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Taekwondo - a Top
Cultural Asset

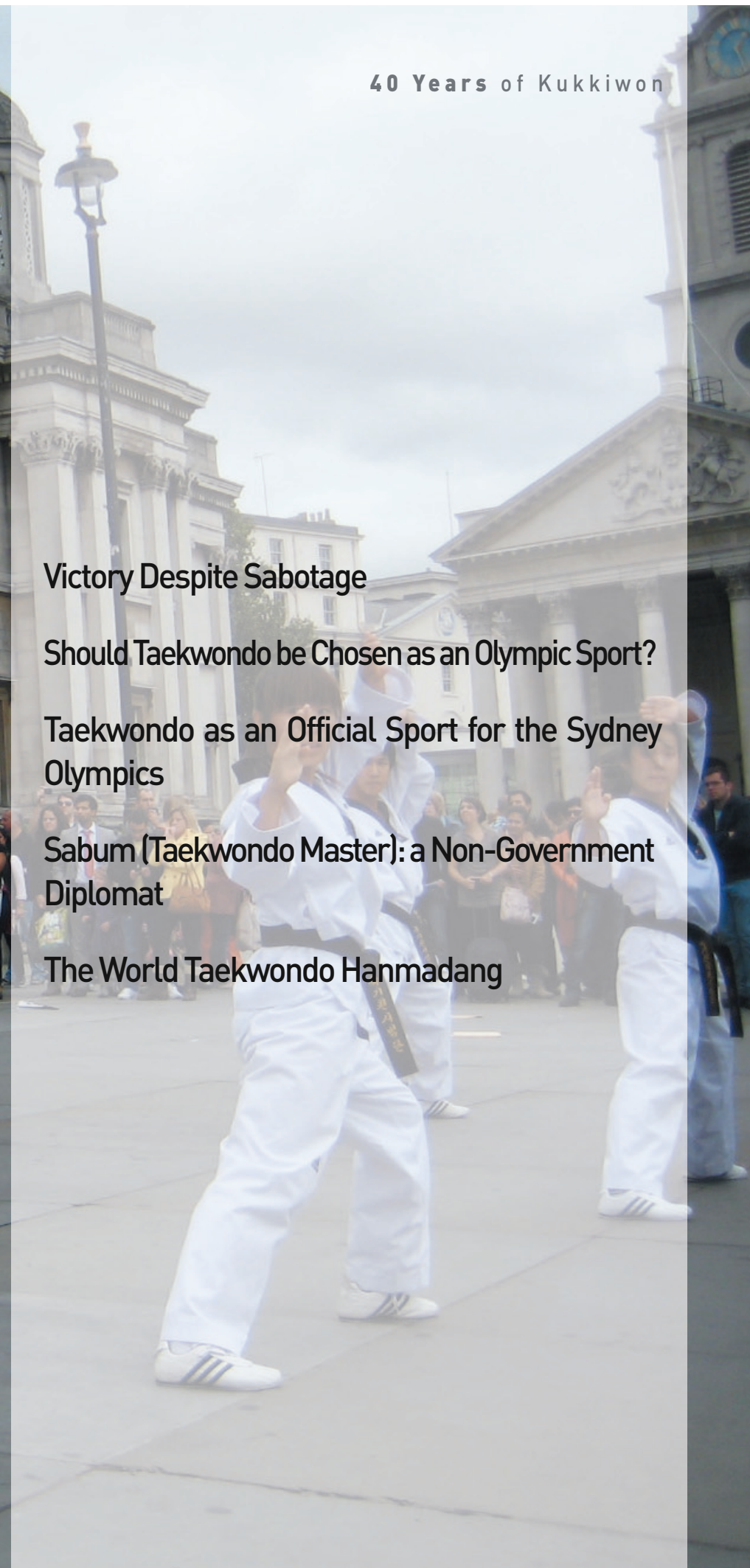
Victory Despite Sabotage

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Taekwondo - a Top Cultural Asset

Victory Despite Sabotage

A rumor was spreading in Paris. Some Korean press ‘sided’ with the rumor while an organized movement was spreading it. Faxes poured in day after day. An IOC executive even received threat calls. The sabotage was ruthless.

On September 3, 1994, a temporary IOC executive committee meeting took place at the Science Technology Center in La Défense. European and American Taekwondo masters, the Korea Olympic Committee officials, and WTF executives were whispering among themselves in groups. Some even looked at the Korean masters with contempt.

Earlier in August 29, Vice President Un Yong Kim confidently declared to the Korean correspondents that there is a 50% chance of winning. Coming from a person, who usually does not refer to anything to be over

‘30%,’ people anticipated a positive outcome, but nobody could be certain at this point.

At 2:00 p.m., IOC President Samaranch approached Korean IOC officials and said to them: “Congratulations.”

People roared in cheers.

The only thing left now were the votes from IOC Session. Taekwondo had once again jumped through another hoop to become an official sport for the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

Should Taekwondo be Chosen as an Olympic Sport?

Efforts to make Taekwondo into an official Olympic sport began in 1994, when Korea Taekwondo Association (KTA) members invited IOC executives to Seoul to promote Taekwondo.

Also in April, KTA invited sports figures from all over the world and opened an ‘International Taekwondo



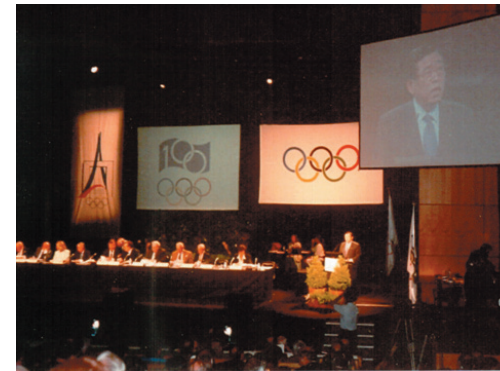
IOC executives watch the International Taekwondo Championships held in Seoul in celebration of the IOC Centennial Anniversary on April 22, 1994.

Competition for official Olympic sport selection.’ After completing two international events, KTA set detailed plans to win over the IOC program committee, the administrative committee, and the IOC Session, who gathered to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of IOC establishment.

However, Chairman Chatelier was unable to participate, stating bad health; thus the IOC Session never took place. Surprisingly, KTA later learned that the real reason for his nonattendance was not health-related, but was that he received pressure from external forces. He received threat phone calls from France’s International Karate Federation, and North Korea repeatedly faxed complaints by the minute to demand that Taekwondo not be selected for the Olympics.

Japan was desperate because it was clear that if Taekwondo is selected as an Olympic sport, then Karate might lose its place in the Olympics. The same applied to North Korea. North Korea had been emphasizing itself as a Taekwondo homeland by building a Taekwondo Hall in Pyongyang and leading the International Taekwondo Federation (ITF, as opposed to South Korea’s WTF). They feared that if South Korea’s Taekwondo becomes an Olympic sport, North Korea’s ITF would lose its value.

Should Taekwondo be chosen as an Olympic sport, there were other sports that would either be completely eliminated or be resorted to reduce their weight divisions, including wrestling, boxing, and synchronized



The 103rd IOC Session held in Paris on September 4, 1994



Distinguished guests gathered to celebrate the official category selection of Taekwondo for the Olympics.

swimming. It was obvious that the countries that earn the most medals from these sports would be voicing against Taekwondo selection. As expected, it was a persistent and stubborn sabotage.

In 1991, Taekwondo was not even on the agenda at the IOC Session at Birmingham, England, and was rejected as an official Olympic sport at the 1993 IOC Session.

South Korean representatives suspected foul play from North Korea and Japan. They readjusted their schedule to re-appeal to the administrative board on September 3, the last day of IOC Centennial Olympic Congress.

Taekwondo as an Official Sport for the Sydney Olympics

After the Session on September 3, Vice President Un Yong Kim and President Samaranch (who was amicable towards Taekwondo) painstakingly appealed Taekwondo to the IOC executives. As a result, Executive Jean-Claud Ganga from Congo voiced his support for Taekwondo and persuaded others to consent the appeal.

On midnight of September 4, 1994 (Korea standard time), making Taekwondo as an official Olympic sport was included in the IOC Session agenda. 85 executive members voted unanimously to officially select Taekwondo as an official sport. It was a historical moment when the commands “charyot” (attention) and “shijak” (start) became the 4th official command language at the Olympics, following English, French, and Japanese.

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The unveiling ceremony of the monument that commemorates the official category selection for the 2000 Sydney Olympics

The biggest change that came from the official selection for the Sydney Olympics was Korea's heightened national image in world sports. Furthermore, Korean athletes obtained 3~4 additional gold medals which placed Korea in the top ranks of medal acquisitions. It also marked a higher status for Korean Taekwondo masters around the world, and growing development of the Taekwondo industry through uniform and protection gear exports.

However, the most important issue of all was to successfully complete the 2000 Sydney Olympics, since it would be the test bed for re-selection for the 2004 Athens Olympics and a stepping stone in becoming a permanent Olympic sport.

The utmost importance was for Taekwondo to greatly appeal to broadcast companies because TV stations pay



Award ceremony for Taekwondo category at the 2000 Sydney Olympics

an enormous amount of money to air sports games. That meant capturing TV viewers' interest by revising rules to maximize intensity and upgrading equipment and uniforms. Also, a global standard for matches was necessary to avoid turning Taekwondo into a "Korean celebration."

Sabum (Taekwondo Masters): a Non-Government Diplomat

Taekwondo began to spread into foreign countries in the mid-1960s. It began with geographically proximate Southeast Asia, but it was a culturally closed region and was not acceptant of foreign influence.

Many countries even had their own authentic martial



arts, making it even more difficult to popularize Taekwondo on their soil.

Taekwondo became known in Taiwan in 1967, when Taiwan's Minister of National Defense saw Korean army's Taekwondo demonstrations. He returned to

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Taiwan and informed the excellence of Taekwondo to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek.

Taekwondo became more popular in Taiwan and eventually lead to establishment of the Chinese Taipei Amateur Taekwondo Association in 1974; the committee later joined WTF.

In the United States, the most difficult part was to overcome the deeply-ingrained Karate reputation as Asia's leading martial art. Initially, in order to approach Americans who are unaware and considered Taekwondo as another form of Karate, Taekwondo went by the name 'Korean Karate.' Consequently, Sabums had to endure harassments from Karate Dojangs.

Taekwondo also spread to Africa. Pioneering Taekwondo was difficult because there was a very small number of Koreans compared to other parts of the world.



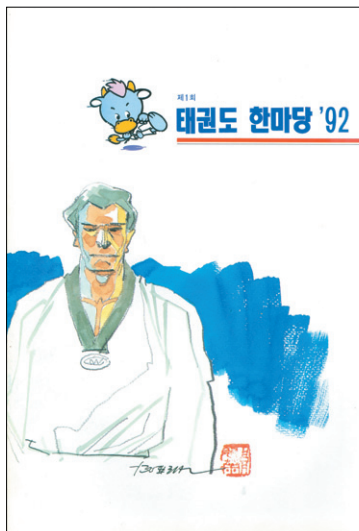
In addition, not many Africans took interest in Taekwondo, which forced masters to work two jobs to make a living. But despite these hardships, the masters gallantly exercised Taekwondo diplomacy.

It was harder to spread Taekwondo awareness in the Middle East, as Karate was much more popular there. However, thanks to efforts poured in by Korean masters, the first Middle East Taekwondo Championships was held in December 1978 - a pivotal event that marked the beginning of Taekwondo awareness in the Middle East. People of Saudi Arabia amicably yelled 'Taekwondo!' when they spotted masters on the streets, and the Iranian government adopted Taekwondo to train their army and police officers. The Iranian Taekwondo team even won 2nd place at the 1986 Seoul Asian Games.



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A brochure for the First Taekwondo Hanmadang held in 1992

Taekwondo was introduced to South America in the early 1970s. Like the U.S., Karate was considered the representative martial art of Asia.

The masters there also initially used the term ‘Korean Karate’ but as Taekwondo wave swept across Mexico in less than three years, they begin to use the name ‘Taekwondo of Korea.’

The World Taekwondo Hanmadang

The first ‘World Taekwondo Hanmadang’ festival was held at the Olympic Park in Seoul on December 9, 1992. Participants included a total of 392 teams and 1,346 belt holders who were divided into 4 groups (the children’s division, youth division, adult division, and women’s’ division). An average of 3,000 spectators visited the Olympic Park during Hanmadang.

The purpose of Hanmadang was to answer the question of ‘how should Taekwondo improve going forward?’ Back then, the concept of Taekwondo was simply sparring, and with less focus on Gyeokpa (power breaking) and Poomsae. A change to this concept was necessary.

The 1999 World Taekwondo Hanmadang held in Kukkiwon received worldwide attention because of the ‘20th Century Taekwondo King of Kings’ championships, where all winners from previous Hanmadang participated.

In 2000, at the 9th Hanmadang, 1,321 participants performed various Taekwondo movements and



The 4th KTA President Byung Jik Roh demonstrates poomsae at Taekwondo Hanmadang.

Honorary guests at the opening ceremony of the 9th Taekwondo Hanmadang

categories, including Poomsae, Gyeokpa, Taekwondo Gymnastics, and Self-Defense. It was the most spectacular Hanmadang ever.

But most notably, unlike previous Hanmadang jointly sponsored by Kukkiwon and WTF, Kukkiwon organized this Hanmadang single-handedly.

Taekwondo was not only selected as an official category sport for the 1998 Bangkok Asian Games and the 2000 Sydney Olympics, it was also voted in the Top 5 Korean Cultural Heritage. As a representative form of Korean



culture, it kept up with its image as a homeland of Taekwondo, as there are 40 million Taekwondo players around the world in 140 countries. The construction of the Taekwondo Hall would boast Taekwondo spirit and make Taekwondo an easily approachable sport.