi proposed the name Taekwondo and in 1959 the 9 kwans formed the Korean Taekwondo Association (KTA). Choi is considered the father of modern Taekwondo. Soon after, General Choi fell out of favor with the Korean government and people over political differences. He left Korea and went to Canada where he founded the ITF as a separate organization. He continued to promote Taekwondo even though he no longer had the backing of the Korean government. After the upheavals and disagreements with General Choi, the KTA continued to oversee Taekwondo in Korea. In 1972, a joint effort of the Korean governments Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism and the KTA led to the founding of the Kukkiwon, the national academy of Taekwondo. The next year, in 1973, the KTA and the Kukkiwon then founded the World Taekwondo Federation to promote Taekwondo as a sport. This organization was renamed World Taekwondo in 2017 because of negative connotations with the initials WTF. Because of its work promoting Taekwondo as a sport, WT-style Taekwondo is more focused on the sports aspect of the art. It is unsurprisingly the style of Taekwondo that appears in the Olympics and the organization hosts various championships and tournaments around the world. US soldiers were introduced to Korean martial arts when they went to fight in the Korean war. They brought some of the techniques back with them and interest in the art began to spark in the US. In 1969, South Korean Haeng Ung Lee founded the American Taekwondo Association in Omaha, Nebraska. This organization and style of Taekwondo quickly grew in the US as interest in Taekwondo blossomed during the 70s. Today, the organization has grown to include more than 300,000 active members in 21 countries. It is still the most common type of martial arts taught in the US. Though Taekwondo belt colors are similar, the order and ranking vary between the major organizations and styles. You can check out an overview of the colors and ranks in this video. The meaning of the TKD belt colors Now lets break down the belt ranking system of each of the three main Taekwondo types we just mentioned. Well start with the International Taekwondo Federation, the organization founded by General Choi. There are 10 levels though only 5 color belts. The tip of the belt is marked with the color of the next belt to denote the extra level in between each color. The Taekwondo belt order used by the ITF are as follows: White belt White belt / yellow tip Yellow belt Yellow belt / green tip Green belt Green belt / blue tip Blue belt Blue belt / red tip Red belt Red belt / black tip Black belt After this, there are 10 Taekwondo black belt levels. It takes decades to advance through these ranks and only a handful of people attain the highest black belt level. Students generally must remain at each level for a minimum period of time. At that point, they are given the opportunity to test for the next level. If they do not demonstrate the required advancement of their skills (or proper etiquette and attitude) they will not pass the test. In rare cases, exceptional students may skip a level (or pass two tests at once). Usually, this only happens to lower level belts and is more common with students who already have martial arts experience. The Taekwondo belts meaning follow the life cycle of a plant. Lets explore what each color represents and how long it takes to achieve. White is the color of innocence. The student has no knowledge of Taekwondo and no test is required to earn this belt. They are starting their journey. Students must stay at the white belt for 3 months. To get the yellow stripe, students must learn the Saju Jirugi and Saju Makgi patterns and demonstrate an understanding of basic techniques. Students with the yellow stripe must train for another 3 months and learn the Chon Ji pattern to move on. Represents the ground from which a tree will sprout. Roots are being laid during this stage as the student learns the basic foundational skills of Taekwondo. Students train at this level for 4 months and learn the Dan Gun pattern to earn their green stripe. Once earned, they must train for another 4 months and learn the 24 moves of the Do San pattern. The tree has sprouted and is growing. The students skills in Taekwondo are beginning to develop more rapidly, though there is still much to learn. To get the blue stripe, students must train for 4 months and learn the Won Hyo pattern. Another 4 months of training and learning the 38 moves of the Yul Gok pattern are needed to move on. The tree is growing quickly, stretching towards the sky. The students mastery of Taekwondo skills is progressing. Again, 4 months of training is expected at this level as well as mastery of the Joong Gun pattern. Once the red tip is earned, another 5 months of training and the 37 moves of the Toi Gye pattern are required before moving to the advanced red belt. Red is the universal color of danger. It is a warning both to the student, who is cautioned to exercise control, and to the opponent. The students skills are becoming formidable, but they need mental discipline. This level requires a significant amount of mental preparation. Students must demonstrate an understanding of when it is appropriate to use their skills and when to refrain. Students should stay here for a minimum of 6 months and learn the Hwa Rang pattern to get their black stripe. The coveted Taekwondo black belt is near at hand, but students must train for another 6 months before they are eligible to advance. Mastery of the Choong-Moo pattern is also required. Black is the opposite of white. The tree has matured and the student has developed a deep proficiency in Taekwondo. The student leaves darkness and fear behind. Like the ITF, the World Taekwondo system has 10 color belt levels. There are a couple of main variations used throughout the world. 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