

The persons and events that shaped Taekwondo in Argentina

By Manuel E. Adrogué
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Photographs are mostly courtesy of Miguel Hladilo

Taekwondo is the most popular martial art in Argentina. During the mid 1980s, when national population reached aprox. 30 million, Taekwondo population peaked with 60,000 students and instructors. The total number of people that have practiced Taekwondo in Argentina has been estimated in 500,000. An international powerhouse in ITF style, Argentina has generated more than 20 world champions in sparring, forms and breaking. This is both an account of the most relevant individuals and events in Argentine Taekwondo, as well as an attempt to place them within the context of a forty-year tradition now firmly rooted in the lower part of South America.

The names in bold indicate a list of the 25 persons considered to be most representative of Argentine Taekwondo, as listed at the end of this report.

First Part: The Korean Masters

The official date of introduction of Taekwondo in Argentina is November 1967. It was then that **Kim Han-Chang** (29), **Choi Nam-Sung** (31) and **Chung Kwang-Duk** (17) arrived and settled in Buenos Aires after two months on board of a Dutch cargo ship. At that time there were less than 1,000 Korean nationals in Buenos Aires –today the community exceeds 20,000-. One day Judo instructor Norberto Aspera stopped at a gas station, and a Korean employee working there saw his folded uniform at the back seat and asked about it. He was invited to the Judo class, which he attended along with fellow countrymen Choi and Chung. They showed their “Korean Karate” tricks in Judo academies, and the rest, as they say, is history. In prior times there had existed other Korean nationals teaching karate, but they never developed schools of their own. On the contrary, these three instructors had the back-up of the International Taekwon-Do Federation under Gen. Choi Hong Hi. Two other instructors that joined them around that time are Yang Dae-Chol (1970) and **Lee Chong-Seo** (1971), respectively from Ji Do Kwan and Moo Duk Kwan backgrounds.



*Kim Han-Chang and Choi Nam-Sung (2008)
Founding fathers of Argentine Taekwondo.*

Master **Kim Han-Chang** is a university graduate in Foreign Relations, very articulate, and highly skilled in his kicking techniques. He started learning in the Chung Do Kwan in Seoul under Son Duk-Sung, Um Kyu-Un and Par Hae-Man, and he recalls frequent visits by Gen. Choi,

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who acted as honorary president of the school. Master Kim received his third Dan in 1966. Of slender physique and fine technician, he became famous through his flying scissors kick in the cover of the second issue of Yudo Karate magazine. Among his first students were Eiriz, Balza (the first Argentine-born black belt), Diehl, Grispino, R. Villalba (who along with G. Poletti contacted Master Hwang Hyun-Chul in the U.S. and introduced Moo Duk Kwan Tang Soo Do to Argentina by 1974), **Busca**, A. Villanueva, Somoza, Desimone, García, Fuentes, **Tajes** and Neer (who later settled in the Neuquén region and published a book about the martial arts as a philosophies for life). Kim, today ranked as Kuk Ki Won 9th Dan, is currently semi-retired from teaching activity but serves as consultant to several organizations. After the local ITF-WTF split that occurred in 1979, Kim strengthened his ties with his original Chung Do Kwan school and his teacher Park Hae-Man, and ever since he has followed the approach taken by the World Taekwondo Federation. Master Kim has been always been beyond political disputes and therefore he is much appreciated by all people in Argentine martial arts as a genuine gentleman and, ultimately, the father of Argentine Taekwondo.

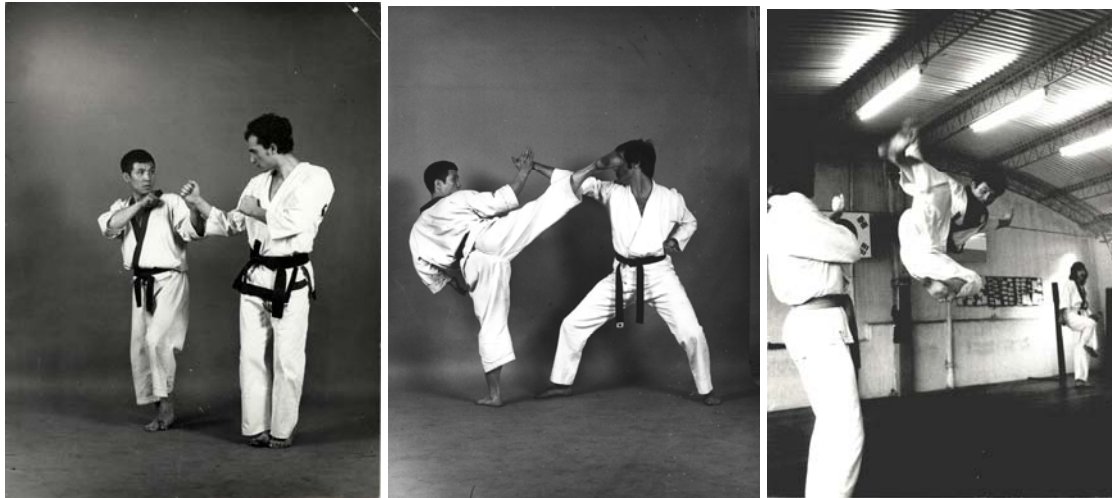


Master Kim Han-Chang

Master **Choi Nam-Sung** was a tough person rugged by the environment in which he grew. Originally from a northern Korean village, the withdrawal of American troops in 1950 forced the family to move south separately. As a twelve-year old boy he ended in an orphan house, and he eventually learnt to survive in the streets. Taekwondo, boxing and hapkido taught him how to deal with the mobsters that harassed him for "contributions" from his hard earned-money selling smuggled watches on the streets. Master Choi is a very tough person. He was had a short and powerful body, and his style was very strong, with heavy basics and his teaching was oriented to fighting. Although a few years older than Kim, Choi always regarded Kim as his elder brother because the latter was senior in rank and all institutional matters,

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contacts and business-like aspects were handled by Kim. Choi's original students were **H. Marano**, **P. Trajtenberg**, E. Casagrande, C. Castagnola, **C. Ouro**, J. Vaccaro, G. Portela, O. Cruz Martín, R. Tiscornia, J. "Pepe" Sánchez, G. Gambolini and Sáenz. Choi is also a Kuk Ki Won 9th Dan. He follows WTF instruction, keeping the roots of his original "Korean Karate", Yun Moo Kwan style. He still gives weekly classes to his higher-ranked students. Master Choi is a very simple and straight-forward person who doesn't socialize much and considers himself an eternal student of traditional Taekwondo at the old dojang built beside his house. Master **Choi** is regarded by his students as a humble man refusing to forfeit the good traditions of the past. He remains as close as a brother to Master Kim Han-Chang.



Master Choi Nam-Sung in action. At left, with student Héctor Marano

Master **Chung Kwang-Duk** was probably the most outspoken and forthcoming of the pioneers. He used to hammer nails into wooden panels with the side of his fist, and his students were highly disciplined under his guidance. Chung's black belts included Vargas, R. Gurtler, F. Pintos, G. Ramisch, R. Saenz and E. Palmisano. During the 1979 split Master **Chung** was the only Korean to remain in the ITF. He became the local head of the organization, until local students of other masters started to become significant to the ITF during the late 80's. Master **Chung** left to live in the United States during the 90s, where he was graded 8th Dan by Gen. Choi and has only returned to Argentina for occasional visits. He currently heads the New York-based International Taekwon-Do Society.



Master Chung Kwang-Duk

Master **Lee Chong-Seo** was a tall and athletic young man devoted to training in the Moo Duk Kwan style. A fifth Dan, he also held black belt ranking in Hapkido. He was regarded as an acrobatic and precise kicker, and was the first to show spinning techniques that marked the difference between Korean and Japanese style. His daily classes used to last more than three

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hours, where he taught forms, kicking drills, self defense, and sparring. Lee's senior students included **P. Florindo**, C. Verdún, J. Rogers, H. Guzmán, A. Salim, F. Solas and C. Capalbo. Lee taught until 1976, when he moved to the United States. He is retired from the martial arts.



Master Lee Chong-Seo at the old Kumazawa school. At right, in the 90s with student Pedro Florindo.

Yang Dae-Chol was a three time national junior Korean champion that arrived by 1970. He was from Ji Do Kwan, and was very focused into competitive training. He was medium height and very strong, particularly in his legs since he had also been a speedskater in Korea. In his classes sparring was heavy and intense, and instead of using punches, students used to slam their palms vigorously into their opponents' chests. His main students were E. Carrillo, R. Burman, Ciabardelli, O. Alderete (the first female black belt in Argentina), and from 1976 until his retirement in 1979, **P. Florindo**. He is semi-retired and lives in San Carlos de Bariloche at the Patagonia.



Jidokwan's Master Yang Dae Chol

Chung Jung-Moo was a lightweight and very fast old-school Oh Do kwan instructor. He arrived to Argentina in 1973. He had grappling skills from his ssireum (Korean sumo) background. Among his students were Ruffini, Alvarez, Cambursano, R. Borjas and C. Filippa. At present he keeps his relation with the WTF Taekwondo community as an advisor.

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Master Chung Jung-Moo

Keh Chung-Chan was a lightweight and skilled instructor who settled in Junín, close to the Santa Fe area. He was also a marathon runner. Through his student N. Misobe he eventually became the teacher of Mattos and M. Nassini, two excellent black belts who became the founders of Taekwondo in Rosario, a city with a vast number of martial arts champions.

Kim Sung-Su was a very aggressive fighter, strong and stocky, who displayed a very mobile style. He was a demanding teacher who developed a group of devoted black belts as R. Bertoia, E. Godoy, Squeff, H. Geiser, E. Lanciotti, Heichmann, Núñez, Bustos and Ambrosini.

So Young-Hye was also a military-trained Oh Do kwan stylist of medium size. His sparring partners remember he had a particularly strong side kick and was a well rounded martial artist. He is said to have been killed by the Shinning Path guerrillas in Peru in the early 80s. He was the teacher of F. Taboada.

Other Korean teachers who spread WTF Taekwondo in Argentina after the late 1970s include **Ku Yong-Chae** (the first Korean master that worked for the development of the style in accordance with Kuk Ki Won standards), Chang Jong-Hee (very proficient in what later became known as Olympic sparring, his influence in the early 80s bore a new generation of fighters and coaches, including Julio Ramos), Lee Seok-Won (a Kuk Ki Won 8th Dan of Moo Duk Kwan schooling who has recently been chosen as mentor by a dozen senior local instructors), Kong Myung-Kyu (who returned to Korea to become a successful Tango and showbiz producer) and Im Hyong-Man (a former Pro-Taekwondo full contact champion in Korea who is also a Christian minister).

Second Part: The seventies, the first Argentine black belts and the ITF-WTF split

By 1974 Gen. Choi Hong Hi visited Argentina for the second time, and all residing Korean instructors received him as the head of overseas Taekwondo. In those times the few local black belts were learning the "chon ji" patterns, and started to occasionally train together sharing what they were learning from their instructors. The first National Taekwondo Tournament was held in 1975, and it was the first time Argentines fought full contact with stiff chest guards, with some memorable clashes that showed a rough style. **Ouro, Florindo, Verdún, Carrillo, Borjas, Cirelli, Portela, Vaccaro, Cruz Martín, Aquino, Figueroa, Iedwab, Ricciardelli, Belardinelli** and "Pepe" Sánchez were some of the most remarkable fighters in that era, and some of them earned a name for Korean stylists in open style karate tournaments (mainly USKA-sanctioned).

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Carlos Ouro, first national champ in 1975. At the right, old time legends Cirelli and Verdún.



Capalbo vs. Sosa, 1977



Casagrande vs. Borjas, 1977



Florindo vs. Ouro, 1977



Capalbo vs. Sosa, 1977

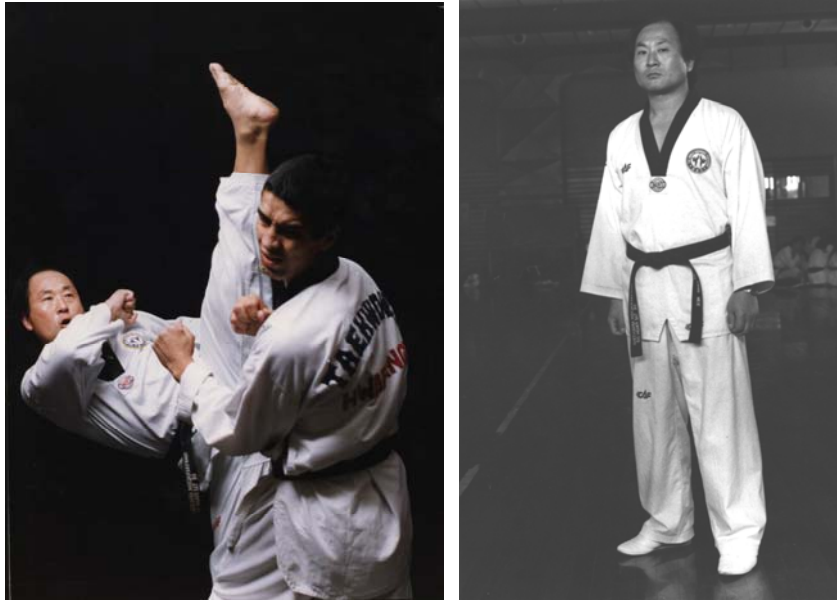
At that time in Argentina information on what was happening in Korea was scarce. The exile of Gen. Choi and the takeover of international Taekwondo by the Kuk Ki Won during 1972 was something unclear to Taekwondo students in Argentina. Korean masters who had originally arrived representing ITF didn't want to focus into politics, and explained little to their students. Additional Korean instructors kept arriving, such as Um Chi-Jung (the first to present WTF style as the new trend in Taekwondo), and some locals participated in the WTF World Championships in Chicago '77 (that was the case of **Florindo** and Verdún), while other who trained together entered in the ITF world championships of Oklahoma '78.



Florindo (left) vs. Borjas (right), 1978

By 1979 political and personal reasons had determined that all Korean instructors except **Chung Kwang-Duk** had decided to report directly to Kuk Ki Won in Seoul. The youth of the Korean instructors –who were in their early thirties, almost the same age of their senior students- may have also persuaded the locals that they should have a voice in deciding the future of local Taekwondo. Many local black belts felt held back in their gradings, and the ITF decided to send Master Kim Jong-Chang (ITF 7th Dan) in an instruction and demonstration tour. The group included Choi Chang-Keun, Rhee Ki-Ha, Park Jung-Tae, Lee Hong-Moon, Kim Suk-Jun and Michael Cormack, and after a week of instruction a group of twenty-one black belts was examined and promoted to 4th Dan: Eiriz, **Florindo**, **Trajtenberg**, **Marano**, Casagrande, Ramisch, Dacak, Grispino, Luque, J. Sánchez, Desimone, Gurtler, Sosa, Nassini, Sanz, Mattos, R. Sánchez, Vargas, Pintos, Aquino and Diehl. On that occasion E. Palmisano was promoted to 3rd Dan.

At that point some black belts who had not been part in the examination questioned the lack of etiquette by the ITF of by-passing local Korean teachers, and many of the promotions were objected by those who say their training pals sky-rocketing several degrees. In such a big group, experience and skill was varied, and it would be unfair to jump into a simplistic conclusion on the merit of such promotions as a whole. A small group of the Argentines – among them Solas, **Ouro**, Vaccaro, **Busca**, **Tajes**, Portela, Tiscornia, García and Somoza- decided to follow their teachers into WTF. Almost in parallel with the presentation of the WTF style by Master Um, on June 1978 Edgar Perez Colman, the Argentine ambassador returning from Korea, established the Taekwondo Association, with full governmental support (later transformed into the Argentine Taekwondo Confederation). Prior to his return and in gratitude and appreciation of Korean culture, Mr. Pérez Colman had undertaken the commitment before WTF officials to organize Kuk Ki Taekwondo in Argentina, and for such purpose **Master Ku Yong-Chae** was entrusted with the technical responsibility. Master Ku settled in the city of La Plata, where his school flourished and some years later continued to evolve under the guidance of Chang Jong-Hee. Master Chang served as the Confederation's technical advisor well into the nineties.



WTF style pioneer Chang Jong-Hee



Ambassador Edgar Pérez Colman with Osvaldo Cruz Martín

J.C. Kim's 1979 pre-examination course served to lay a unified technical ground for ITF Taekwondo in Argentina, while Perez Colman's Association –with the technical assistance of **Ku Yong-Chae**, who was the first to teach Taeguk forms in Argentina- formed the basis for local modern WTF Taekwondo.

Third part: The eighties and the first groups headed by Argentine instructors

In Argentina Taekwondo has grown and developed with strict adherence to the major global governing bodies (the WTF and the ITF). Unlike other countries, independent Taekwondo groups are few. Maybe because the first Korean masters were affiliated to international organizations and for the most part the Korean masters did not issue black belt rank based on their own personal authority, local Argentine instructors, even after leaving their original Korean teachers, have generally sought international certification.

After the 1979 Argentine instructors upgrade, the ITF organized the 1981 World Championships in Resistencia, province of Chaco, 1,020 kilometers north to Buenos Aires. Although in Argentina the most relevant martial arts activity was found in the city of Buenos Aires, the tournament in Chaco gave people from other parts of the country the opportunity to witness first-hand the international standards in ITF competition. During that event Azucena

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Zorzón (the first top-level female competitor in Argentina, currently 7th Dan) became world sparring champion. She was student of Paraguay-born Javier Dacak, Montreal '74 ITF and Oklahoma '78 ITF world breaking champion, who succeeded smashing seven one-inch boards with a knife hand strike.



*Alcides Solís, Javier Dacak and Azucena Zorzón
at the '81 World ITF championships in Chaco.*

As Taekwondo was gaining some awareness among the public, many of such teachers decided to teach martial arts professionally and for such purpose they gathered in a few organizations, among them (1) the group headed by **Héctor Marano** and **Pablo Trajtenberg** –which included Daniel Rossell, Alberto Katz, Mario Troiano, **Edgardo Villanueva**, Martín Montes, **Néstor Galarraga**, Ricardo Siracusa, and Jorge Miccolis-, (2) the group lead by **Pedro Florindo** –with Jorge Rogers, Héctor Guzmán, Francisco Taboada, Francisco Beloso (a former student of Daniel Cirelli), Carlos Gómez de Olivera, Armando and Jorge Carabajal, Claudio Iedwab, Gabriel Delucci and Martín Haussemer-, and (3) the group lead by Enrique Eiriz –with Ricardo Desimone, Darío Vega and brothers Adrián and Cristian Desiderio. Master **Chung Kwang-Duk** remained as the highest ranking ITF instructor in Argentina, and he was seconded by Ricardo Gurtler, Guillermo Ramisch, Roberto Saenz, Eduardo Palmisano and Kim Yong-Chol.



Pablo Trajtenberg

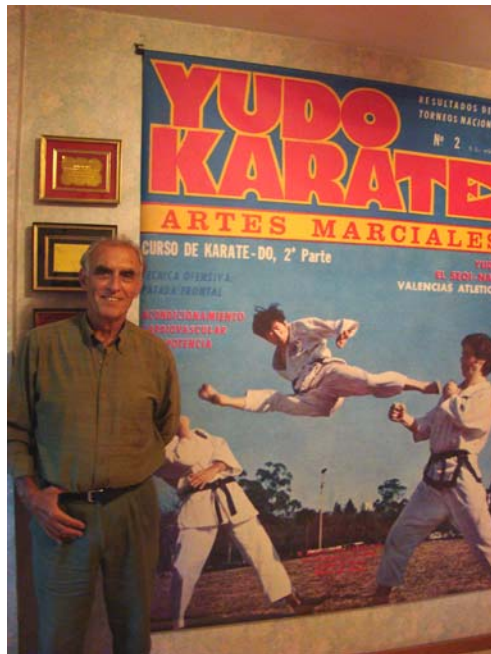


Claudio Iedwab / Gabriel Delucci

On the WTF side Emilio Casagrande, Félix Solas, Abel Salim, Jorge Vaccaro, **Raúl Busca**, **Oscar Tajés**, Gustavo Somoza, Carlos García, Ernesto Carrillo, Ricardo Burman, Osvaldo Cruz Martín, Carlos Algranati, Enrique Cambursano, Ricardo Fuentes, Ramón Borjas, Alfredo Muñoz, and **Carlos Filippa** were among the most active instructors in Argentina during the early '80s.

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The right-wing military government was replaced by democracy in 1983, and slowly the life-style of the population changed. Sports and cultural activities that had previously been pursued by few started to attract the youth massively, and by 1985 martial arts schools were blooming. Yudo Karate magazine, through its alma mater **Miguel Hladilo**, helped to shape local Taekwondo inspiring competitors to achieve the merit of being at the cover of the magazine, which served as authoritative voice about what were the international and local trends of the martial art.



Miguel Hladilo beside the historic cover photo of Master Kim, Han-Chang.

On the WTF arena during the early 80's **Raúl Busca** and **Juan Carlos Mangoni** (2nd and 3rd place in the 1981 Santa Clara USA World Cup) with Ricardo Puppo and Miguel Rodea were among the best competitors of their time. Some years later and with a distinct Olympic-style influence from Korea a faster and more strategic Taekwondo evolved. One talented instructor and Korean university champion who settled in Argentina for some time, assisting Master Choi Nam-Sung and Oscar Tajés was Kim Jun.



Raúl Busca, unstoppable

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Juan Carlos Mangoni, a golden era champion

Jorge Gómez, **Julio Ramos**, Martín Pardo, Andrés Haber, Alejandro "Lamparita" González, Alfredo Vitaller, Flavio Salvador, Manuel Chamorro, Angel Muñoz (champion under WTF and Karate rules, whose axe kick was terrifying), Alberto Juárez and Alejandra Chancalay (fem.) became the top fighters in the style during the eighties.

In the ITF style the champions of the early 80's were **Edgardo Villanueva** (a resourceful and aggressive fighter, undefeated national champion in ten years), Alberto Katz (a superb technician), Ebel Barat (Silver Medal heavyweight at the ITF 1984 Glasgow World Championships), Alcides Solís, Pedro Osuna, Francisco "Paco" Beloso, Alfredo Belardinelli, Daniel Burban, Fausto Mercado, Jorge Rábago, Jorge Carabajal, Marcelo Franzotti, and Azucena Zorzón (fem.), and in the mid '80s Gustavo Pigni, **Juan José Sunini** (a talented fighter tough as a nail who was champion under all sort of martial art rules), **Marcelo Vatrano** (a very complete lightweight), Pablo Sabalain (world champion in pattern and breaking specialties), Carlos Bianchini, José Maidana, Humberto Próspero, Laura Micceli (fem.), Marcelo Franzotti, Eric Calvo, Alejandro Quadro, Fernando Pigni, Francisco Petrocco, Facundo Alarcón, Daniel López, Mario San Agustín, Sabrina Condró (fem.) and Mary Potenza (fem.) were outstanding competitors.



Edgardo Villanueva (left) and Juan J. Sunini (right), two fierce fighters

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Marcelo Vatrano

In 1987, ITF envoy Master Park Jung-Tae gave a one-week seminar in Buenos Aires, which finished with the examination of the local senior instructors. Among those promoted to 6th Dan were **Trajtenberg, Marano, Florindo**, Ramisch, Gurtler, Sosa, Dacak, Nassini, Grispino, A. Villanueva and Luque. Later on that year the ITF Panamerican Championships were held in Buenos Aires, presided by Gen. Choi. At that point different groups of instructors were starting to compete to obtain direct contact with the ITF headquarters, which exclusively dealt with **Chung Kwang-Duk** until that time.



Master Park Jung-Tae split his attention during the 1987 visit into two groups: the one whose main figure was Chung, Kwang-Duk (left), and the group lead by P. Trajtenberg and H. Marano (right)



Héctor Marano, Alberto Katz and others during their 1987 exam

Fourth Part: The nineties and beyond

By the beginning of the 1990s a solid pyramidal structure had developed below most ITF-style masters. Since most groups were based in Buenos Aires, they competed against each other over the number of schools affiliated and students each of them had, their strength to usher their best students into the national team, and their contact with the ITF headquarters (which was translated into their ability to grant their students international rank certification). In principle the ITF headquarters preferred to deal with only one headmaster per country, but when differences became irreconcilable, the ITF preferred to have parallel relations with several representatives in Argentina rather than loose important schools for domestic disputes. At a breaking point there were two or three "national championships", each organized by a different group. Shifts of entire schools from one organization/headmaster to the other became frequent.

Songahm (ATA) Taekwondo was first heard-about during the beginning of the eighties through the participation in open tournaments of César Ozuna from Paraguay. Mr. Ozuna is currently senior master in such organization, and head for South America. The first Songahm representative in Argentina was local Taekwondo veteran Félix Pintos, and such position was later occupied by Pablo López and Emigdio López –former WTF instructors currently teaching in the U.S.- Gustavo Cortés is also a former WTF instructor who was instrumental in the development of such style in Argentina. Songahm style has not grown as much as other systems but has become well established under Agustín Spiess (in Chaco) and Ricardo Fernández (in Rosario). The South American headquarters of the style are in Asunción, Paraguay.



Pablo "el Perro" Ferreiro



Mario Shaur becoming 1988 heavyweight world champion

During the nineties some of the best ITF style Taekwondo competitors in Argentina were **Pablo "el Perro" Ferreiro** (a rock-hard yet flamboyant fighter who has been in the national team from 1992 to 2005), Mariano Bechara, Ricardo Rieiro (world champion and renowned for his close-quarter skills), **Mario Shaur** (a powerful heavyweight, the first Argentine ITF sparring world champion), Fernando Pigni, Iván Protti, Carolina Menegazzo (fem., an outstanding fighter several times world champion), **Noemí Prone** (fem., a forms specialist who has won world-awards in all areas of Taekwon-Do), Federico Pascual, Alejandro Banega, Federico Figari, Hernán and Martín Cisternas, Alejandro Gartenbank, Iván Protti, Javier Romitrovsky, Felipe Villamil, Germán Von Foerster, Germán Bianchi, Leandro López, Carlos Uriarte, Eugenio Favalli, Christian Quevedo, Oscar D'Agata, Brian Mutri, Marcelo Bordiez, Marcelo Cremona, Lucas Villa, Darío Calderón, Ezequiel Borracer, Mariela Ledesma (fem.), Sebastián Freire, Karina Wassermann (fem.), Ana María Coronel (fem.), Patricia Garelic (fem.), Paula Iglesias (fem.), Silvina Velázquez (fem.) and Marina Serrano (fem.). In the different international

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tournaments they entered they all held high positions, and many of them became ITF world champions on several occasions. In the last years new Argentine ITF-style competitors with a international success include Johathan Batista, Denis Turnes, Soledad Serrano, Ignacio Caplonch, Leandro Money, Guillermo Alvarado and brothers César and Marcos Favalli.



Noemi Prone's perfect kick



Hernán Cisternas and Federico Figari



P. Florindo and E. Villanueva jumped over federations' restrictions and put together a dream team of Sunini, Ferreiro, Cremona, Borracer, Figari and Gartenbank to win the Taekwondo International '2000 World Championships in the Netherlands.

WTF Taekwondo enthusiasts were challenged by the negative effects of ill-politics, since alternating groups attempted to seize control of the Argentine Taekwondo Confederation, the government-recognized entity for official local, regional and world WTF Taekwondo championships. Many times the selection of the competitors for the national team and the use of governmental funds became tools used for the benefit of one group and exclusion of others, but that did not prevent several dedicated persons with a passion for Taekwondo and

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Argentina from resisting such abuse and obtaining meaningful results. In the last fifteen years local WTF training became more professional, and sports technology from other countries entered Argentina revolutionizing the way athletes trained. Varied influences –among them, former Spanish world champion and renowned coach Ireno Fargas, Cuban Olympic coach Roberto Cárdenas, Spanish coach Angel Guerra del Cerro– contributed to the formation of a instructors generation that regarded Taekwondo as a high-performance sport. Among the best WTF-style coaches in Argentina are **Julio Ramos** (university-educated in high-performance athletics, currently national Taekwondo head coach in Aruba), **Carlos Filippa**, Néstor Etchegaray and Ricardo Puppo, who have become examples in Argentina on how a coach should work to train athletes into the highest tear of Olympic-style Taekwondo.



LaVía, Filippa, Busca and Tajes



Filippa with Spanish coach Guerra

Among the most important Argentine WTF-style competitors during the nineties and into the new century were **Alejandro Hernando** (an extraordinary technician, two time Olympian – Sydney 2000 and Athens 2004, 58 to 68 kg.-), **Gabriel Taraburelli** (a lionhearted athlete, 4th place in the Sydney 2000 Olympics, under 58 kg), and **Vanina Sánchez Berón** (fem., -63 kg., Silver Medal in both the 1995 Manila and Spain '96 World Cups and Bronze Medal in Germany '98, participated in the Athens 2004 games and has qualified for the Beijing 2008 Olympics).



Julio Ramos flanked by Hernando and Taraburelli (left) and Vanina Sánchez Berón, Olympian

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Gabriel Taraburelli (left) and Alejandro Hernando (right)

Other noteworthy WTF style athletes of the nineties are Sebastián Zapata, Alan Levy, Cristian Yañez, Gustavo Cortés (a talented martial artist who holds instructor credentials in Taekwondo, Hapkido, Brazilian Jujitsu and Kali), Iván Rojas (a very low profile and professional instructor) Marina Agüero (fem.), Anibal Lavía, Ana Julia Vilela (fem.), Ezequiel Pérez, and, more recently, Darío Coria, Débora Hait (fem.), sisters Carola and Laura López (fem.), Débora Calvo (fem.), Anabella Carmona (fem.), brothers Sebastián and Mauro Crismanich (two rising stars), Martín Sio and Mariela Poblete (fem.). One of the most important umpires in Olympic style is Gustavo Tejada.



Mauro and Sebastián Crismanich

In Argentina black belt ranking has been directly affected by Taekwondo economics and politics. During the nineties many ITF-style organizations awarded black belt degrees profusely. The increase in revenues and multiplication of instructors transformed many school networks into well-organized and standardized business units, many times at the expense of martial art quality. The ITF was effectively presented as the brand for the "true Taekwondo created by General Choi", and thus instructors lacking such certification were in disadvantage until they obtained official recognition. The ITF adopted the policy of rewarding instructors who promoted the federation by facilitating their growth through the ranks. "Special training courses" -officially deemed to reduce six months from the time requirements- helped many to achieve high Dan ranking earlier than expected. Additionally, some old timers who had discontinued their activity for twenty years have recently returned to Taekwondo receiving questionable master ranking. Some dedicated local masters and instructors decided to preserve the standards of their schools by keeping their "slow", traditional pace ranking. The combination has produced an uneven ranking criterion within ITF style in Argentina, with a

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rather excessive number of 7th and 8th Degree “Master level” black belts when compared to other countries with a similar Taekwondo foundation date.

On the other hand, the local WTF-style ranking policy went into the opposite direction, with unusually strict time requirements for promotion. The Argentine Taekwondo Confederation was, for the most part of its history, directed by politicians alien to Taekwondo practice. The Confederation is in charge of issuing official rank and eventually process the certificates issued by the Kuk Ki Won. Since the Confederation’s purpose is to promote Taekwondo competition, black belt ranking is secondary. The authorities kept the policy of minimizing promotions to higher ranks. As a consequence of such approach, since April 2007 there are only eleven persons officially certified as 7th Dan. Under traditional standards, provided that they meet the technical requirements, most of such persons should have received such rank about eight years earlier.

In Argentina the most widespread mindset among instructors and students is that WTF and ITF are totally different activities, and as a consequence there is little contact between such groups. Most WTF instructors teach competition-oriented Taekwondo in soccer clubs, townships and government-funded educational institutions, while ITF style –practiced by roughly two thirds of the TKD population– is mostly (although not exclusively) found in a commercial format in gyms and private schools, with a growing interest into sparring and forms tournaments. There are almost no schools offering the older Korean Karate style. The few occasions in which WTF and ITF have joint-ventured are reduced to the supervision by Master Kim Han-Chang of black belt examinations in a couple of ITF groups during the time they were separated from the international headquarters, and a joint exhibition-tournament which was organized in 1989 between Pedro Florindo (ITF style) and Oscar Tajés (WTF style).



*Iván Rojas (left), Gustavo Cortés (center) and Marcelo Cremona (right).
A new generation of young masters who see beyond WTF / ITF barriers.*

The most relevant WTF masters in activity are:

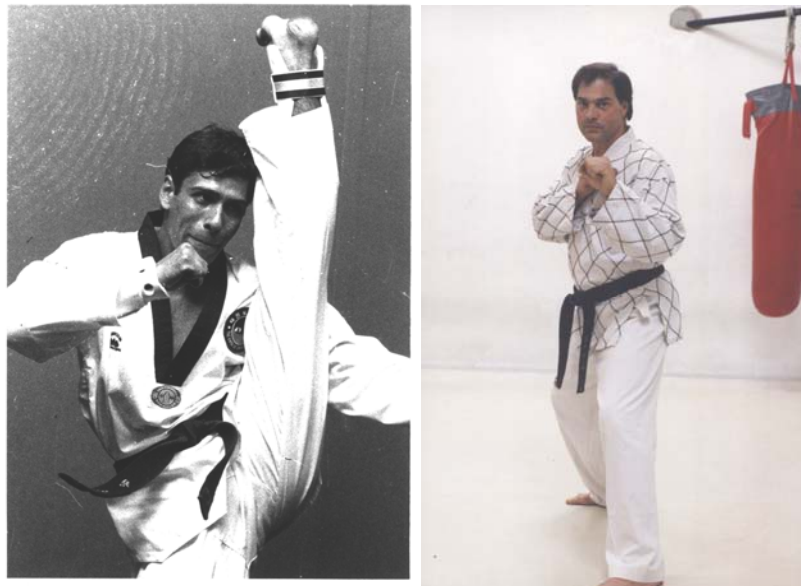
- **Kim Han-Chang**, semi-retired acting as advisor to private groups.
- **Choi Nam-Sung**, until recently official technical consultant to the Metropolitan Federation. He keeps his teaching activity, with the assistance of Jorge Vaccaro (a solid technician that preserves the teachings of his master Choi N.S.), Sebastián Zapata and César Plaza, among other instructors.
- Lee Seok-Won, probably the most active of the senior Korean masters, leads a group that includes Iván Rojas (a well rounded martial artist with extensive competitive experience), Gustavo Merani, Néstor Etchegaray, Eduardo Encina, Hugo Pereyra da Silva and Rodolfo Carballo, among others.
- **Oscar Tajés**, a hard-core martial artist with high ranking in Hapkido, frequent trainee at the Chung Do Kwan Hqts. in Korea and the only Argentine born Kuk Ki Won-certified 8th Dan.

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- **Carlos Filippa**, a successful coach who professionally runs an organization that seeks and develops young talents for competition, seconded by senior instructors Galguera and Lavalle.
- Other relevant instructors include Emilio Casagrande (the first president of the Confederation to be also a Taekwondo master), Carlos Algranati, Abel Salim, **Raúl Busca** (a fierce WTF fighter who was the first local that was the first to receive international recognition), Abel Canteros, Ricardo Alvarez, Ernesto Carrillo, Ignacio Carbonell, Jorge Ruffini, Enrique Cambursano, María Celia Mancuso, Osvaldo Cruz Martín, Raúl Bertoia, Ramón Borjas, Ricardo Puppo, and a generation of younger masters and coaches that includes former competitors such as Aníbal Lavía, Osvaldo Franzosi and others.



Master Choi Nam-Sung surrounded (left to right) by Adrogué, Tajés, Cruz Martín, Salim, Vaccaro and Cremona.



Oscar Tajés (left) and Raúl Busca (right), emblems of WTF in Argentina

After the impact of Gen. Choi's death in 2002 local ITF instructors followed different directions. There are currently at least twenty-five Argentine-born internationally certified 8th Dan. The most prominent Argentine ITF-style masters include:

- **Pablo Trajtenberg** and **Héctor Marano**, both senior masters with extensive international experience, have become top officials in the ITF branch headed by Master Tran Trieu Quan. Trajtenberg and Marano are sought-after in seminars instructing on the finer details of ITF patterns from the perspective of contemporary “sine wave” ITF motion. They are seconded by Guillermo Ramisch, Jorge Rogers, Alberto Katz, Edgar Spittle, Alcides Solís, **Edgardo Villanueva** (unanimously regarded as the coach that produced most champions in Argentina, among them **Pablo Ferreiro** and Carolina Menegazzo), Rodolfo Samara, Carlos Salvo, Armando and Jorge Carabajal, Carlos Gómez Olivera and Fabián Pini, among a large network. One outstanding student of Marano, Mario Cancelliere, has succeeded with his gifted son Marcello in establishing a high standard school called “Red Tiger” in Philadelphia, USA.
- **Néstor Galarraga**, effectively combining his skills as martial arts instructor, entrepreneur and leader, has become a right-hand man of Gen. Choi's son, Choi Jung-Hwa. He was in charge of the organization of the 1999 ITF world championships in Buenos Aires and since then he has endeavored into several first-rate projects, including an international champions' circuit and giving ITF-style seminars in South Korea, Australia and some European countries. He is seconded by José and Alberto Maidana (the former, a well respected coach who has become a popular technical advisor in Ireland), Mario Troiano (teacher of Humberto Próspero, Troiano has become the producer of a TV program that has made him the face of the martial arts for the general public), Ebel Barat, as well as multiple time ITF world champion Ricardo Rieiro, Mónica Guardia, Eduardo Vicente and **Noemí Prone** (an exquisite technician and the only woman featured in Gen. Choi's Legacy video series).
- **Pedro Florindo**, who cut his link with the ITF during the mid 90s to free himself from Taekwondo politics, is the only high ranking master in Argentina that has decided to become independent from both the ITF and WTF. A true martial arts veteran, he is currently senior vice-president of England-based Tae Kwon Do International (headed by Dave Oliver), and frequently coaches competition teams to Europe with excellent results. His active students include Jorge Rábago, Juan Carlos González, **Juan José Sunini**, Héctor Rivera, Eric Calvo, Marina Serrano, Marcelo Cremona (a former elite competitor at present chief instructor for the Buenos Aires coastguards), Manuel Adrogué (yours truly, Taekwondo technician and researcher), Walter Sosa, Víctor D'Amore and Darío Calderón (former international champion). Florindo's most relevant students abroad are Gustavo Pope in West Palm Beach, and Claudio Iedwab, one of his best students ever and a martial arts prodigy during the 1970s, now living in Canada where he has become a master on his own right.
- The masters that have become affiliated with the North Korea-based ITF include Adolfo Villanueva, Ricardo Desimone (who used to assist Gen. Choi during his frequent visits to Argentina), Raúl Sosa, Eduardo Palmisano, Pedro Osuna, Enrique Godoy, Osvaldo Ríos Olivero. This group is strong in the northern provinces of Argentina, specially Tucumán, Santiago del Estero and Santa Fé. Daniel Rossel and Ernesto Figueredo have also worked with such group.
- A sub-group also under the ITF Vienna (Tran Trieu Quan) banner is composed by Alejandro Quadro, Carlos Composto, **Marcelo Vatrano**, Marcelo Pedrini (a coach specialized in patterns who took several national teams to win world gold medals), Herman Saez, Aníbal Neves Méndez, Horacio Fasán and Miguel Oga.
- Francisco Beloso leads a small pack of students as representative of Park Jung-Tae's (rip) Global Taekwon-Do Federation, an ITF spin-off.
- Alberto Lettiere and a minor group follow master Hwang Kwang-Sung, head of an ITF spin-off named Unified International Taekwon-Do Federation.

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Pablo Trajtenberg and Héctor Marano



Pedro Florindo (left) and Néstor Galarraga, with Choi Jung-Hwa

Taekwondo organizations have proved to change along the way, as it is through trial and error people find those like-minded. Although the institutional aspects may change in the future, the description above will serve to provide a basic outline of the facts and names that have earned a place within Argentine Taekwondo.

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After several conversations with relevant instructors of the different eras, I put together a list which attempts to represent the past and present of Argentine Taekwondo as a whole. The points considered for such selection included the contribution to the development of Taekwondo in the country, technical skills, success in competition, leadership, and awareness of such person by Taekwondo enthusiasts. A balance of such qualities has (hopefully) been achieved at the expense of excluding multiple time international champions and very prominent masters. This is the list:

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|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. Kim Han-Chang | founder |
| 2. Choi Nam-Sung | founder |
| 3. Chung Kwang-Duk | founder |
| 4. Lee Chong-Seo | founder |
| 5. Ku Yong-Chae | modern WTF style pioneer |
| 6. Pablo Trajtenberg | instructor and organization leader - ITF |
| 7. Héctor Marano | instructor and organization leader - ITF |
| 8. Pedro Florindo | former champion, instructor and organization leader- ITF |
| 9. Oscar Tajés | instructor and organization leader - WTF |

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10. Miguel Hladilo	publisher
11. Carlos Filippa	coach and organization leader - WTF
12. Raúl Busca	former champion and instructor - WTF
13. Juan Carlos Mangoni	former champion - WTF
14. Alejandro Hernando	Olympian - WTF
15. Gabriel Taraburelli	Olympian - WTF
16. Vanina Sánchez Beron	Olympian - WTF
17. Néstor Galárraga	instructor and organization leader - ITF
18. Edgardo Villanueva	former champion, instructor and coach - ITF
19. Noemí Prone	former champion - ITF
20. Julio Ramos	coach - WTF
21. Pablo Ferreiro	former champion - ITF
22. Juan José Sunini	former champion - ITF
23. Marcelo Vatrano	former champion, coach and organization leader – ITF
24. Carlos Ouro	former champion - WTF
25. Mario Shaur	former champion - ITF

About the author:

Manuel E. Adrogué practices and teaches Taekwondo in Buenos Aires. A student under Master Pedro Florindo, in 2003 he tested for his 5th Dan before Pittsburgh-based Master Kong, Young Bo and is certified under GrandMaster Kong, Young II. He follows a traditional approach to Taekwondo training, with emphasis on technical detail in the execution of basic technique, self-defense, sparring, forms and breaking. He has had the chance to train or take seminars from Gen. Choi Hong-Hi, Ji Han-Jae, S. Henry Cho, Kim Pyung-Soo, Park Hae-Man, Cho Hee-II, Hwang Hyun-Chul, Choi Kwang-Jo, and Jun Chong, among other famous Korean masters. In 2001 he participated in the Henry Cho's Championships placing 1st in Black Belt breaking and 2nd in Masters' forms divisions. An active business lawyer, he is also a researcher and author on martial art history and technique when not sharing family life with his wife and four children. His website is www.taekwon.com.ar

