

***Thoughts about getting to Black Belt and
Beyond at Mile High Karate.***

***Questions and Answers
with Chief Master Stephen Oliver***

Q: When will we be evaluated for Black Belt Training?

A: For a new student, our instructors take a look at the student and try to decide about aptitude and interest.

They decide if they feel comfortable with working with you on a three-, four-, five-, six-, seven-year basis in order to develop to a black belt. Once we make that commitment, we've made the commitment to make sure that you achieve Black Belt.

Our average black belt is a seven- to 12-year-old, and their parents taking classes. So we have a high majority of parents and families who get to Black Belt.

But the main thing is it's a process that evolves with curriculum. If a child is a third-grader now, they can be a black belt when they're a sixth-grader. It's an easy process to go through. Obviously, the curriculum gets more difficult as we go, but they get walked into that curriculum.

The main thing about our program, through the process of getting a black belt, is the development of physical, mental and emotional skills. And obviously, there is a self-defense component, so that the student is able to protect themselves or their loved ones. But mostly, the process of getting to Black Belt is more emotional and character development than it is the pure physical and athletic aspects.

Q: What are Considerations for our Family?

A: As a new student, the evaluation should be to take a look at the program and decide if it's something that, as a family, fits into your philosophical values. Is it something that's supportive of what you're trying to accomplish as a family.

Q: When should we consider Black Belt?

A: As a new student, it's very important to be thinking about training to Black Belt now. You need to get acquainted with the school. To get acquainted with the environment and the philosophy of the school. And, to get acquainted with the process of classes and the curriculum.

As a parent, I can assure you that we guarantee that every time a child's in class, he's going to have a lot of fun.

Frankly, as an adult, every time you're in class you're going to have a lot of fun.

But the important part is this is a school, just like any other school. It's important, early on, if you go to Harvard, you're not going to be deciding, from midterm to midterm, whether you're going to follow-through and get your bachelor's degree or get your master's degree.

It's very important, early on, as you enter the school, to decide what the outcome is. In a martial arts school and Mile High Karate, the outcome is to be a black belt.

Black belt is more a metaphor for the outcome. And the outcome is confidence and discipline and focus. The outcome is a high level of physical athletic skill, a high level of physical fitness, as well as having the ability to defend yourself if you ever need to.

Q: How can I be sure my child will stay motivated?

A: The nice thing about martial arts, unlike a team activity, is you're not trying to keep up to anybody else's standards, you're achieving by your own standards.

We provide incentives and rewards on an incremental basis, so the each student stays motivated in class. Our curriculum unfolds gradually. There's a high level of physical accomplishment that comes with being a Black Belt, but that physical accomplishment comes over nine, 12, 18, 24 months. .

Q: How is martial arts different than other sports?

A: It's so important to realize this is a school, and it's not a recreational activity. Training to Black Belt is a developmental process.

Now, it's fun. The kids are going to have a great deal of fun. They're going to get very excited about this, and they're going to keep their excitement level probably over three, four, five years.

However, it's not like soccer league or baseball league. It's more like elementary school.

So the parent makes a commitment to bring the child to class twice a week, sometimes three. The child has a regular class. They're going to have a lot of fun in that class by a very well-trained, professionally-developed instructor. And through the processes, they're going to get the black belt.

And frankly, for a five- or six-year-old, it's no more difficult to get a black belt than it is to go from second grade to sixth grade.

Q: When must we set the Goal to Black Belt?

A: Any of the families that we have in our black belt family, the way they got to black belt is started with one step: setting the goal. It's a family goal, it's not an individual goal.

For a child, the way the goal gets set is frankly this: the child has fun in class, has a high level of enthusiasm, usually sees some of the other black belt kids and decides they'd like to be like that other child that they've already seen with a black belt.

Honestly, a three-, four-, or six- or seven-year-old, they don't understand what three or four years from now means, and they don't understand the long-term outlook. That's where the parents come in.

And for the parents, it's very important to look at it and look forward into the future and say, "My seven-year-old, if they were a 10- or 11-year-old black belt and they had all the outcomes that go with that at school and at home, is that something we'd like for our family?"

And if that parent makes that decision and the child has immediate enthusiasm and some immediate aptitude in class - I don't mean physical aptitude. We have many kids who started in the program who were just physically horrible,

but they enjoy class and they enjoy the time when they're in class. If those two pieces go in place, then it's a family decision to follow-through and be a black belt.

What many people are afraid of is that as they take the next step and commit to black belt, it's going to be very time-intensive and it's going to be a huge time commitment.

And the reality is that for the next several years, it's a twice-a-week, 45-minute-per-time commitment. When you get to brown belt, it does become a little bit more time intensive and people have to slot in six or eight weeks to prepare for and be ready for the black belt test.

But other than that, it's a consistent, twice-a-week, 45 minutes each class, ongoing consistency.

Q: What's the likelihood of my child achieving Black Belt?

A: This school is no different from Harvard. We're one of the top martial arts schools in the world, and we want to make sure that we have a graduation rate that's just good. It's a four-year process to be a black belt - we want to make sure that we qualify students to make sure that they're going to be a good fit in the student body. A good fit into the black belt team once they get to that point. And that they're going to be able to be up to the rigors of getting their black belt.

A university like Harvard only has 1% or 2% that don't matriculate to their bachelor's degree once they enter. And our objective that once a family has made a decision to be a black belt that with very rare exceptions they going to get a black belt - whatever it take on our part to accomplish that objective.

Q: How does the evaluation process for Black Belt work?

A: As a new student, you're also evaluating us. And you're evaluating us - both with the material we're giving you here and with your experience in class and your interaction with our staff and other students - to decide whether it's a good fit for your family, whether the philosophy of the school and the outcome that you see is really what you want for your family.

You really have to make a choice between one of two options early on. Option one is you're going to do this for a short period of time and that's all you're going to do with martial arts.

Or option two, is you're going to be a black belt.

It's very important to realize there's not three choices, there's two choices. There's not, "Yes, we want to be a black belt," "maybe we will," or "no, we're not going to." The choice is yes or no.

What we've found is, universally, maybe means no by default.

So without having the real goal to get a black belt, then nobody's going to achieve a black belt. All the hundreds of black belts we have here this weekend, all set a goal at white belt that they were going to be a black belt. And they made a definitive goal, not an open-ended one.

Q: Once we decide to be a black belt what are our choices?

A: There's two choices.

Option number one is our Master Club.

The Master Club is the base way to get to black belt. It's going to get you to all of the physical skill sets that a black belt's going to have, which includes obviously self-defense but also high-level physical conditioning, and a high level of athletic accomplishments with all the martial art skills.

Also, it's going to get a person to a high level of mental focus, a high level of mental discipline, a high level of confidence, and having the ability to really focus, set goals, and follow through on those goals.

So Master Club takes a person to black belt and beyond, and gets them to the point that they're part of the black belt family and gets them to the point where they've really achieved all of the physical skill sets.

The second choice is our Leadership Program.

Our Leadership Program is all of the components of the Master Club - all the physical skills, whether it be weapons, the forms, the self-defense combinations and all the physical curriculum, as well as the mental development - but it takes it one step forward and it takes it into a leadership component.

And that leadership component is so important because as a college student or as an elementary student, it's important to be able to interact with other people, it's important to take a mentorship role and a teaching role. Our black belts and our leadership people will be able to interact with 40 people, 50 people, and will perform in front of sometimes 1,000, 2,000, 3,000 people.

So the Leadership Program takes it to a new level, which is the ability to have good public speaking skills, good mentorship skills, excellent communication skills and persuasion skills, and an excellent ability to relay content and material to another person and to persuade them around to your belief so you can help them to move to a higher level.

Q: What's the next step to decide for our family?

A: The next step, for the student and family, is to sit down with the program director and instructor and receive a thorough evaluation on how their child or how they are doing on the program and whether Master Club is an appropriate fit and whether they qualify for that, or whether Leadership is a better fit and whether they qualify for that.

If you already have an appointment with the program director and instructor and you've spent some time talking as a family before that about whether you're going to be serious and be a black belt someday or not, set that goal.

If you don't have an appointment, please set that appointment. It's very important to get a thorough evaluation and decide whether black belt on a long-term basis is going to be best for you or not.