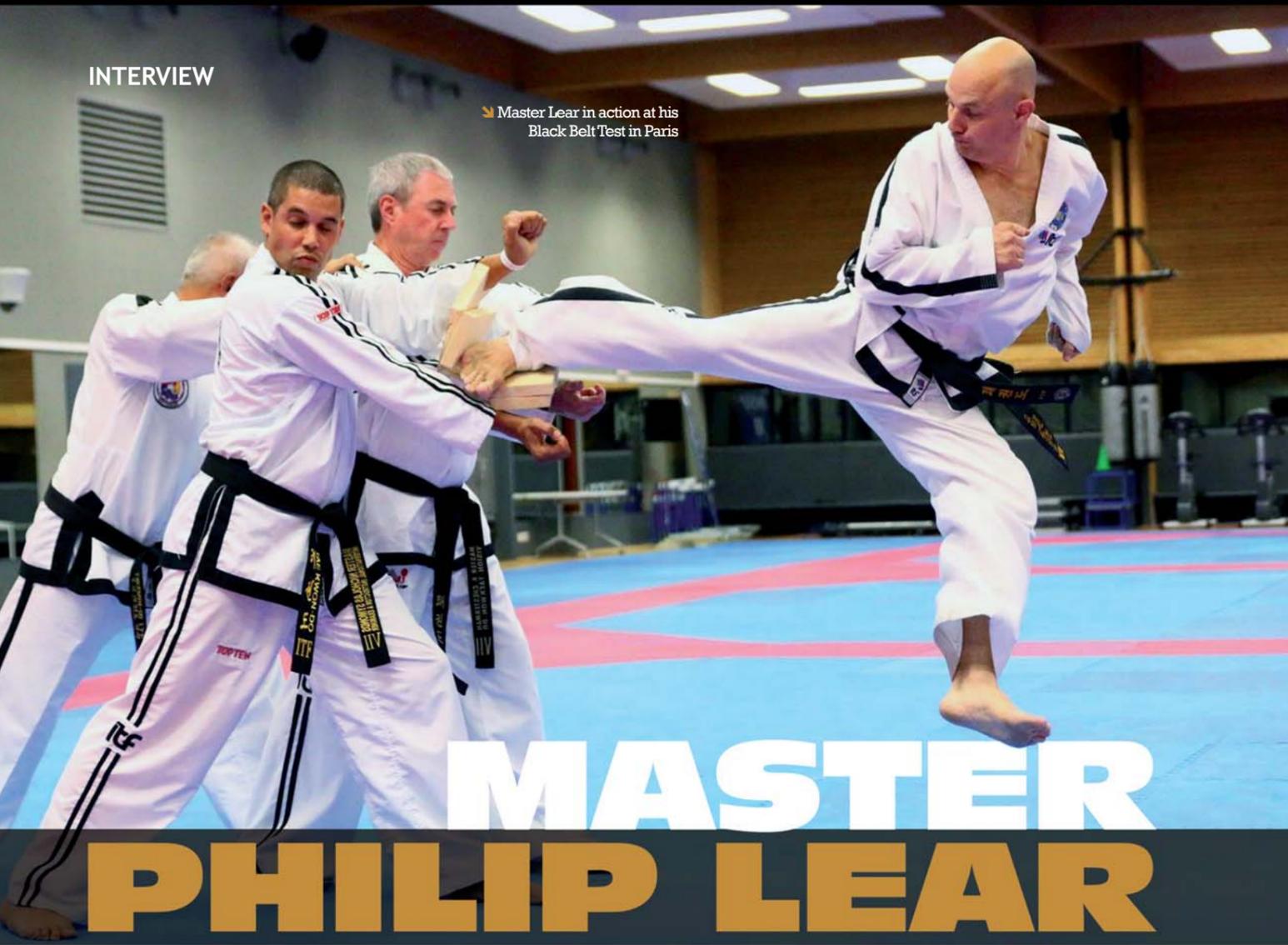


Master Lear in action at his Black Belt Test in Paris



MASTER PHILIP LEAR

Liliana Cottrell - ITF England PR Officer talks to Master Philip Lear about his test to become a 7th Degree ITF Taekwondo Black Belt, his involvement as ITF England National Taekwondo Team Manager and the benefits of Mindset training.

Master Philip Lear was promoted to 7th Degree ITF Taekwondo Black Belt in November 2016. He is well known for the quality of his Taekwondo; his leadership qualities; charisma and passion for the art. Most recently, he has been best known, as the ITF England National Taekwondo Team Manager who led the team to some impressive performances and results. He has helped many; is an inspiration to many; and has had a diverse experience and an interesting martial arts story over the years, which is why I wanted to capture some of it in this interview he kindly agreed to do with me.

Liliana Cottrell: First of all, congratulations on your promotion, Master Lear. Have you got used to the sound of that yet?

Master Philip Lear: Hi, thank you, Lili. It's been quite strange that from one day to the next people call you a Master. I don't believe it has changed me, well I certainly hope it hasn't. I plan to continue being the same person, however I do take the title very seriously and realise my responsibilities in not just the way I communicate to people

but also in my own continued education. I always had a pre conception of what a Master would be, however I certainly don't have a long white beard and I'm not quite at the Yoda level yet. But I am still learning.

You took your test in Paris at the IIC held there in November. Did the location add to the occasion, given your heritage? (Jean-Philippe.)

Ah yes, not many people knew about this. I was born with a French name as my mother is French. When my dear friend Mr Lillian Doulay said he was going to organise an IIC in Paris it just felt the most natural place to go for my test and I was very proud to be in a city that I have lived for a few years when I was younger.

Could you tell us a little bit about the test itself?

The test felt quite intense, there were

ten of us there being tested in front of GM Marano and GM Lan, with GM Weiler and GM Bos watching. From the candidates there was one going for 5th Degree, one for 6th Degree, five for 7th Degree and three for 8th Degree. It was an honour to be on the same floor as 5 times European Champion Master Mark Hutton, also Master Kenneth Wheatley who is someone I have started to build a very good friendship with recently, finally having my dear friend Saija Aalto from Finland, as well as Janitizio Moreno from England and Anna Anastassiadou from Germany. I also made a new friend in the person I was partnered with who is now Master Art van der Lee from Netherlands.

We covered Patterns, Step Sparring, Self Defence, Free Sparring, Breaking and then Theory. With everyone totally focusing on their own performance and doing the best they could. It felt really special.

Were you happy with your performance on the day? What helped and what stood in the way? What was the hardest part?

I believe I performed to the best of my ability, especially considering the state of my hip. I was diagnosed with arthritis last year which was quite a difficult thing to accept. In fact what happened is it just made me more determined to do my test before my surgery took place.

I was absolutely buzzing during the test, it was like many years ago when I used to compete internationally. I was so focused on each element and felt like I was completely in the zone. Having GM Bos come up and congratulate my performance was absolutely the highlight of my promotion. Having him watch over me and knowing the standards that he set meant that his approval was all I needed to hear.

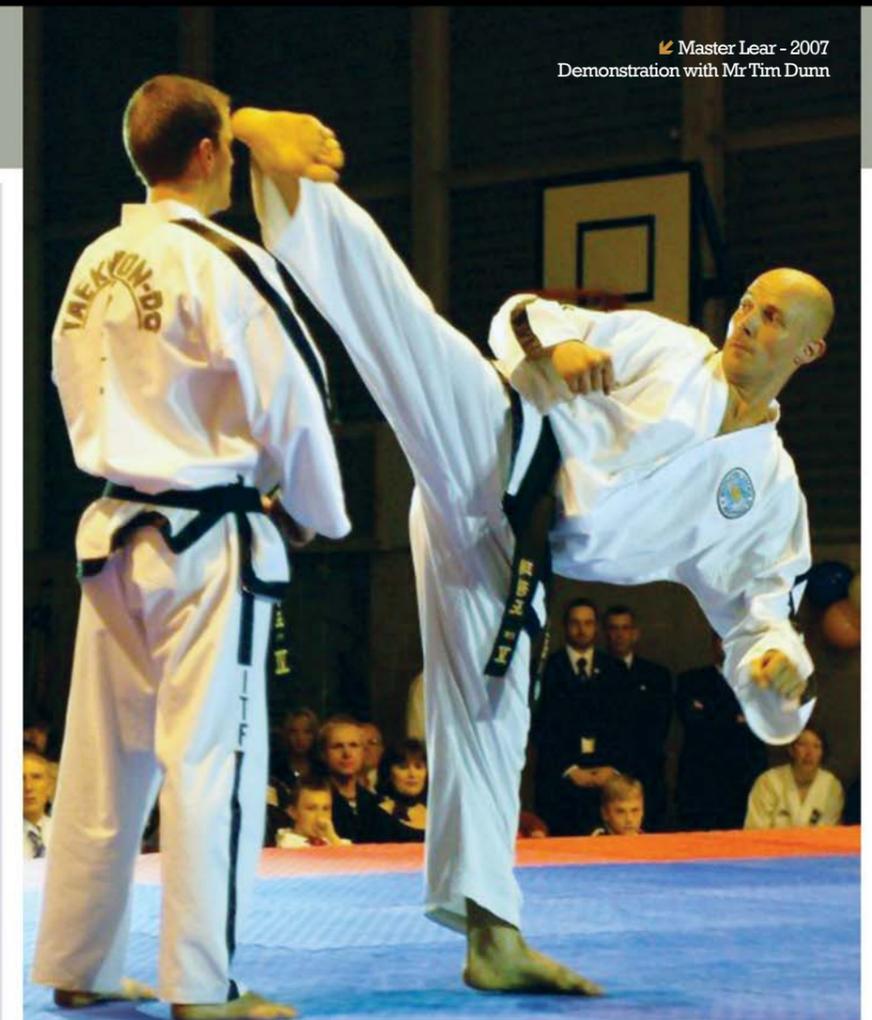
The hardest part were the Patterns, I hadn't kicked properly in about 18 months and was struggling to kick waist level, let alone head height as is required in Tong-Il. There was one kick in particular, which was the high back kick where I felt my hip click, fortunately for me my head was turned from the examiners so they didn't see the grimace on my face as I retracted my leg.

Master Lear in action at his Black Belt Test in Paris



You looked in pain with your hip in the hours before the test. How did you manage to go through it all?

Yes, it was very painful. I had prepared a cocktail of pain killers to get me through the test, this had been approved by my doctor, but also I was lucky to have Master Martin Hewlett with me at the test who is a Paramedic and he helped me by ensuring I was taking the maximum dosage allowed



Master Lear - 2007 Demonstration with Mr Tim Dunn

test I knelt down and closed my eyes. I just focused on my breathing and used positive affirmations for 10 minutes. This meditation process completely helped me to focus only on the task and not on anything else that was happening to me.

What does your promotion mean to you?

It's very personal. I've had a very colourful journey in Taekwon-Do so far and have enjoyed every single element. The last few years I have been giving my time to others to help them progress, notably on the National Team. This was my chance to give back to me. From the time I was training with my instructor Master Tan in Malaysia back in the early '90s he really became the inspiration for me in so many ways. From wanting to be an international competitor, teaching Taekwon-Do full time and then the thought of one day being promoted to a Master. This is almost like a pat on the back to myself for what I have done over the years and I have certainly felt in the last year and a half that I am ready for it.

Now you are a Master in Taekwondo, what will be your focus? Has anything changed in the man behind the title?

I have a few plans in the pipeline now. Not only with my own full time academy that is currently being set up in my hometown of Crowborough, but also my plans for organising an Open British ITF TKD Championships at the K2 in Crawley, West Sussex on 25th November this year.

without it causing me any problems. In the end I had taken 2 lots of the maximum dosage of Co-codamol within 2 hours of each other and then Diclofenac and a stomach protector, 2x Ibuprofen, 2x Caffeine tablets and half a bag of jelly babies.

I'm just glad there are no WADA testings for Degree examinations! I managed to perform as if I had no pain. Also, before the

INTERVIEW

This will be open to any ITF affiliated or ITF style group as we want to bring back the chance for people to really see if they can become a true British Champion and not just a Champion of their group. We already have some other countries interested in attending too and we will promote the Championships more in the coming months. I also want to focus on continuing to grow and develop our organisation *Vision Tae Kwon-Do*, we have an amazing group of likeminded instructors who are forward thinking whilst maintaining a high standard of student. We now have over 1000 members and it's a really exciting time to be a member of our group.

Ambitions for the future?

My first ambition is to be able to kick again after the hip surgery I've had. I'm currently going through rehab and it's feeling stronger everyday, I'm really pleased with my improvements and am completely astounded



➤ Master Lear and Master Hutton after their Black Belt test in Paris

at how the body heals itself so quickly, I am able to walk now totally pain free and I can't wait to get back to teaching and showing everyone I can kick again. I also continue to do some really important work teaching Special Needs children here in my town of Crowborough and I want to expand that so as to give them more opportunities.

For a few years now you have been the ITF England National Team Manager. What has that been like? What has the experience taught you? Best bits? Worst bits?

I got involved with the team when it was at its lowest. The team had returned from a European Championships with 2 Bronze medals and the Head Coach had resigned. At the following ITF England AGM I put together a proposal to build the team back up again and create a structure. In my proposal I created a hierarchy for coaching, improved



➤ Master Lear action shot with Lyonel Tan in Malaysia

the selection process that was in place at that time and increased the number of hours and the frequency of squad training. I then called some of my friends who are all excellent coaches and asked if they wanted to get involved in this new project and they all said yes.

Then over the following 4 years our team started getting some incredible results. My team of coaches created many World and European Champions including the amazing feat of the Junior Male Team becoming Team Pattern World Champions and European Champions at the same time, our Senior Male team became World Team Power Test Champions, we also had seniors Matt Cadle and Zak Espi become individual World Champions as well as Junior Izzy Bridger becoming both World and European Patterns Champion, Nermeen Hilton and Tiegan Flay both junior Sparring European Champions. Matt Cadle also became Sparring European Champion.

This combined with many Silvers and Bronzes in both individual and team across all the disciplines made it an enormous step up for England and more importantly the team sustained this level of success. The team went from winning 9 medals during the term (1 Worlds and 2 Euros) 2011-2012 (before I took over) to 25 medals during 2013-2014 and an astounding 46 medals during 2015-2016.

I created a Coaches Code of Conduct, Competitors Code of Conduct and Spectators Code of Conduct. I also created job descriptions for every level of the national

team and brought on board a physio to assist our competitors before, during and after competing, a Child Protection advisor and our own photographer.

I also started to move the squad training around the country as it had been 100% focused on the South East. Now we have 3 venues for training so that everyone shares the distances required for travelling.

I also organised a sponsor for the team through Top Ten who supply doboks and track suits for the team at a very special price and I also organised annual team t-shirts through ITF England for the competitors.

The team of coaches has grown in experience and some coaches have left with new ones coming in, however the same mentality has stayed and I believe the new team of coaches will help to take England to the next level.

Worst bits? There were no worst bits. It was always a pleasure to be part of changing the England team into a successful one. I'm very proud as soon as I see any England competitor competing for our country.

You yourself have been an international competitor, a national team coach, an umpire, instructor, AETF Board Member... Do you think that each role has added different qualities to you as a martial artist and a human being?

I've been fortunate enough to stand on the podium representing my country on many occasions as a European or World Champion, World Cup Champion and medallist, I've

helped others to achieve their dream of becoming a European or World Champion, I've been fortunate to centre referee at World and European Championships and I've been on the AETF Board for 8 years working with some of the elite leaders of Europe's top countries. All these positions have absolutely given me the opportunity to meet so many people and to develop myself as a person. There are many who just want to 'do' Taekwon-Do and there are many that can say TKD is their life. This isn't just because they train two times a week and talk about it from time to time, this is because they are there for the long haul. By being active and involved on so many levels in TKD we learn so much more about ourselves and also what we can do to help others. It means we are also helping to promote TKD around the globe by showing the professionalism of the way we work.

Do you have role models who have inspired you on your journey? Could you tell us a little about them please?

Yes, firstly, we tie the belt around the waist once to represent three things, one of them being to serve one Master with unshakable loyalty. My Master has and always will be General Choi Hong Hi and I was lucky enough to meet him a few times, train with him and have dinner with him.



➤ Master Lear with Grand Master Bos in Paris after his 7th Degree Test



➤ Master Lear action shot with Lyonel Tan in Malaysia



➤ Master Lear with his Instructor Master Tan

Another role model is my instructor Master Tan Eng Kiat from Malaysia. I've trained under a few instructors over the years, but he is the one I have felt truly changed my outlook on TKD both physically and mentally. I have been training with him now for 23 years and we see each other every year. He is always there for me when I need another point of view on something and he's someone that I confide in with any matters that are going on in my life. He is like a father to me.

My other role model is Grandmaster Wim Bos from Italy. I have known him since 1994 from the World Championships in Malaysia and instantly I could see there was an aura about him. He is a very passionate man who wears his heart on his sleeve and I relate to that. He has done so much in ITF history to improve our competitions and our ITF and even now as a 9th Degree is a real inspiration to the world with his incredible ability and knowledge.

How did you get into Taekwondo?

This is an interesting story. When I was 15yrs old I was being bullied by someone in my year, almost everyday for about 6 months

he would just walk up to me and punch me in the face. I would freeze and just allow him to do it. After games he would wait for the teacher to go into the building and then punch me with the class standing around me. I just didn't know what to do and how to react as I'd never had that happen to me before. He wasn't even asking for anything, he was just doing it to have power over me.

At that time I had a part time job working at a local supermarket and strangely I befriended the local tough nut called Rob who was also doing Taekwon-Do (it was WTF, but I didn't know the difference then). He told me I had to stand up to this kid at school to stop him and I said I just didn't know how I could do it. He then very kindly took me under his wing, we would go out running in the evenings and then I would go around his house where he would show me how to punch and kick. During this time I managed to stay clear from the kid at school so gradually I was building my confidence. This was the key, because actually my level of punching and kicking probably wasn't that good, but Rob instilled a belief in me that I could actually stand up for myself.

One day the kid from school approached me



and went to give me a punch when I put my hands up and told him to stop. I said, "Let's sort this out once and for all, you name the place and the time and I'll be there." His face lit up at the thought and said, "Ok, let's do it." So we set a day and time and I told Rob how long we had, I remember getting very nervous about it and at one stage Rob offered to go in and 'sort him' on my behalf. I said no, I had to do it myself. The day came and it was a lunchtime in the artroom, I was in the photography studio psyching myself up whilst he was in the classroom winding himself up in front of a massive crowd of students who had all heard this fight was going to happen.

I walked into the classroom and we stood face to face and the fight started. I remember it being a pretty pathetic affair with a bit of wrestling, I remember holding his arms and then throwing him across a desk where he hit his head on the ceramic sink. I remember being quite surprised at how strong I was. We continued to wrestle with each other, I tried to kick him, he grabbed my foot then I held onto his shoulders and managed to wrestle him to the ground. I then pinned his arms with my knees, grabbed his throat with one hand and drew my other hand backwards above his head, everyone was shouting, "Kill him, hit him," "fight, fight, fight." I shouted at him to say submit so everyone could hear, eventually he did. I then looked around at everyone in the room and shouted, "I hope you're all f***ing happy now!" I got off him and walked off. No punch was thrown that day! But he left me alone afterwards and my street cred went up around the school. That was my introduction of the positive effects of TKD through Rob. After that I took up Karate for a while, then Kickboxing. I then moved to France for a couple of years, then on my return I was determined to look for Taekwon-Do after my positive experience with it and it just so happened that a new ITF TKD school opened up in a town close by and immediately I joined it and haven't looked back since.

I know that more recently you have become very interested in mindset and mindfulness. I have

myself benefited from these teachings and I remember witnessing you using some of your knowledge in the field in the preparation of some of our competitors at the European Championships in Finland with some impressive effects. Could you tell us a little bit about it?

I've felt for years that something was missing in my life, I've always been very pro-active and what I've realised is, when you do so much in any organisation there are many people who like to find fault in what you do and maybe for their own reasons be it jealousy, envy or just being malicious they want to bring you down. I struggled to deal with this and found myself getting over emotional as I allowed these thoughts to get to me. I knew I had to do something to stop this and that's when I met an old friend called Stephen Aish who was my Kettlebell Instructor Trainer. He had changed his path in life and instead of working in the fitness industry he dedicated his life to being a Mindset coach. I went to his house for a one to one session and went through lots of content that all made sense and helped me to realise that I can take complete control of my life instead of reacting to other people's toxic and negative ways towards me. From then onwards I started to remove the toxic people from my life and I learnt all about being mindful and how to meditate. I learnt about visualisation and how to live in the present moment rather than allowing things from the past (depression) or unknown things from the future (anxiety) control how I felt at that moment.

It has been a revelation for me and I would say it's the bit I felt was missing before going for my 7th Degree. I now work on the mental side of my training everyday and find that I am so much happier within myself. I enjoy every single moment both with my family and teaching TKD and feel very grateful for what I have.

I have spoken about mindset training to many people since going down this road. I have helped them to change the way they see life and I have helped some with guided meditation. I have also helped to build competitors up so they believe they are the best. The thing about Mindset training is that it's all about giving without receiving anything back, you do it because you know you can completely change someone's life for the better and then you go to the next person and then the next person. It's an extremely rewarding feeling when you can help people to un-jumble the 60,000 thoughts they have everyday and bring them into the present moment. I continue to run Mindset courses with Stephen and we see people literally transform before our eyes, it's incredible.

OK, so to finish I want to ask, if you could choose two superpowers, what would yours be and why?

Wow! Tough question. I think being a TKD Instructor makes you into a real life superhero for many kids that are training. I had a 6 year old girl go into her school on Hero Day dressed in her dobok pretending to be Mr Lear (not sure how she did the hair though!). I believe everyone already has superpowers, some choose to use them and some not. As a TKD Instructor you have such an incredible influence on young children, they look up to you. So the way you behave and speak to others can be mimicked by them, you actually have the ability to create good citizens in society or if you are a negative/bitter person always looking for the worst in others then you can create the opposite as the kids will follow your lead. The superpowers of Courtesy and Empathy are skills that people choose to have or not, I believe these are essential for the development of good leaders of the future.



Master Lear accepting his next 4 year term on the AETF Board by Master Loboda