

IRISH FIGHTER



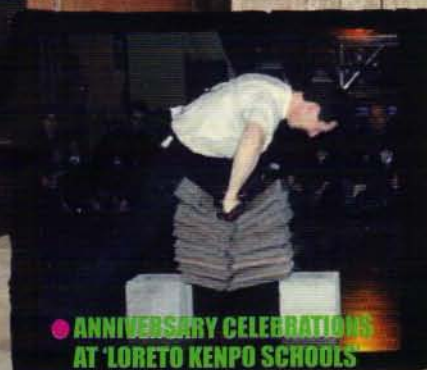
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● SURESH NAR AWARDED
7th DAN 'MASTER' RANK



● YANILOV TEACHES AT FIRST
IRISH GRADUATE CAMP



● ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS
AT LORETO KENPO SCHOOLS



● OISIN BURKE ON PRACTISING
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7th DAN 'MASTER' RANK FOR SURESH NAR

BY NIAMH GRIFFIN

MONAGHAN MIGHT NOT be the first place you'd expect to find one of the world's few Tang Soo Do 7th degree black belts. But it's where Master Suresh Nar has called home since 2007. Speaking to him recently, he says the ancient Korean martial art of Tang Soo Do is based around a series of flowing movements. Well known for its distinctive kicking style, Master Nar describes the art as a composite system blending elements of Chinese martial arts with indigenous Korean styles.

"Tang' means 'defend' or 'strike'; 'Soo' means 'hand' or 'punch', while 'Do' means 'way of life'. When you combine the three Korean ideograms it means the 'Way of the Hand'. 'It's very structured and organised," Master Nar said. Born in England, the recently graded 7th dan followed his Irish wife, along with four young children (all now black belt), to Monaghan after a lifetime dedicated to martial arts. And he says proudly there are about 20 black belts already in his Irish 'dojang' or club. Dressed in the white 'toe balk' – similar to a Karate 'gi' – and wearing the black and red stripes of his senior master level, the instructor looks tough enough to take anyone on.

'Starting from scratch'

"To be honest when I relocated to Ireland it was a difficult move for me because I was leaving behind scores of students and an organisation in England which had taken me 25 years to develop," Master Nar said. "As soon as I got settled though I began classes almost immediately at the Monaghan Leisure Complex in Monaghan Town. I have to say it was difficult starting over again. I was used to teaching black belts and now I found myself trying to recruit novices and really starting from scratch."

However, with his patience and perseverance the Tang Soo Do classes slowly started to grow. "I also began teaching just across the border in Northern Ireland and five years on I now have over 19 black belts and very successful classes," he added. "I was talking to a senior instructor recently and I was saying how lucky I was, and he replied: 'sir, the harder you work, the luckier you get', and he's right."

However, it wasn't always like this. Remembering his first training sessions in England, he says he was 13 years-of-age in a gym full of men, and it was difficult. "I'd



Following Master Suresh Nar's grading examination in the USA, Grandmaster Ki Yun Yi (right) presents the Monaghan-based instructor with his 7th dan black belt certificate at Master Nar's 35th Anniversary Tang Soo Do Championships in London, England.

a lot of injuries but I could feel it was the right thing for me. It was tough, but I wanted to be tough. That was my dream," he explained. Although the training in the 1970s was harsh the young Nar was determined to stick with it. So determined, in fact, he saved his school dinner money to pay for the lessons. The determination paid off as Master Nar is now the chief Instructor of Grandmaster Ki Yun Yi's European branch of the International Martial Arts Association (IMMA) and a six-time world championship winning coach.

The same structure

The art of Tang Soo Do has roots going back over 2,000 years, but was modernised in the mid-1940s. Master Nar gained his 1st degree black belt rank under the man who took charge of that movement, Grandmaster Hwang Kee. Eventually he moved to London where his small club formed the basis of the Great Britain (Yong Kook) Tang Soo Do Association. Master Nar says all that hard work in the beginning paid off, and taught him that dedication can bring results.

One of the students in those British classes was Irishman Master Paul McManus. And when they both found themselves over here in Ireland, they set up the All-Ireland Tang Soo Do Association together. Master Nar says students coming to the classes for the first time will find the same structure he saw in his own first classes. "We've students as young as five, and adults up to 60 years-of-age. It's a sign of a good system that it can accommodate anyone, and have a good instructor who can communicate," Master Nar said.

New way of thinking

Unlike Olympic style Taekwondo, Tang Soo Do is not overly focused on competitions. Master Nar admits with a chuckle that it's nice to win but says tournaments are really about "coming together and camaraderie". "Tang Soo Do gives you a new way of thinking, and acting, in order for you to be happier, healthier and wiser," he says. And that must appeal to the Irish psyche as he thinks there are nearly 1,000 people already practicing the art here.

But while competition is not necessary, constantly striving to learn and improve is



Grandmaster Ki Yun Yi (left) and senior Master Suresh Nar share a joke during the Tang Soo Do championships in London. The grandmaster acclaimed Master Nar as his 'brother' which carries a lot of responsibility for Master Nar.

a key part of this martial art. And so, after 35 years of practicing, Master Nar went to America this summer to formally test for his 7th degree 'master' rank. He tested at the International Martial Arts (IMA) Tang Soo Do Association headquarters dojang in Woodbury, Connecticut. The grading panel consisted of Grandmaster Ki Yun Yi, 9th dan IMA president, and a large number of senior IMA masters. The test itself was a grueling affair covering key elements of the IMA Tang Soo Do syllabus.

Being in supreme physical condition himself, Grandmaster Ki Yun Yi stressed the importance of maintaining fitness hence the grading began with the 'black belt of steel' physical test. This consisted of various exercises including push-ups, jumping jacks, jumping kicks and more, done against a time restraint of one and two minutes with minimum numbered targets having to be reached.

"Following this I had to go into requested hand and foot combinations followed by a multitude of the Association's 'hyungs', or patterns, from the most basic to the requirement for 7th dan," Master Nar explained. The examination concluded with a one-on-one talking ses-



Newly graded 7th dan Master Suresh Nar demonstrates a high degree of mental and spiritual strength by holding a suspending a bucket of water hung from a skewer driven through his neck. This was one of the demonstrations at Master Nar's 35th anniversary Tang Soo Do celebrations in London, England.

sion with Grandmaster Ki Yun Yi who gave the grading candidate a lesson on the importance of being humble and explained his view on Master Nar's extended duties within the organisation.

'Sense of achievement'

"I thought I'd prepared diligently for my grading with a six month training plan, increasing my physical training and polishing of my techniques," Master Nar added. "However, I left the test barely able to walk out of the training hall. Having said that, I had a wonderful sense of achievement and pride, as I know my rank wasn't just handed to me. I earned it; I worked very hard for every thread on my new belt."

Master Nar's 7th dan belt was to be presented to him the day after his actual grading, at the IMA World Tang Soo Do Championships in New Jersey. "However, I requested that the presentation take place in England at my 35th Anniversary Tang Soo Do Championships which took place in October in Croydon, South London," Master Nar said. "I'd taught in that particular



The tournament winning Irish team, led by Dublin Tango Soo Do Master Paul McManus, at Master Nar's 35th Anniversary Tang Soo Do Championships held in London.

part of London for many years before I moved to Ireland and the area remains a hot bed for Tang Soo Do activity in the South East of England where I've 11 master belts who all started their training with me as white belts."

'A wonderful compliment'

He continued: "So, for me, it was the proper location for the presentation and indeed the exact occasion to celebrate my achievement in the Korean art." Grandmaster Ki Yun Yi travelled from the USA to be at the championships and made the presentation himself. During the presentation the grandmaster told the gathering that it was his privilege and honour to award Master Nar the 7th dan rank after 35 years of unbroken practice and loyalty to him and the IMA.

"The grandmaster also commended the work that I'd done in expanding the European region," Master Nar added. "He also said that without my direct input the IMA would not be what it is today - a wonderful compliment." In accepting the promotion senior members commented, that after personally training over 200 black belts and 15 masters, that Master Nar was "their" inspiration.

Master Nar remarked: "Once again, this was a wonderful compliment. It was a moving and touching moment for me, and to top of a remarkable day my Ireland team, led by Master McManus, won the team competition at the anniversary championships and my daughter, Anine, won the junior grand champion title."

Having passed his recent 7th dan test it made him one of just three practitioners at this level in the European Tang Soo Do Federation. With over three decades of martial experience, Master Nar has dedicated his life to the Korean art and developing the IMA Tang Soo Do schools across Europe. He has worked tirelessly to expand the European Tang Soo Do Federation, which now has member schools in Malta, Wales, England and Ireland.

In 2001 Grandmaster Ki Yun Yi pronounced Master

Nar as the IMA's 'instructor of the year'. Master Nar has hosted two world IMA Tang Soo Do championships and was nominated to host the 7th IMA World Tang Soo Do Championships in Ireland in 2010. Earlier this year he hosted the successful 2nd European Tang Soo Do championships, the first time a Tang Soo Do event of this kind was held in Ireland. He has personally taught six students from white belt to master belt level.

Drive and enthusiasm

Master Nar has no plans of slowing down. When asked what motivates him his answer is simple: "I get my drive and enthusiasm from my 'Kwan Chang Nim', Grandmaster Ki Yun Yi." Over the years Master Nar has received many commendations from some of Tang Soo Do's most senior exponents, but his most cherished award was being selected as the IMA's 'Instructor of the Year'. "I've had many memorable occasions throughout my training life," Master Nar remembers.

"I've received accolades from some of Tang Soo Do's most senior exponents but recently Grandmaster Ki Yun Yi announced me as his 'brother', and for me this was a most touching experience and one which carries a lot of responsibility, particularly to the Tang Soo Do community within the IMA."

"I'd like to take this opportunity to thank my grandmaster for his support and guidance, my senior belts for their loyalty, and most of all my wife and family for allowing me to dedicate my time to the affairs of the association and the art of Tang Soo Do."

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