

YOU'RE NEVER TOO OLD TO COMPETE!

By Master John Kirkwood-AIMAA



At what age should you stop competing in sport, 30, 40, 50?

That really depends on the sport, for me martial arts has given me the motivation to live life to the fullest and to me competing not just in martial arts competitions but in everything that I do in life is given 100% commitment.

Its a fact as we get older we get slower, we loose muscle mass, we take longer to recover but its not all downhill as we get older, we can slow the process down and in some cases reverse the decline. The great thing about martial arts is that most students get better and wiser as they get older!

The younger student wants to learn new techniques and without perfecting that new technique they crave for more and more and they will go up and down the studio throwing hands and legs around without actually thinking about the technique and its development.

It is with the proper instruction and constant practicing of the techniques that not only make the movement looks good but increase the speed and power.

As an older competitor and instructor at 49 yrs old, I now find that my training regime has evolved over the years, not just because I am getting older but because there is now much better information and scientifically proven workouts available today. Competing is in my blood, I love all forms of fighting skills and in particular points sparring, you need the explosive speed, quick thinking, fast reactions and the agility to move fast in any direction, my speed in points sparring is as good as it was when I was in my 20s and 30s and in some techniques I feel slightly faster, this may not be down to just training more as i have many years of experience now, I feel a lot more relaxed which helps me to respond

quicker, but I don't think I could do the techniques the way I do if I didn't train properly.



My training consists of daily stretching, light weights and most importantly for me is Plyometrics for boosting speed and power.

Plyometrics requires explosive, intense movements and places great strain on the muscles and in particular the joints so there is a greater risk of injury if not done properly, as with any training program always do a proper warm up and make sure you have adequate rest between plyometric exercises as the risk of fatigue could lead to injury.

Examples of Plyometric exercises

Upper Body

A variety of drills can be used to make the upper body more explosive:

Press ups & hand clap: Press-ups with a hand clap in between is a particularly vigorous way to condition the arms and chest. The pre-stretch takes place as the hands arrive back on the ground and the chest sinks, and this is followed quickly by the explosive upwards action. Once again, to get the best training effect keep the time in contact with the ground to a minimum.

Medicine Ball: Another means of increasing upper body strength popular with throwers is to lie on the ground face up. A partner then drops a medicine ball down towards the chest of the athlete, who catches the ball (pre-stretch) and immediately throws it back. This is another high-intensity exercise and should only be used after some basic conditioning.



Lower body plyometric exercises with intensity level:

- Standing based jumps performed on the spot (low intensity) - Tuck Jumps, Split Jumps
- Jumps from standing (low-medium intensity) - Standing long jump, Standing hop, Standing jump for height
- Multiple jumps from standing (medium intensity) - bounds, bunny hops, double footed jumps over low hurdle, double footed jumps up steps
- Multiple jumps with run in (High intensity) - 11 stride run + 2 hops and a jump into sandpit, 2 stride run in + bounds
- Depth jumping (high-very high intensity) - jumps down and up off box (40 to 100cm), bounding up hill
- Eccentric drop and hold drills (high-very high intensity) - hop and hold, bound/hop/bound/hop over 30 meters (athletes stop and hold on each landing before springing into the next move), drop and hold from a height greater than one meter

Here are some more important guidelines when performing plyometrics:

- Plyometrics is not recommended for anyone under the age of 16 - especially more demanding drills such as depth jumps.
- Plyometric exercises won't leave you out of breath but do not be tempted to add in more sets and repetitions.
- Perform lower body plyometric exercises on a soft surface such as grass or exercise mat.
- Two to three sessions of plyometric's per week is ample.
- Rest completely between sets for 3 to 5mins. The goal is not fatigue but to complete each repetition with the maximum amount of speed and intensity.
- A plyometric session should not contain more than 120 ground contacts for any muscle group.
- Do **not** add extra load such as ankle weights or a weighted vest as this can lead to injury and negatively affects the quality of the drills.
- Keep the torso erect during the movements -- it prevents undue strain on the lower back.
- Always seek the advice of a professional coach before attempting plyometrics.

As I mentioned earlier it is important to practice the techniques properly, master the technique so that it becomes a natural movement if it feels un-natural and you have to think too much in what you are doing then it will restrict the explosive flowing movement.

When doing kicking drills don't always kick like it was a rhythmic exercise, use explosive speed to kick the pad, relax, compose yourself and repeat the kick, I believe that quality is better than quantity. Always stay relaxed, a relaxed muscle will react much faster than a tense muscle.

Keep up your training and don't listen to anyone who might suggest you are too old, enjoy yourself, vary your training regime to make it interesting, start to train with your kids or even your grandkids, do what ever it takes to keep you motivated.

Stay young and healthy.