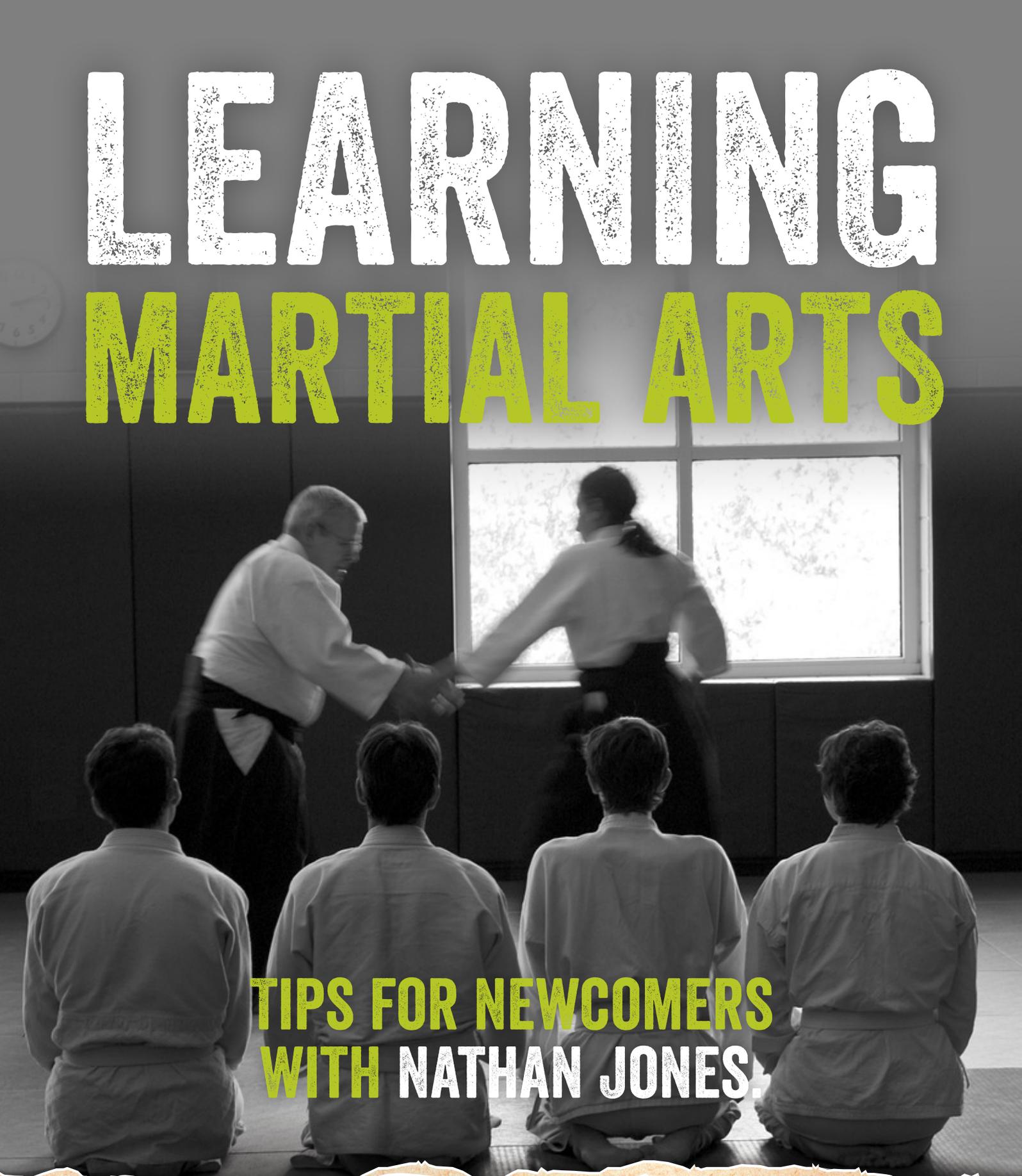


LEARNING MARTIAL ARTS



TIPS FOR NEWCOMERS
WITH NATHAN JONES.



LEARNING MARTIAL ARTS - TIPS FOR NEWCOMERS

Regardless of your chosen discipline(s), whether via a traditional martial arts school or a combat sports gym, it matters not! That is because learning the art, the sport, and the self defence system is a life skill. It has transformative properties and will enhance well being and confidence.

Below are my top tips, which are aimed at newcomers, but is relevant to all. They will help get you started, settled or at least, redress uncertain notions - as we are always learning. I often have to resync with these tips either when I try a new martial art, travel to another gym or have a bad day in the office. The lessons are the same, I go through the motions and the journey continues.

TURN UP

You have gotten over the first hurdle; and for most, the hardest is walking into the gym and stepping onto the mat. For people new to the gym, it can be quite intimidating, with the new environment, experienced practitioners/ fighters/ athletes and everyone seemingly knowing what to do. You may feel out of place, but don't worry about that, the feeling will soon go. Take the coach's lead, follow the gym rules and keep turning up. Very importantly, make sure you are on time (first impressions count, and reputations last). Find a schedule that suits you and make it routine. TURN UP.

OPEN MIND

When training, be objective and receptive. You don't know what you like or what you're good at, if you haven't yet tried it or have just started. Don't limit yourself by putting blocks into your learning when practising new techniques. I hear the word, "can't" a lot. Breaking the word down: cannot, means you can, but are not, right now. Have an open mind and just get on with it. Okay, you may not have understood the concepts initially, or you struggled with the steps; this does not mean that you won't find it easier - you may surprise yourself and get it next time. Get out of your comfort zone and learn in your stretch zone. Get used to being in the stretch zone, this is where you will learn and develop. Coaches will give you a level and if you meet it, they will give you the next and so on. An OPEN MIND will help this process.

LISTEN AND LEARN

A very necessary skill is to listen. Listen to instruction and to your peers. On the mat there is such a wealth of experience, so make the most of it. Benefit from the lessons, both formal and informal. Conversely, it's not wise to think you know it all because you've done it once or seen a video; or that you don't think technique works, or think that it is easy. Everybody learns differently, so whichever way suits you, do more. Have fun being a student. LISTEN AND LEARN.

SOAK IT UP

Martial art is an experience, whether as a hobby, or a way of life. It will be whatever you make it, or whatever you allow it to become. The dojo/ gym is YOUR safe space and it's your 'me' time. You've taken time out of your busy day and commitments, so leave your stresses at the door (you can pick them up after training). Stress is a block to your progress. Take the good with the bad and make the most of it, take it all in. There are infinite techniques and situations; train as often as you can; try different classes and learn from as many instructors as you can. Why not? What have you got to lose? SOAK IT UP.

DON'T WORRY

You are in a safe environment. It is not uncommon to worry or have reservations. Trust your instructors; they will guide you on your journey. It is important to note that it is an individual journey, so comparisons need to stay in context. Some people have dedicated years to learning and practising, for others it is their job. Don't be surprised that they're so many moves ahead or appear to be learning faster. Take the lesson, learn and adapt. It is a long winding road with peaks and troughs for everyone. So, even if you have a bad day, or you are simply, not getting it, there's no need to overthink it, eventually the penny will drop. I am a firm believer in 1% better every day. So, DON'T WORRY.

RELAX

When it comes to training, it is very important to relax. If you do not know how, make it a priority to learn. Beginners are tense and tend not to know their own strength. This can increase the risk of injury if you panic. Also by using strength over technique can slow your progress. So don't 'freak out', slow it down. Like Neo in the Matrix, you'll be able to understand and see techniques coming sooner, and have more time to process your options. Breathe, flow and enjoy. You will get more out of training this way. Martial art is like human chess: accuracy then speed. RELAX and figure it out.

CORRECT EQUIPMENT

Invest in your training and yourself. Buy your uniform and protective equipment so you are able to practise the full syllabus safely (safety not just for you but your training partners as well). By looking the part, you'll think the part. My father would always tell me "good things aren't cheap, and cheap things aren't good". In the main, this is true! You get what you pay for. So look after your equipment, as the cost will add up. However, do not let expense put you off. Get the essentials and build over time. Before you know it, you'll be kitted up with CORRECT EQUIPMENT ready to train, come rain or shine.

BUDDY UP

You are not on your own. There is sure to be somebody that started at same time, or does the same classes, or is your size and weight. Buddy up and socialise, it will help your training by pushing each other. This is important, as it will keep you engaged. When training we need three types of people: In a nutshell, (1) your buddy is someone of similar experience level to be competitive with. (2) Also needed is someone of more experience to show you your mistakes and (3) someone, also, who is less experienced so you can try new moves on. Embrace the lessons of each, as each is as important as the other. BUDDY UP.

FEET FIRST

When training, immerse yourself; no need to tip toe around. Of course, I do not literally mean feet first, as the other tips: apply - listen, relax etc. I mean feet first with your attitude. You get out what you put in, so dive in - it will help your progress. Commit yourself to training, and do things to complement your training. It will keep you engaged and will give you quality mat time. The adage "if you don't use it, you lose it" applies. Stay on top of your acquired skills. It is okay to not know something or to make a mistake. Get up and try again. With this 'can do' attitude, practise makes habit. So make practise your habit, ask questions, seek out the training, try your best and give it a go. FEET FIRST.

MARATHON NOT A SPRINT

This is key to remember, that it really is a journey; a never ending journey. So at the start, no need to be surprised if you are not great (especially if you are a high achiever in your profession), or even expect to remember techniques, sequences or concepts first time. Don't rush, as I have mentioned, we are always learning. Keep chipping away. Set goals to help monitor your progress and to keep you motivated. With regard to your body - think of longevity: have good sleep, eat well, maintain hygiene, smart and safe training, rest and recovery. Look after yourself so your body can stay in tune with your mind and you'll be able to train as long as you want to. Remember, it's a MARATHON AND NOT A SPRINT.

REMEMBER YOUR FIRST DAY

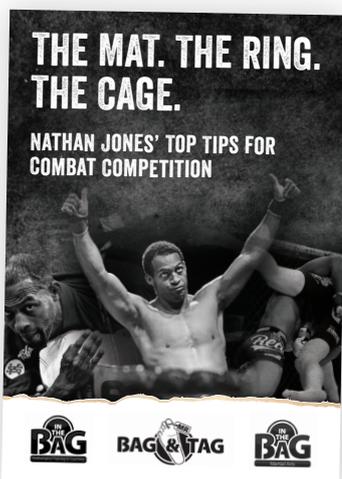
It does not matter who you are, your level or experience or what achievements you have. We all have had a first day. Remember the feeling? This is very important because you can measure how much you've learnt and compare it with your progress. The same for your gradings and competitions. These reference points serve a purpose and are also milestones in your journey. It also allows you to relate to new people that join after you. A helping hand can go a long way. Can you remember somebody offering you a helping hand? REMEMBER YOUR FIRST DAY.

RESPECT

Always have respect. There's a saying, "ego is not your amigo". No truer words spoken. There is always a bigger fish - always. Moreover, do not judge a book by its cover. You'll find doing martial arts that the unassuming, humble ones are the most dangerous, and that the loud and scary ones are not a threat. Martial arts teaches humility. A valuable life lesson to all. We must also respect each other. Look after our training partners; if you hurt them or don't train safely, they will either be out with injury, or will not want to train with you - you'll have no one to train with, then how will you improve? You must RESPECT yourself and others.

Hopefully, the above tips can help you get started, or give you insight into what is to come, or simply as a reminder of experiences you can relate to. The community is strong, and you will have the correct guidance and support to allow you to spread your wings. Enjoy the journey of martial arts and becoming a better you!

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