

# **Final Reflection on My 2017 Summer Training Experience at Yong In University**

**Peter Huh**

This summer, I had the opportunity to train with world-renowned Taekwondo athletes for two weeks at Yong In University in South Korea. There, I had the privilege to experience professional-level training and to form friendships with Korean National Team members and future Olympians. During that time, I trained extensively, fostering my Taekwondo passion and skills, as well as preparing for the USA Taekwondo Nationals in Detroit, Michigan.

## **새벽 운동 – Morning Training**

Every weekday at Yong In begins with an early wake up to make it to 새벽 운동, or literally “dawn training,” at 6:30 a.m. Because these training sessions were mandatory for athletes to compete in tournaments, every taekwondo athlete reluctantly woke up at the crack of dawn and walked to the track, which was about half a mile away. The mass of people walking from the dorms with disheveled hair and eyes plagued with fatigue resembled a zombie apocalypse; I would have laughed, if I, too, had not been affected by the toll intense training took on my body. Once we arrived, we immediately warmed up by stretching and walking around the track. Then, on the coach’s mark, we would proceed to run 2.5 miles around the track as fast as we could.

Right after running the 2.5 miles, we would run another 1.5 miles, this time sprinting in 400-meter intervals. After that, the journey back to the dorms was torture. Because Yong In is situated on the side of a mountain, it meant a half-mile of steep, uphill walking back to my room. Exactly 44 stairs and 14 steps I would arrive at the dorm and collapse on the bed in my room until I could conjure enough energy to shower and walk downstairs for breakfast. In retrospect, this part of the day was definitely the hardest.

## **Hours Between Training**

All Yong In students attended classes from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. As I was not a university student, for me, it meant resting and recovering so that I would be ready for afternoon training. It was also time for eating, and, surprisingly, the food served in the dining halls was really tasty! Of course, even though it was consistently your typical sticky white rice complemented with a side of kimchi, protein, vegetables, and soup options that varied day to day, it never failed to fill me up after a hard workout. Additionally, though there were specified serving times for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, the dining halls always served ramen from 7:30 a.m. until closing, which was especially convenient whenever I missed meals due to training.

## **Afternoon and Evening Training**

After class until 5 p.m., all athletes would work on technical skills and practice sparring with each other. I had the opportunity to practice sparring with members of the Korean National Team, making sure to take note of effective strategies and trying to add them to my game. Even though I was constantly losing, I could physically and mentally feel that I was improving. The intense atmosphere demanded nothing less than full concentration and hard work, pushing me to

my limit just to keep up.

Finally, evening training ended the day from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. It was usually for those who wanted to work on skills on their own. This was essentially “free time” for athletes, during which they could either lift weights, spar, or focus on whatever skill they felt needed improvement. Because all athletes at Yong In are also students, this session usually had the fewest attendees, mainly because evening training was not mandatory for athletes who had class. Education was prioritized over training. For me, evening training was the most fun part of my day; teammates and I would form mini tournaments in which we would spar against one another wearing high-tech sparring gear. During these mini tournaments, other teammates would all cheer in unison “USA” whenever it was my turn to spar. Looking back, it was a quite hysterical, yet it is a fond memory that I will cherish whenever I think about my teammates at Yong In.

### **Lessons Moving Forward**

The soles of my shoes were permanently stained red from running on the track. After a day of training, I would wake up on the bed the next day paralyzed with fear that the slightest movement would trigger pains. Trying to do laundry at night was challenging because I could barely move, let alone climb two flights of stairs carrying all my dirty clothes. These were only some of the countless of indicators that attest to the fact that training at Yong In was the most physically and mentally demanding thing I have ever done. Before starting training at Yong In, I would watch athletes on TV and just assume that they worked hard; I had no clue, until my training experience, about the full-fledged dedication and effort professional athletes put into perfecting their skills. I walk away from this experience with a newfound respect for all athletes who are trying to make their dreams a reality and a firsthand feel for what it takes to become a professional.

Perhaps the most interesting fact that I learned from the athletes at Yong In was that they all hated Taekwondo. When I asked them why they were training so hard for something they detested so much, their responses were that “Taekwondo was their only option left.” Their only memories from middle school and high school revolved around training for Taekwondo. Intense, everyday training from a young age left no time for them to study or discover other passions. Consequently, when they transitioned to college and realized that they hated Taekwondo, they could not find something that they could invest their time fully in because they missed the prerequisites all taught in high school due to training. What started as a fiery passion to them slowly extinguished; their love for the sport eventually faded as it slowly became their job. In listening to the resentment and regrets of Korean National Team members, I understood that, to be truly happy with the sport I currently love, I must strike a balance between it and my other priorities. I cannot sacrifice my role as a brother, son, friend, or student for the sake of kicking drills. Rather than dedicating myself to Taekwondo completely, I must develop other facets of my life so that I can strive to become a more complete person with a variety of skills and interests. Finally, I decided that I will not pursue a professional career in the sport even though I love Taekwondo; I cannot imagine four years of college spent in intensive training like at Yong In.

Words cannot express the countless of lessons that I learned at Yong In, whether it was learning when to execute my axe kick against taller fighters or what buttons to push on the washing machine so that my clothes would go through a complete wash cycle in 43 minutes. I experienced firsthand what it was like to live independently away from home and take care of myself in an unfamiliar, physically, and mentally demanding environment.

I am extremely thankful to Yong In University's coaches for allowing me to train with them and regarding me in an unbiased way. I also would like to thank my friends/teammates for accepting me into their sparring groups, teaching me everything they know, and leaving me with unforgettable memories. Finally, I cannot thank the Garwin Family Foundation (GFF) enough for everything the Foundation has done. Pursuing an elite training program for Taekwondo was something that I have always dreamed of and not something that I thought I would ever have the chance to do. Not only did the GFF entertain my request to pursue this opportunity at Yong In, but the GFF also supported me in attending the training program. Without the Foundation's guidance, advice, and encouragement, none of this would have been possible. Thank you, GFF!