



"FOR ME, TAEKWON-DO ITF IS A GOOD PATH TO BE FOLLOWED"

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MY CHILDHOOD AND BRIEF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Living with physical-motor disabilities from birth has numerous challenges, no matter your circumstances. For myself, the challenges were particularly unique as I was the only person with a disability in my neighbourhood in Maputo (Matola) in Mozambique.



I remember that my physical disabilities separated me from others from my humble childhood. I was 5 years old when my parents separated, and I remember being the only child with a physical disability. I was raised by my mother with my three older sisters. However, despite this I recognised that a sense of inclusion started at home. My local childhood friends also treated me without discrimination.

Nonetheless, I also experienced problems of exclusion. This was apparent when I started going to school, as the other children treated me differently and I was often mocked for my physical condition. I always liked to play sports and my favorite sport was football, but in primary school I was excluded from taking part in sport due to my disability. Even the teachers denied me the right to play sports.

I attempted to participate in other sports, however I was never taken seriously. At the time, people with disabilities were perceived to be incapable of excelling in physical activities. We were often viewed as being too unhealthy and weak for sports, and this perception is still upheld to some extent today.

At some point this caused me to develop depression, although fortunately my family was always there for me to fall back on. After constant rejection by the sporting community, I developed aggression as a form of coping with the isolation.

The challenges were greater as I grew up. I could not comprehend why I was constantly being rejected, as I never viewed my condition as a limitation against accomplishment or as an impediment to perform or practice any activity.

My childhood was not easy, I faced several difficulties, my parents divorced when I was still a child, I have 3 older sisters, and I am the only boy on my mother's side. And this meant that since I was a child I faced many difficulties and challenges, firstly because I was from a poor family, my mother worked hard so that I could have food



on the table, secondly because I was a person with a disability, at the time little was known about the rights of people with disabilities, and the community attributed pejorative names, and he was often seen as incapable, sickly, fragile.

My biggest challenges during the practice of TKD were the financial resources, I didn't have someone to cover my expenses, in the initial phase my family did not approve of my TKD training, and that made me train from 2007 to 2009 if ever have taken any graduations or participated in any TKD championships or tournaments.

From 2009, together with my colleague from TKD, we worked as gardeners to be able to cover our basic expenses at TKD, which initially allowed me to buy Dobok to train, participate in graduations and be part of some championships, other materials for punching and kicking we did at home, and the more the years went by the cost of living also increased, but thanks to discipline and love for TKD in the midst of various adversities, I managed to keep up until today and luckily the most important people like my mother started to see in a positive way the TKD and started to give the necessary moral support.

Difficulties have always been present in my life, and that has made me psychologically strong and visionary to face life's diversities, without difficulties I would not be who I am today.



START OF TAEKWON-DO ITF PRACTICE

In 2007, when I was 14 years old, I first heard of Taekwon-Do. I had always believed that there would be some sport where my physical condition would not be a reason for my rejection. Although I did not have any idea about this martial arts and what it involved, I looked for instructor Domingos Charle's house, about 2 kilometers from my own home.

I didn't get an immediate response from him for a week. He then contacted me and accepted that I train. It was the first case of a person with a disability wanting to train Taekwon-Do ITF. Since Taekwon-Do is a martial art, I didn't have much support from my family because martial arts was seen as a practice for outcasts and confused people.

My initial motivation to train was to fight against those who had rejected and mocked me. However, the first two years of training were not easy. Even my instructor faced challenges, as I was his first athlete with a disability and the only one in Mozambique to practice Taekwon-Do ITF. Fortunately, he didn't look at my condition as a problem, but as an opportunity to become a different person. It was a learning experience for him as well as for me. I was informed at the beginning that I would have special training due to my disability. However, as both myself and my instructor learnt, everyone was unique whether or not they lived with a disability. There was no day of training that I felt as if I was separate or outcast from others.

My willingness to learn grew as I trained more. I was very enthusiastic about my sense of place and inclusion in the sport. I always communicated to people about my Taekwon-Do practice, however the responses I received were negative. People often associated Taekwon-Do with violence and marginality. I seemed to always be told to "stop training martial arts, it's going to break your other leg, can't you see that you're a disabled person?" It was difficult at the time to explain to people that Taekwon-Do goes far beyond fighting, that it teaches to love others, makes people honest, and helps one gain self-control. Initially, I trained against my family's wishes, because they had a wrong perception of the art.

My own physical and mental journey in Taekwon-Do was not easy. At the time I would go to school in the morning and train at night, wake up early and sleep late. On return



from school I needed to also complete my schoolwork. Over time I got used to the routine. I also faced other difficulties related to finances, as I didn't have money to pay for my graduations, nor my participation in championships and other relevant events in Taekwon-Do.

With the passage of time, and a lot of training in my Taekwon-Do journey, I began to realize that aggression was not a tool to solve my problems. The sense of anger I had towards those who had dehumanised me was disappearing, and the principles of Taekwon-Do had changed my mindset and the way I see people and the world around me.

With the practice of Taekwon-Do it helped me a lot to overcome depression and raise my high self-esteem, it stimulated new learning in me and improved my mental capacities, TKD provided me with a good quality of life, ease to make more important decisions, resolving conflicts, resilience to face difficulties, good interpersonal relationships and eliminated unnecessary suffering in me.

The practice of TKD teaches me a lot about myself, it constantly gives me new challenges for my growth and forces me to leave the comfort zone and raises self-confidence. In short, TKD helps me get through my day and gives me happiness at the highest level.

2009 was a historic year for me, after 2 years of training, it was only in 2009 that I managed to participate in my first Taekwon-Do championship and my first graduation to the yellow belt. It was a highly emotional event for me after my first championship as my family started to look at Taekwon-Do more positively and took the first steps towards acceptance.

I feel indebted to my first instructor, *Domingos Saimon Charle*, who I trained with until 2009. Following this, I was under the command of another instructor *Émerson Sumbana*. Both paid for my expenses at classes, graduations, local championships, tournaments and local events. They allowed me to be part of a sport and a community. Although there were cases where discrimination and prejudice came from Taekwon-Do practitioners, these served as lessons that helped me to be passive, tolerant and have a good attitude in different situations regardless of the dimension of negative attitudes.



My experiences at TKD were good and bad, the most memorable experience I had was my first day of training, I was all looking forward to my first training and the instructor took a while to arrive at the training site, I found the colleague at the time was a blue belt and I introduced myself, I said that I was about to train and he was surprised, as a senior he guided the training, and he said to me: "do what you know" I was indignant and isolated in my corner, because I didn't know anything about TKD and it was my first day of training, I found a corner inside the gym and sat down.

After a few minutes, another senior colleague came and saw me sitting down and asked what I was doing inside the gym sitting down, I replied that I'm here to train, and I ask why aren't you training? I replied that they told me to do what I know, and I didn't know anything.

He was upset with the attitude of his colleague who said: "do what you know", he dedicated all his time to train me that day, and from that day forward he was part of training with the other colleagues.

Other notable points were when training was at provincial level, initially colleagues from other academies saw me and made fun of each other, some felt sorry (pity is a feeling that I don't identify with), and happily some gave me strength and stayed admired to know how I adapt to TKD being that they demand more from the lower limbs.

Until 2009, everyone already saw me with a positive eye, and the energies I received were positive, and many already wanted to become my TKD instructors. Some journalists made reports talking about my story and journey in TKD and influenced other people to do martial arts.



GRADUATIONS

- 2009 – My first graduation at TKD, after 2 years of hard training, where I graduated to yellow belt; (Provincial Association of TKD ITF Maputo)
- 2013 – Graduation to I Dan (Grand Master Kim Sung Su)
- 2016 – Graduation to II Dan (Grand Master Prof. Hwang Ho Yong, Senior Vice President)
- 2019 - Graduation to III Dan

PARTICIPATED SEMINARS

- 2011 – My first seminar as a TKD athlete, seminar directed by Master Kim Jung Su
- 2013 – Seminar Directed by Master Kim Jung Su
- 2014 – Seminar led by Grandmaster Hwang Ho Yong and Master Kim Jung Su
- 2015 – Seminar directed by Master Kim Jung Su
- 2018 – Seminar led by Master Jaren Philips and Master Brannon Philips.

OFFICIAL DEMONSTRATIONS HELD



I have already performed more than 18 demonstrations, on national and Mozambican commemorative holidays, at sporting events, and at the opening of national & international championships.

PARTICIPATED CHAMPIONSHIPS

- 2019 – World Cup Medal of Honor awarded by TKD President Ri Yon Son
- 2022 – Online Taekwon-Do Championship Champion for people with special needs (1 gold medal)
- 2021 – Vice-champion of the TKD World Online for people with special needs (2 silver medals)
- 2017 – 6 TKD WT 3 gold and 3 silver championship medals
- 2016 – African TKD Champion (4 gold medals)
- 2014 – African TKD Champion and Medal of Honor awarded by Grand Master Prof. Hwang Ho Yong.



I currently have a total of 41 medals, 14 of which are from international competitions.

I received a Medal of Honor at the XXI World Championship from the President of TKD ITF Grand Master Prof. Ri Yong Son (Bulgaria, Plovdiv – 2019).

In 2014 I received a Medal of Honor at the II African Championship by the Senior Vice President of TKD ITF Grand Master Prof. Hwang Ho Yong (Mozambique, Maputo – 2014).

CHALLENGES I HAD DURING MY JOURNEY AT TAEKWON-DO ITF

Being the first person with a physical and cognitive disability to train Taekwon-Do at the time, I had several challenges. I was required to adapt to a comfortable way to perform foot and hand techniques, attempt to keep up with my peers, and train twice as hard to achieve the same technical and mental skills as them. At times, I hesitated in bringing up new ideas of training to my instructor. I also had to fight against the



mentality that I was not progressing due to my disability and persevere through my training. These are challenges that I still face today, however, through a journey of self-discovery and improvement with the help of Taekwon-Do, I have been able to overcome these barriers more easily.

I currently train 3 days a week, and on 1 of the 3 days I dedicate myself to face-to-face or virtual training. I had to reduce training days in search of financial means for my sustainability, I joined an organization that advocates and promotes the rights of People with Disabilities. I have sensitized communities to respect the rights of people with disabilities and sensitized families who hold their relatives with disabilities hostage so that they can attend school, governmental institutions to create architectural conditions and specialized human resources to assist people with different types of disability.

The other means I have for my economic sustainability is helping people with academic work, which is only possible when classes are in progress.

MY THANKS GO TO MASTER JAREN PHILIPS AND MASTER BRANNON PHILIPS FOR THE GREAT SUPPORT TO MY STUDIES, SUPPORT IN TAEKWON-DO AND PROSTHESIS ACQUISITION



In 2014, I had a new page drawn on my Taekwon-Do journey. At the 2nd African Taekwon-Do ITF Championship in Maputo, I had the privilege of meeting brothers Jaren Philips and Brannon Philips. Who gave me unconditional help inside and outside of Taekwon-Do.

After finishing high school and without any hope of studying, the brothers Jaren Philips and Brannon Philips, helped in my professional training. They supported my training from high school, where I graduated in Business and Banking Management, to the Higher level where I graduated in Librarianship and Documentation, from 2015 to 2016, fully funding my studies at the Padre Prosperino Galipolli Technical School.



From 2017 to 2020, they fully funded my studies at the Higher School of Journalism (Escola Superior de Jornalismo).

They were always open and ready to support me in the most decisive phase of my life, allowing me to access professional training of a high quality. They even provide me with moral and psychological support today. I am the first person with a cognitive disability to train in martial arts in Mozambique and the first person to achieve the black belt. Without their help I could not have achieved this at such a young age.



In 2016, the brothers Jaren and Brannon Philips and the Federation helped me to fulfill my biggest dream, by creating the *Fenias Claudio Project*, to raise funds so that I was able to obtain a prosthesis. With their help the project amassed enough support, and I was able to make my dream into a reality when in 2019 I was able to purchase the prosthesis.



June 2019: Fenias during a three week rehabilitation in Johannesburg, South Africa while his new custom prosthetic leg was being built and fitted. The result: he was able to stand without crutches for the first time in his life.

BENEFITS I GET FROM PRACTICING TAEKWON-DO ITF

The practice of Taekwon-Do is extremely important for me. Not only does it give me the skills to defend myself, it maintains my physical health and stimulates my creativity through the execution of Taekwon-Do movements.

With the practice of Taekwon-Do, I cannot count the personal gains it had provided for me. Some of these include:

- Improved self-esteem
- Improved agility
- Helped me improve strength
- Improved motor coordination
- Improved my physical resistance
- Gives me motivation for future activities
- Developed and improved my balance
- Stimulates me to strive for independence and autonomy
- Ensures good mental health and quality of life
- Helps me to prevent secondary disabilities
- Taught me discipline and values, as well as respect for hierarchy
- Improved problem-solving ability development
- Developed fighting spirit, self-confidence, will to lead, seriousness, patience and humility.



In addition to the above, Taekwon-Do has also helped me have a deeper understanding of my own body. I now understand my body's limits and how I can stretch them. Through the practice of Taekwon-Do, I have noticed an improvement in my daily life, and my ability to overcome psychological and physical limitations has improved.

Finally, it is also important to highlight that Taekwon-Do has helped me socialize with other people, in a way that was not previously possible. Through the practice of Taekwon-Do, I have met new people and have increased my social sphere. I believe that this has improved my autonomy and social skills.



FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

My future plan is to continue the practice of TKD for people with disabilities in particular, to help as many people as possible to regain their self-esteem and their value within society.

My dream is that HQ in the near future could make more efforts towards the emancipation of TKD for people with disabilities and for people with special needs and create rules and policies that go according to their specificities.

My particular dream since the beginning of TKD practice is to become a master in the future and contribute to the growth of TKD in Mozambique, Africa and the rest of the world.

I am proud to train Taekwon-Do ITF. With the practice of Taekwon-Do I have had the opportunity to get to know my body's functioning and limitations better, I overcame my physical and mental barriers at the highest level, and I gained a robust emotional stability that also follows the principles of Taekwon-Do.

I would like to express my wish that the International Taekwon-Do Federation engage in efforts to create a committee for people with special needs to be more included and encouraged to practice Taekwon-Do. This martial arts has made me the best version of myself. But more than knowing how to defend myself against my opponents, I have learned that building a more peaceful world is the best defense against our opponents.