Why are tournaments important?

Martial Arts students are often hesitant to enter their first tournament, but the benefits cannot be understated. At Yom Chi Martial Arts, we encourage all students at all levels to participate in tournament competition for a variety of reasons, but here are 10 benefits all martial artists receive for challenging themselves to compete:

1. TEST YOUR SKILLS

Tournament competition is an opportunity to take your months or years of training and put it to the test. Competition tests your physical fitness, your technique, your stamina, your timing, your mental strength, and your determination in ways our regular training doesn’t. Just like in belt grading, tournaments offer an opportunity to show that our training has made a real difference in our ability level over time.

2. GET OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE

When we train in class, we get comfortable. We get comfortable with our training floor, we get comfortable with our instructors, we get comfortable with our peers and comfortable with our sparring partners. We can even get comfortable with our complacency. Competing in a tournament – be it patterns, sparring or board breaking – puts us in a new environment where we’re forced to perform in front of new eyes, in a new room with people we don’t know. It’s this act of stepping out of our comfort zone that pushes us to work that much harder.

3. CHALLENGE YOURSELF AGAINST NEW OPPONENTS

When we continue to spar with the same opponents over and over – as we do in our classes – we learn how people move, what techniques they throw the most and where their weaknesses are. We learn to adapt to each of our opponents and anticipate their moves. We know who we could reasonably win against and who makes us a little nervous. When we step out on the competition floor we have no such insight. It’s a true test of skill against an unknown competitor – an opportunity to gain a new perspective and find out how sharp our instincts really are when we have to think on our feet.

4. OVERCOME YOUR FEARS

Martial artists must learn to stay calm in stressful situations. Tournament competition creates jitters for sure. Sometimes it can cause some significant adrenaline surges we need to take control of and learn to channel into useful energy. Learning to stay focused and relaxed, lower our heart rate and breathing rate under stress in order to be able to perform at the highest level is a skill that is only developed over many opportunities to try it in practice.

5. BUILD CONFIDENCE

Since tournaments often break down their competitors into relatively small fields by age, gender and belt level, competitors get a chance to see how they really stack up against others their size, age and rank – something we don’t always get to do in class. By comparing yourself to others on a more level playing field, you can really see that you are gaining new skills over time. Furthermore, whether you win or lose in sparring, one thing is virtually guaranteed: you will finish your round feeling empowered knowing that you did what you set out to do and came out relatively unscathed.

6. BUILD TEAM SPIRIT

Tournaments give you a chance to grow closer to your peers. When a club travels together, competes together and spends a couple of days in close contact with one another, cheering for one another and giving hugs and high-fives for performance and effort, the natural outflow is a more cohesive team spirit. Everyone wants to feel like they belong. Martial arts – and tournament competition specifically – gives participants that opportunity to belong to a tribe of sorts… to bond with like-minded people who share the love of the art.

7. BUILD CHARACTER

Winning and losing is part of any competition; and healthy competition is good for you. It creates opportunity to build mental strength and determination but it also offers a chance to learn humility. Compete often enough and you will see that there will always be someone who is a stronger competitor than you are. Tournaments give you the opportunity to test your skills, recognize your weaknesses and congratulate others for their successes regardless of how you place.

8. GET MOTIVATED WATCHING TOP LEVEL COMPETITORS

When you’re moving up through the belt ranks, watching top level black belt competitors can be very inspiring. It motivates you to want to not only continue your training but to take it up a notch and focus more on areas where maybe you see room for improvement: conditioning, flexibility, speed, accuracy, self-control or power. It can motivate you to aim to master a new technique or combination and

9. GIVE YOURSELF A SHORT TERM GOAL

Registering for a tournament can help shift your focus towards preparation in advance. As that date draws near, you can use it as a short-term goal to seek to improve your focus on your training. It’s an excellent motivator for ensuring those patterns don’t get overlooked at home, workouts don’t get skipped and class attendance remains regular.

10. HAVE FUN

Tournaments are fun. Great way to meet other students in the school that are in different classes.