

Tae Kwon Do

The Global Tae Kwon Do Magazine

April 2024 Issue 182



*Martial Arts
for GCSE*



*The Real
Application of
Heaven Hand*

**An Interview With
The Indomitable
Master Chris Snow**

Plus much more inside

An Interview With **The Indomitable** **Master Chris Snow**

By Stuart Anslow

I have known Master Chris Snow for well over 20 years, having trained with him, competed with him (and sometimes against him) and have witnessed some of the highs and lows of his journey.

With his club approaching its 30th anniversary, I thought it was high time the magazine interviewed him.

Let's start at the beginning: What year, how old were you, and why did you start Taekwon-do?

Firstly, thanks for allowing me to do this interview. As was already public, as a kid, I was in the care system, eventually ending up in a monthly boarding school from 7 to 11 years old. This resulted in me being abused and beaten regularly for four years by our head of care, which has been covered before in other sources. So, by 11, I was accustomed to violence and was messed up.

My second school was a weekly borstal, (again closed down for abuse and violence). It had about 60 kids, but we were extremely complex kids with various issues, and fighting was a daily occurrence. In my first week, a big lad beat me up daily for my money in front of his gang, but on the 5th day, I fought back and threw him and me down about 10 stairs, so a friend, a seasoned hard nut, older than me, and his mate defended me as the gang wanted revenge. My friend Graham says, 'You got to learn to fight, as once we leave, they're going to come for you'. He was right!



It was late 85. I tried Kung Fu, Boxing, and Karate and found Tang Soo Do. I did that for a few weeks, but by chance, I found my first real instructor, Billy Vigour, who was teaching a TaeKwonDo and Judo class at the Dacourm Sports Centre in Hemel, called Advanced Street Fighting, which I had the privilege to join in January 86', age 11. Sadly, about 5 or 6 months in, Billy, a 2nd Dan Black Belt, said you need to grade up. I refused and left his club out of protest, as in those days it was all about fighting for me.

My next coach was John McDonald, a 2nd Dan in St. Albans. I remained with him until January 1987. John convinced me to grade up, so I got my grades and got 7th Kup in March 1987. The club was a tough club, which now I know was full of idiots who would just bash each other up in sparring weekly, and again I just got on with it. His class closed as he had no control, so I joined Tony Manning in Hemel Hempstead who was strict and had full control, whom I remained with until 2001 when I got my 4th Dan under the BUTF.

Why did you choose Taekwon do as opposed to the other martial arts you tried before?

The other arts I tried all were good, Tang Soo Do is possibly the closest to

Taekwondo due to the kicks but still did not hit the spot like taekwondo. When I found my first club with Billy, his classes were not traditional as he holds a 3rd Dan in Judo and other combat arts, so we were able to train in throws, locks and restraints, boxing, so as I was doing Taekwondo to be able to fight this suited me.

Can you remember your first classes as a white belt? What were they like?

Yeah, I was 11 and so excited. I remember



A young Chris Snow, aged 11

I was due to start my first class at Billies Club that Wednesday night. A family friend had an old Karate suit, so he gave it to me. I lined up in that class that night. I felt so cool, but the reality was I was out of place as the uniforms were different. I remember getting my uniform a few weeks later. At night, after the lights went out on our wing at 9 p.m., I would get dressed into it, stretch for an hour, and do 30 minutes of air kicks, honing my fighting skills. Everyone on

the wing thought I was mad. I got caught out of bed one night, and the wing master arranged for me to have the common room a few nights a week for two hours to train, so I would not train after the lights went out.

What are some of your favorite memories from your colour-belt years?

Two years into my classes with Tony, aged 14, I was settled at Tony Mannings Club. He is a fab coach, and classes were tough, but I was still not taking it seriously, unlike nowadays. I would turn up at class with black eyes and a split lip, having been in a fight in school, won, and lost a few. Tony would give me the right dressing down, but I just ignored his advice. While home one weekend, I got into a fight with an older lad who beat me up good and proper. My issue was I'd just never back down; I remember walking into the club a few days after being bruised and battered and Tony taking me to the side and saying I knew this would happen sooner or later.

He was angry. I think after that incident he literally would say, 'You're competing in six weeks', no option just you are, and I would just do it, and he made sure he sparred me often to toughen me up. He made me compete four times a year, but I now know he was helping me change my ways. I won nothing for about 3 to 4 years, but he still pushed me to compete until I started winning medals which started to help me gain respect for myself and let me understand my limits and abilities.

How much were you into competitions, what's the highest level you competed at, and did those bronzes turn into silver or gold?

As mentioned, I did not care about tournaments until I started training with

now Grandmaster Manning. I guess the reason he got me to compete regularly was to teach me a lesson and make me stronger as a fighter, as I was not going to stop fighting when challenged. I seem to remember at 2nd Kup I won my first gold in patterns, which incidentally was TAGB, and how I was in with the adults, and I had to go up 5 times in patterns. I remember I won, and the ring supervisor said he's in the wrong group, but Dave Oliver said.... Nope, he won so leave it. Yes, I picked up some Bronze and Silvers too after, but I was still not 100% competition, to be honest.

What year did you grade to black belt, and what did you have to do to achieve it?

In July 1992, I graded under Mr. Ray Dennis, 5th Dan. I remember there were 17 of us doing the exam at our club when I was 19. Ray was the former TAGB head coach and then formed the GBTA. He was a tough instructor and examiner who wanted us to spar like crazy, with loads of physical fitness, patterns, and step sparring until we were sick.

One thing I remember is that all the rest of the group went up and hit the brick with hand techniques once and gave up. He called me up. I was a thin, Mr. Bean-looking lad. I hit the brick about 10 times, and my hand was red-raw. Ray stands up and says, "Stop!" He goes on to say, 'This kid has heart.' He did not break the brick, but he did not give up. That's a real Black Belt and someone I would want



1990 - Dropping the Axe!

by my side in a fight. I was proud of that statement, and this pushed me to go crazier in class and get into Taekwondo more.

You are now an 8th degree; what are your standout moments from your black belt gradings?

Stuart, you and I had the privilege to be part of the BUTF, but the exam rules were strict. The late Grandmaster R.M.K. Choy educated me from 2nd to 4th Dan. I can recall two great stories I often recount to my students. The first was going for the 3rd Dan in early 1998. The technique was an over-head height jump with a reverse turn kick, so for me, that was 6 feet, 8 inches high. I could not do it, and Tony says the Monday before class it's too late. You're going to have to just hit and hope. On the day of the exam that Sunday, I think, we were all called up one at a time after the

physical exam for breaking; it was my turn to break, with my right leg it goes first time.

Onto the left leg, I hit it twice and nothing happened, and Master Choy said one more attempt and you failed. I remember Master Sangha saying, Chris, step back and breathe! I do as he says; I jump and kick, and it honestly feels like my leg was grabbed and pushed through the board. It breaks, and Master Sangha says, See, I knew you could do it... What an amazing man... I was deeply saddened to learn of his passing.

The second was my 4th Dan exam. Grandmaster Choy insisted that I go to Uxbridge for further training weekly with him and another. Man, he killed us on patterns each week, but in one of the sessions, he says you are not going home until you both break two boards three times in a row. 360 Jump Back on both legs. We must have broken a hundred times while



B.U.T.F. Days - British United Taekwon-Do Federation



Promotion to 2nd Degree

walking; no limping out of there; our legs were gone and our feet were bruised badly, and that was at 10.30 p.m.

I have to say that training however won me a few golds at 4th Dan after, at events because I'd just knocked them down when the boards were put up. That session, dam! Never hurt as much as I did after it.

Regarding competition, was 'special technique' sections your specialty? How did you fare in other sections, such as patterns, sparring and destruction?

No, I think I have always been dedicated to all areas, I did not want to be dedicated to sparring but would just take part in it all. I think I did this to challenge myself. I think as I got older, I committed to special techniques and patterns as I truly believe these show the real beauty of the art in my opinion.

From 1st degree to 8th degree, who were your examiners, and how did they differ from each other?

Ray Dennis, 5th Dan 1992, had no set format, so when you graded, you had no idea what was coming.

BUTF: The exam board was the hardest and best I had the privilege to be graded by and there's been a few. They had an amazing format and they knew how to push you to your limits.

BUTF is good; you only have to look at many top fighters and instructors like us today who were educated by them in the UK, like Zak Espy, Kevin Guy, and Richard Bell, to name a few.

Master Choy, 1995, 2nd Dan
 Master Choy, 1998, 3rd Dan
 Master Choy, 2001, 4th Dan

2005 UKITF 5th Dan Exam, OK, I don't see eye to eye with Grand Master Nicholls
 Totally Tae Kwon Do - 19

now, but his exams had substance like the BUTF, and again, he is good at getting the best out of his members; he helped me a lot, for which I am grateful.

2010 Senior Master Issac Harry, ITUK, I had my 6th Dan exam. Yeah, I liked that exam; it was a two-hour test, and again, he pushed me out of my comfort zone. Loads of patterns, set sparring, and breaking.

ITF Union has been my current ITF membership since 2015. Both my 7th and 8th Dan tests were conducted by Grandmaster Dalton, who set minimal requirements.

At these exams, I was given a blank sheet and told, you have proven yourself, so show me what you want too. Tong-Il was essential, as were a few other patterns, but I now know both 7th and 8th were tests of my integrity. Well, both times I set a high standard for myself, giving myself a list to be proud of and Grandmaster Dalton was not disappointed. Videos are on my website of these tests, proving how I pushed myself.

2016 7th Dan Test
2023 8th Dan test

In the Ch'ang Hon / ITF system of Taekwon-Do, usually promotions beyond 6th degree and not physical, but awarded for time served within the art and what you have done and given back to Taekwon-Do. Why did you choose to do a physical grading for both 7th and 8th degrees?

I believe a few of the ITF's are in fact asking for physical exams now. I know several other Masters who have graded have said their ITFs asked for this now. To me, it is not an issue as I am still able to perform. ITF Union's policy is all 7th and 8th grade now albeit there is not so much required. I gave my list which was for two reasons.

1. I wanted to show my students that I too do hard exams like them.

2. This is my journey so I must challenge myself, so I know I am the real deal.

To me it has to be done right. I don't want to be like those who get grades for being buddies with the head of an ITF or group or how many students they have, I will earn it and they can never make claims if we fall out, which is the case on every grade I have taken to date.

You hold Grandmaster Choy and the BUTF in high regard, why did you leave them?

I have never spoken poorly of them. Grandmaster Choy was a second-to-none instructor, he could pull the best out of anyone, and he did not mince his words. I knew it was time to leave as I would butt heads with him many times beforehand and I would not back down, eventually, I decided I was causing friction in the family, and I had no choice but to go. Everyone turned on me after I left but it was something I had to do as I seemed to be causing a lot of upset.

What type of things did you butt heads about?

Grandmaster Choy was strict, if you're a Black Belt turn up to all courses, seminars, and Championships or get lost. At the time I disagreed on this due to my ideas on freedom, only now I look at those around me and see why he did it, as my opinion now is Black Belts of today, well many are lazy, they will not give back to Taekwondo like we did, and will not help. This unfortunately has been my downfall, give too much freedom and some just take the mick. This is not just Black Belts it goes right up to 8th Dans. I think many that attend our opens can agree, after seeing

how many won't help at our open championships run to date.

In what year did you become an instructor and start running your own Taekwon-do school?

After my dad passed away in 1989, I went off the rails, giving up Taekwondo for 6 months. I was 16, and drugs, alcohol, raving, and fighting were good nights out. An incident between me and a 40-year-old family friend happens; he takes me to the ground in a fight. Instead of beating me up, he says, 'You used to be something. Now your family is ashamed of you. Are you proud of yourself?' After this, I refocused, as I had made a promise to my dad on the night he passed that one day I would be a master of Taekwondo. I mean, I was only a 5th KUP at the time and only 16... Big promise, eh?

On reaching the 7th and 8th Dan belts, I have embroidered on my belt now, 'The promise was achieved' as a mark of respect to my late father and I have now

placed my 7th Dan belt in a glass box on his grave..

I was back at training within three weeks. Did I give up what I liked? Much of it, yeah, but I was still struggling with the child abuse from years ago. Short fuse Chris, they called me. To be honest, the drink and drugs just numbed the pain, and the fighting was anger at life.

In 1994, I opened my St Albans TaeKwonDo school, which I still run now. It was my 21st birthday, and I had one student. My mates called round and said, 'Come on Chris, let's go celebrate' This meant go get drunk, take drugs, have a scrap and dance all night. I refused; instead, I went and taught my only student. The sense of pride in being an educator means as much to me now as it did then. I gave up my old life when I met my partner, Tracey. Yep, no more alcohol or drugs for the last 30 years and I try not to argue. I mean, I had a kid on the way, so it was about time. I have lost it a few times over the years, but nowhere near like when I was younger, I was a real jerk who had some real demons.



A young Chris Snow with his kids

How did it go in the early days?

I don't know about other coaches, but we seemed to attract a lot of idiots from other clubs back then. I would agree to take on some challenges head-on and even say to some, we will go in the car park, shall we? Even my students in the early days were ready and willing to fight in the dojang or the car park, being St Albans and Colney boys they too loved a tear up. This, as I look back on it now and know, was wrong, but it seems my non-nonsense attitude rubbed off on many of the early Black Belts. I just did not care; if I could get a time machine, I would change things.

What exactly would you change if you could?

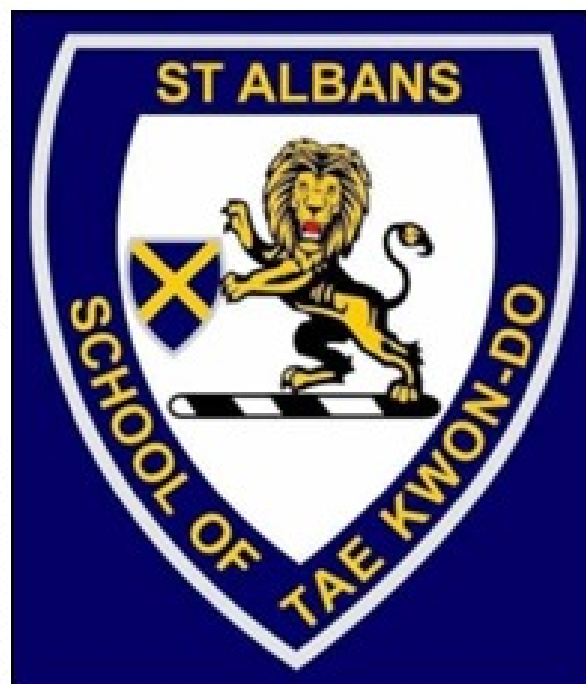
Be calmer and deal with people firmly and diplomatically, I'd definitely try and speak to Grandmaster Choy so when I left it was on good terms but I would

still leave, perhaps I would have stayed away from some unscrupulous seniors I aligned with over the years too, then, on the other hand, their incompetence and lousy ways taught me how not to act especially as a Master grade. Seems to me some think they are gods, No you are just a 7th, 8th or 9th Dan. If you want respect you must give it and earn it in my book. Rank is a position of honour, but respect is the highest level.



Chris and Tracey

How is your school now compared to when you started it?



Oh my god, so different now compared to years gone by. I dealt with my child abuse issues in 2011 at age 38. My attacker was found guilty for historic abuse and hung himself after six kids went forward. I fell apart then, and something happened to me inside. I think I started to live again.

I forgave myself; for many years I believed I must have done



Chris Snow and his students at a tournament in Derby, 2003

something to have such actions put on me, I now know I was not responsible for his actions and I realized the past must stay there. Now I treat all students, whether they are 9th Dan or white belts, the same. My ethos has changed when teaching.

Our clubs are hardworking and offer fun and excitement, but I am still hard on the members, and my expectations on standards are that you get results or go...

They work hard and I have their respect as I train every class with them.

What hurdles and pitfalls have you encountered along the way of running a Taekwon-do school?

Leaving the BUTF was tough, as everyone at the time (2001) just attacked us online. Me being me, I just went back at them, so I



made a lot of enemies for standing up against them. Running four classes a week with a young family was hard too, as was holding a day job and I was only making enough to pay the hires for each class, but I learned new ways to generate new members, which has led me to be full-time.

Why did people attack you online, just because you left a Taekwon-Do organisation?

I was outspoken, especially on GeneralChoi.com forum, I am still outspoken today but I am more of a choose your words and wars wisely. If you haven't realized by now, it's all about money and power at the top whereas I do not care about money and power that can 'do one'. Don't get me wrong, some are fab but it's only some. 'Everybody wants to rule the world' Sorry that's the DJ in me coming through lol...

You are well known, among other things, for running the LTSi tournaments twice a year. The tournaments have now been running for 20 years. What made you decide to run your own tournaments?

In the early days, we would go all over the UK; some were good, some were bad, and I think eventually I said to my guys, come on, we must be able to do better. Our first tournament had 95 competitors. We quickly learned that every penny must be rolled back into making the next bigger and better. 20 years later, our events match the biggest and best organizations out there. The only thing is that ours is built on the founder's last wishes: to bring everyone together, encourage friendships, and never allow the egomaniacs in.

How would you say the tournaments have evolved over the years?





Well, where do I start? LTSI has forced many to up their game; many have to use mats now; awards that are top quality given by us have meant that they have had to follow; many try and emulate our events and copy what we do, even hosting at our venue to harm us, which I find hilarious as they will never be LTSI.

I truly believe that is because I am a perfectionist; every little touch is done by me, never sacrificing quality. I am not about money and these events to me are people's events; I am simply the driver of the car. As long as we cover costs, that is all that matters. If our visitors love them, we keep providing them.

You used to run a destruction section at your events for many years, but this is no longer the case, why is that and are there any plans to bring them back?

Insurance and time are why it was

removed, we run a well-oiled chain of events and they run amazingly even with 400 in over a day so putting breaking back in could break the chain but never say never.

Nothing, with regards to running tournaments, ever goes smoothly. What are some of the biggest issues you have faced over the years?

The biggest issue has to be the insane attitude that some still have. I mean, most of the ITF spout the tenets but don't live by them; they still attack each other, especially LTSI, which seems to be a punching bag for some. I mean, just get over it, and let's build bridges together; it's all about unity.

In 2009, I stepped away from arguing with anyone and said, we just build, and they will come. 15 years later, I am right; ITF and Independents attend, and the events



are so relaxed, at least for many that visit. Honestly, everyone loves LTSI because we set a bar that does not favor one group but all of them equally.

I was told many years ago that mixing with non-ITF and sitting on the fence is wrong, yet our founder said we must unite all Taekwondo. However, some know that staying divided means they maintain control. Kind of like our government, as long as we keep fighting with each other, each party keeps control. So sad, but very true.

All in all, the journey of my development has been hard. Having to walk away from some coaches who were amazing to reach the destination I wanted to get to, the 30 years at one club that now offers 8 classes a week, and the insane work we put into

the events every six months... All has probably taken its toll but give me a time machine and I would only tweak a few things.

For some, Taekwondo is a sport; for others, it's an art, but for me, it's what has made me the best version of myself I am today. I'm calmer and more relaxed, but firmer. Above that, I am here just to serve an art I love and will until I die, as when I am doing Taekwondo, I am breathing and living the life many can only dream of.

I understand you train for 2 hours every day, is that correct? If so, what do you do in these 2 hours and is it every single day?

Nope, I do not train every day only Monday

to Friday so it's five days a week. I spend 60 minutes stretching with a few pilates exercises as my body has deteriorated over the years. I spend 40 minutes on patterns then 20 minutes on cardio kicking.

You are very flexible, have you always been like that or is it something you had to work at?

Ok I see where this is going, When I was a kid from 9 to 17, I would spend many weekends at home at the pioneer youth club in the Hip Hop zone, and we would dance our asses off. Eventually, I moved into a crew going to other cities for a burn (Dance offs), and occasional fights, or rather the older lads did. So, when I came into TaeKwonDo I had a bit of flexibility from dancing.

The lads I hung with were all older than me so we would dance, beatbox, and do some

pieces as we also loved spraying walls with some amazing cartoon art pieces, that was until we got caught.

What tips would you give anyone who is looking to increase their flexibility?

Anyone can get flexible, but it takes discipline, so many who I have spoken to who have taken on my ideas have got good kicking range. Here's a tip, get an elastic band and every day just stretch it daily for 5 minutes. After a month it has expanded ie stretched out. The body is the same, if you have 12 stretches and you do 2.5 mins on each leg over 5 days, after three months you will see your range change.

Why 5 days? Simple the body needs to rest, and I have done this for 30 years now.



Master Snow - Still super flexible all these years later



St Albans Taekwon-Do Black Belts, 2013

If you were in charge of the whole of Taekwon-do and could make changes to it, as it is today, what would you change and why?

That's a massive question but honestly, I would not want that burden, and frankly, how would you get rid of all the Ego maniacs out there?

My view would be to stop arguing and start building bridges, stop trying to rule the world, you ain't that important, none of us are. You cannot control anyone through fear, if you try one day they will fight back. Look there is NO ideology in Taekwondo, but the fact is.... There is only our ideology which is Taekwondo, it's what we all have in common, so just practice and enjoy.

Once you drop the ego and learn to get along and work together for the betterment of Taekwondo and everyone can compete freely at each other's events with no fear of being told you are disloyal, then we have an art with good substance. However not sure it's ever going to be possible.

With your years of experience in the art, what advice would you give to firstly, someone just starting Taekwon-Do and secondly, to someone who has just passed their black belt?

Find a club that is more localized and not focussed just on the International Body or National body, in this I mean some think if you are not part of them, you are fake. This is a complete farce and under the UK law is a statement classed as 'Restricted Practice' to try and force the public to join them. The fact is all you need to do, is go train at the club and then try a few others and choose what suits your needs. Any reputable club and instructor will have his / her info on their websites, if not why not!

As to Black Belts, I am probably going to play devil's advocate here, be proud of your achievements, practice humility that will stem ego in you, and be a Black Belt that is on hand to help at class and at every event your club is running and backing and carry yourself with pride. I



Dad and Daughter

blame General Choi for the attitude some Black Belts have nowadays as he forgot to add 'Humility' as a tenet, I am sure the haters will have a lot to say about that lol.

How do you see the future evolving for Master Snow, the LTSi clubs, and the LTSi tournaments?

I am yesterday's news, I am 51 so I may have another 25 years left in the game if I am lucky, I will continue fighting for the small man against any injustice. I will continue trying to get all Taekwondo to respect each other and work alongside

each other as I do now with my events.

As to LTSi clubs, we will just keep doing what we do best, If your readers want freedom take a look at our affiliation page on www.the-ltsi.com. We will be providing events as long as our network members still want them and NO! We won't go to war with those who try and get under our skin as that is just buying into their negativity which is not what we are about.

We have no interest in world domination or National TBH, we will do our best to restart the 'Black Belt' only event in 2025 but that is being organized as we speak now.



LTSI XX South East Opens

St Albans TKD Winning Team, 2024



Master Snow's tribute to his late Father

'The promise was achieved' story

On 11th May 1989, as his dying father Roy took his last breaths, a young man known as Chris Snow, the only son to Roy, made a promise that, one day, he would be a Master (7th Degree Black Belt) in the art of Taekwondo which he was already studying and would also run his own Martial Art gym.

On 5th April 1994, on his 27th Birthday, he opens his gym which celebrates its' 30th year in operation on 5th April 2024.

In August 2016, the main promise was achieved after 27 years and 30 years in the art. On 25th November 2023, Chris passed another rank to 8th Degree Black Belt, he surrendered the belt he had been wearing at his very successful schools to his late fathers' graveside.

Thank you for the informative interview, have you any final words for the readers?

Now what was that pattern saying? 'Man is responsible for his own destiny' This is so true, anything you want in life you can achieve it. I am about unity and yes I will never be the one to get everyone to agree to disagree in Taekwondo as I am just a link, however, if everyone did their part in Taekwondo ie do their link, taekwondo would become respectful to each other. The negative can only exist as long as we allow it to happen. Stand up and say no, and the minor few will have to follow suit or pack up and get lost.

It beggars belief that groups still attack each other and no action happens, even in LTSI we have had other groups in a few ITF bodies open clubs close to ours even though we were members, like over the road. Even host major events at our venue and not call us beforehand out of respect, proving the point of the infighting and lack of respect some have. Just getting talking and uniting is the best move forward in my book.

If you can't work together just learn to get on and communicate, this way we are all united and the pettiness will just dissolve.

Thanks for your time Stuart.



"True friendship is a plant of slow growth, and must undergo and withstand the shocks of adversity before it is entitled to the appellation." ."

- George Washington



Issue 183: May 2024
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