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# ***THE* MARTIAL ARTS** *Mental and Physical Conditioning for Peak Performance* **ATHLETE**



***TOM SEABOURNE, Ph.D.***  
*with Foreword by Herb Perez*

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## Foreword

I met Tom Seabourne at the Taekwondo World Cup in Colorado Springs in 1986. He was the sports psychologist/physiologist for the U.S. Team. I was having trouble sleeping the night before my bouts and it really concerned me.

The pressure was unrelenting. I asked Tom what to do. His reply was, “Herb, it’s not the amount of sleep that you get the night before your fight, it’s the quality of sleep you get the WEEKS before.” He was right! I know that I had been getting pretty good sleep before the events and the more I thought about what Tom said, the more it made sense. The pressure was off! I was ready! With that advice and using some of Tom’s techniques I was able to win gold medals at the World Cup, Pan Am games, and finally at the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona

Martial artists today are looking for more than just self-defense techniques. We are training for improved health, better body fitness, clarity of mind and of course, competition. The trouble is that you probably can’t attain all of these goals training only during class time at your school.

Dr. Tom Seabourne’s book *The Martial Arts Athlete* takes the guesswork out of training. As a two-time member of the U.S. Taekwondo Team and Silver Medalist in the World Championships, Tom knows what it is like to compete at an elite level. But more than that, Dr. Seabourne has spent years studying physiology and psychology so that he provides you with the science for your success, but without the hard to understand jargon.

This is the same method that Tom provided to me in my early years of competition, and now it is available to all by virtue of his new book. Tom is one of the few elite athlete-scholars who has joined an even fewer elite producers of training material for martial artists. His books are on the shelves of every serious martial artist around the world.

I have trained and traveled around the world with Taekwondo. I don’t think a minute goes by without thinking about my love for this art. Whether you aspire to become an Olympian, or if you just want to be your best, I highly recommend that you read *The Martial Arts Athlete—Mental and Physical Conditioning for Peak Performance*.

Herb Perez  
1992 Olympic Gold Medalist  
Taekwondo

## Preface

In junior high I was an MVP football player until I dropped a game-winning touchdown pass. My teammates forgave me but I never forgave my “Charlie Brown choke.” I haven’t played team sports since. Instead, at thirteen I quit football and focused on martial arts. Disciplined practice was my passion. My solitary workouts were emotional. My buddies thought I was nuts. I remember New Year’s Eve, sneaking past my parents’ guests down to my musty basement, practicing martial arts drills until my clothes were soaked.

My master once commented, “Make your feet like your hands.” From then on my combination kicks blossomed. My front leg double roundhouse kick resembles a boxer’s double jab. And my rear leg side kick can be likened to a right cross. My front leg hook kick looks like a boxer’s hook. And my rear leg front kick favors an uppercut.

Many people feel they cannot do their best because they have not learned the Far Eastern concepts of discipline and self-control. It took me twenty years of studying Eastern philosophy and analyzing it in Western terms to develop and use a variety of mental preparations and physiological training techniques, to prepare me to win national and international martial arts events.

My study, training, and competition took place in Okinawa, Japan, China, and Europe, and encompassed traditional physiology, as well as a search for that elusive inner strength.

Understand that the psycho-physiological techniques in this book take practice, but whether you learn them from *The Martial Arts Athlete* or an aged wise man, the principles are essentially the same. These principles point the way to enhanced performance and wellness. Sometimes we must simply remind ourselves to use these secrets.

# Mastering the Basics: Strength, Speed, Flexibility, Power

## 2.1 Awesome Abdominals

Training overseas, we did no abdominal exercise. Our paunches got a decent workout from two hours of kicks, punches, strikes and blocks. For example, put this book down and punch with your right hand while you exhale. Place your left hand lightly over your stomach and punch-exhale again. You should be able to feel your abdominals contract.

### Why Train Abdominal Muscles?

Most athletes concentrate on strengthening their bodies depending on their sport. For example, sprinters work on their legs. But if they do not train their upper bodies they will not run as fast. Similarly, as a martial artist, although you concentrate on your arms and legs, you cannot ignore your abdominals.

Although your abs do not appear to be directly involved in martial arts, they are. You can move with increased balance and body control if your midsection is strong enough to steady your movement. Improving strength in your abs will help you change directions. You can lift twice as much weight. Your back won't get sore after you work out. And you can take a shot to the body that would make most people cringe.

The center of your body is the place where your power begins. Martial artists have known this for centuries. You focus your *'chi'* from a place two inches below your navel. If you are centered, you will increase your energy and power. A powerful midline provides a base so you may explode through your punches. Whether you do kicks or throws, force is generated from your midsection. If your abs are weak, your power chain is broken.

Your torso is a vital area for you to tone and strengthen to increase your power. Torso exercises stabilize the spine and protect you from injury. Abdominal muscles allow your torso to turn, twist, and bend so you can remain comfortable in the ring. Your waist connects your upper and lower body to generate the tremendous torque necessary for dynamic punching and kicking.

A strong middle connects your upper and lower body. The muscles in the front and side of your belly help raise your legs to execute all of your kicks. The muscles that run diagonally across your ribs and those that sit above them help keep your posture. A strong midline prevents injury. Strong stomach muscles also protect your internal organs.

A strong abdomen stabilizes motion for peak efficiency. Your abdominals must stabilize your torso. When practicing or sparring, your center of gravity constantly changes. For example, your center of gravity is outside of your body during a flying side kick. Your center of gravity lowers when you bend your knees to deliver a commanding punch. Therefore you should prepare your torso for flexion (leaning forward), extension (leaning backward), and rotation (turning sideways) by training your abs and obliques. You can move at a variety of angles and feel secure if your abs are trained.

Finally, if you are striving to develop a lean look and a washboard stomach, abdominal exercises will tone and strengthen the muscles.

## The Six Pack and Other Abs

The set of abdominal muscles referred to as the 'six pack' are your rectus abdominis (Figure 2-1). And in reality they are a 'ten pack'. The origin of this muscle group is your pubis bone. The insertion is located in the cartilage of ribs five through seven and your xiphoid process. The rectus abdominis is a strap-like muscle designed for smooth, long movement. Its main purpose is to raise your body from bed each morning. In order to train this muscle group, a simple crunch exercise is sufficient.

Beware of infomercial abdominal devices. Some train body parts which do not include your abs. To firm up your abs free of charge, lie on your back with your knees bent, and your chin resting on your chest (Figure 2-2). Tilt your pelvis until the small of your back begins to flatten to the floor (Figure 2-3). Curl your ribcage toward your

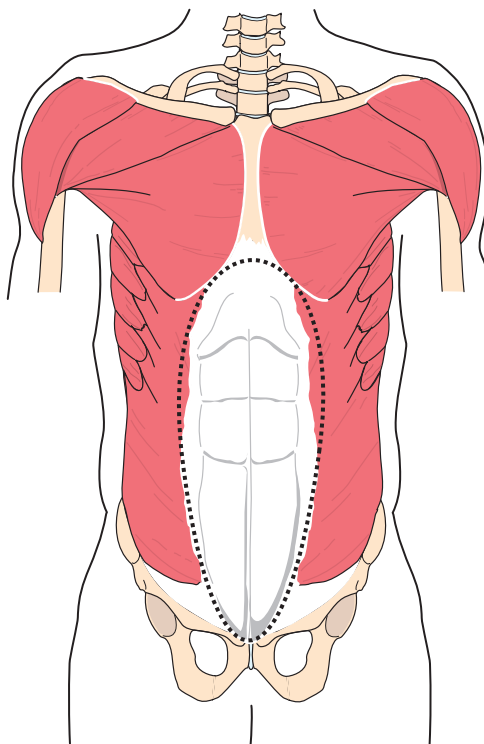


Fig 2-1. The 'Six Pack' (rectus abdominis)



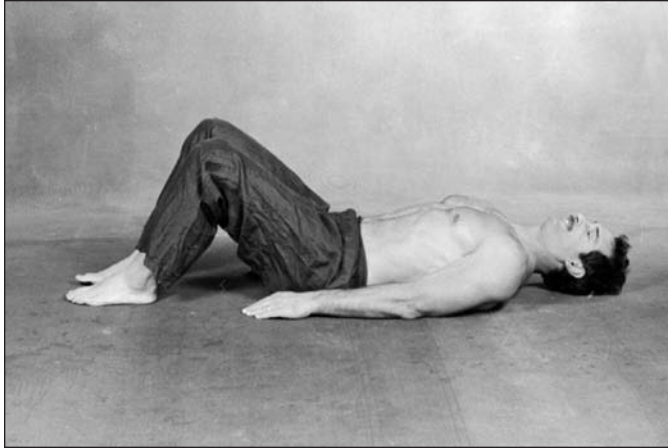


Fig 2-2

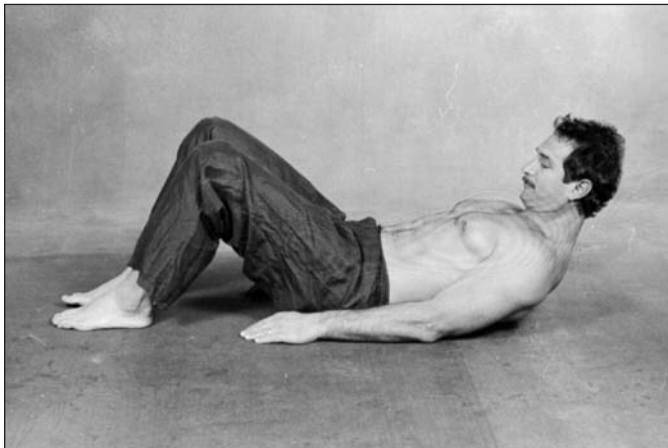


Fig 2-3

pelvis. Follow this progression: Tilt, curl, flex for two seconds, then untilt and uncurl. Focus on flexing your rectus abdominis. The range of motion is only a few inches. It feels as if you are working your upper abs because the top of your rectus abdominis is thinner than the layer towards the pubis. Perform ten repetitions. Use your rectus abdominis muscles to curl your body, not your head and neck.

To do a reverse crunch, lie on your back with your knees flexed to your chest. Place your hands under your hips (Figure 2-4). Keep your knees together as you bring your feet toward the floor (Figure 2-5). Hold for three seconds, then slowly draw your knees back to your chest (Figure 2-6). It feels as if you are working the lower part of your rectus abdominis because your hip flexor muscles (iliopsoas) (Figure 2-7) are assisting.

Two more sets of abdominal muscles are your external and internal obliques. Your external obliques are the “hands in your front pocket.” The origin is on ribs five through twelve and the insertion is on the iliac crest and pubic bone (Figure 2-8). Your obliques are thin muscles. They are not designed for heavy resistance training. They



Fig 2-4

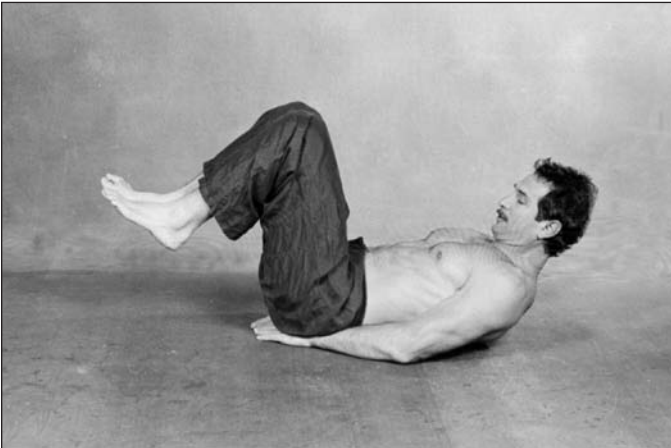


Fig 2-5

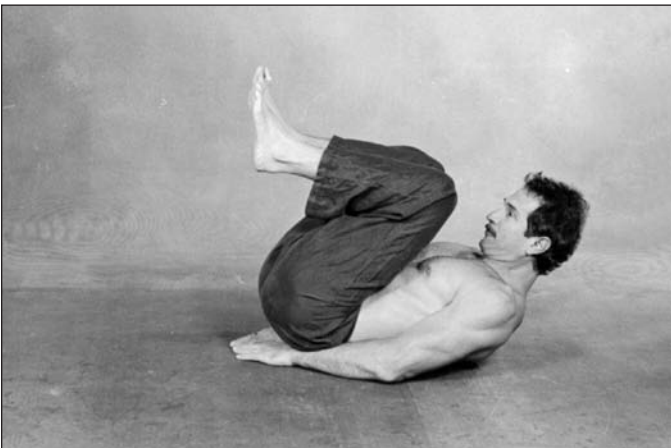


Fig 2-6

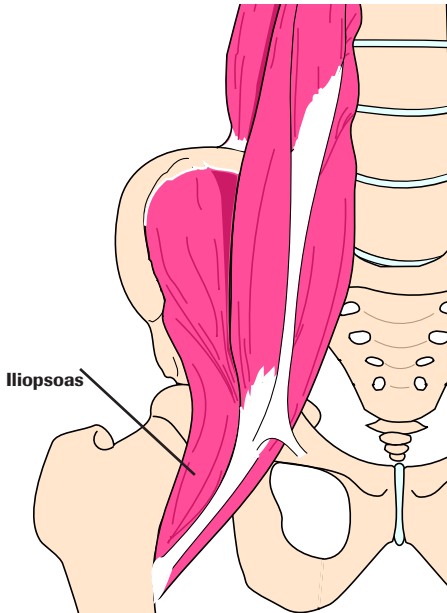


Fig 2-7. Hip Flexors (iliopsoas)

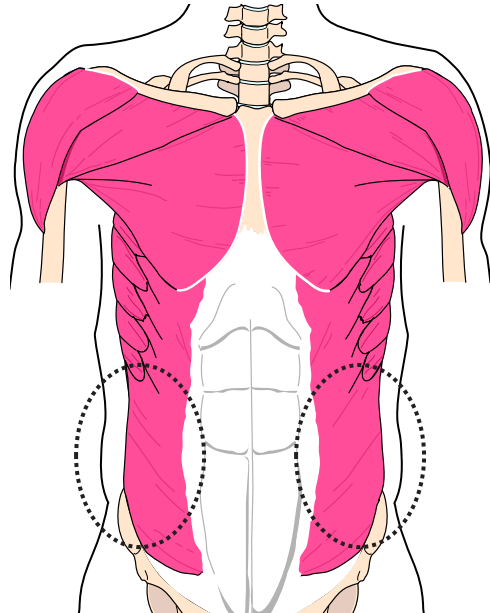


Fig 2-8. External and Internal Obliques

wrap around the torso enclosing the internal structures. Obliques act as protection and support; a suit of armor. These are the muscles you notice when you lift a heavy object. They protect your abdominal area during straining, sneezing, forced expiration, or bearing down. Strong obliques help to pull, lift, or push heavy objects. They steady the torso to keep gravity from pulling you out of a neutral position while standing or sitting. Your obliques help you to balance and move your pelvis and lower back. To train your obliques, follow the same technique as the crunch, except that you raise your upper body at an angle to the right or the left.

Your internal obliques are under your external obliques and surround your waist. Think of these as the “hands in your back pocket” muscles. They are shaped like an inverted V. Internal obliques stabilize your trunk. Your obliques are the only abdominal muscles constantly active during standing. They function while you are in an upright posture to brace your torso. The origin of the internal obliques is your iliac crest. They insert on ribs nine through twelve (Figure 2-9).

Another set of stabilizer muscles in your abdomen include your transversus abdominis. The origin of these muscles are the cartilage of the last six vertebrae, iliac crest, and lumbar fascia. The insertion is the xiphoid process and pubis (Figure 2-10). They run horizontally. Their primary purpose is to enable you to force an expiration such as a cough or sneeze.

Now that you understand the origin and insertion of the major muscle groups in your waist, you realize there is no isolating the ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ abs. Train your rectus abdominis with crunches, and your obliques with twists. Do other exercises for variety, but more is not always better. There is no magic to developing your core. Instead, it requires disciplined daily training. An Ab-Roller is fine, but you can obtain the same results from crunches.

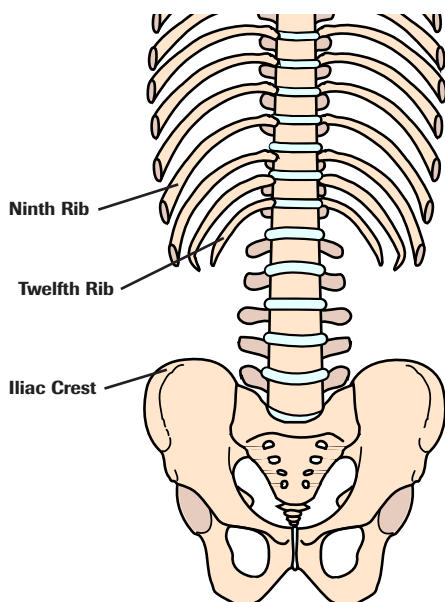


Fig 2-9. Muscle Attachments for Int. Obliques

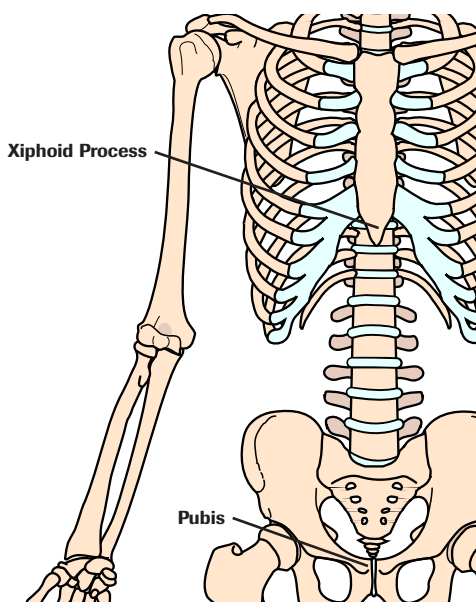


Fig 2-10. Xiphoid Process and Pubis

To perform a perfect crunch, begin each repetition as if you were in slow motion. Contract your rectus abdominis and exhale as you let your muscles pull your shoulder blades off the floor. Exhaling on each repetition will allow you to squeeze your abs without arching your back. If crunches are too difficult, raise yourself off the floor with your arms and perform a crunch on the down phase.

An easy exercise to begin working your abs is pelvic tilts. Lie flat on your back and bend your knees keeping your feet flat on the floor. Extend your arms out to your side. Pull your abdominal muscles in and tighten your buttocks. Flatten the natural arch of your back against the floor (Figure 2-11). Hold your abdominals flexed for three seconds as you exhale. Then relax and take a deep breath. Do ten repetitions.

When you are attempting to train your abs, other, more powerful muscles called your hip flexors (iliopsoas) do most of the work. Even when you perform a crunch correctly, your rectus abdominis begins the movement but your hip flexors cannot help but become involved; especially if you attempt to perform crunches quickly. Raising slowly, and only coming up part way is your best method for working your rectus abdominis instead of your hip flexors.

If you anchor your feet, you work mostly hip flexors. With your feet anchored, your back may arch straining the quadratus lumborum (lower back muscles) (Figure 2-12). Don't try twisting your elbow toward your knee at the top of your crunch. Instead, raise your elbow toward your opposite knee at the beginning of each repetition.

In my first martial arts tournament as a black belt, I was a freshman attending Pennsylvania State University. I found myself in the finals fighting for first place. Reaching the finals was thrilling, but I was matched against a tough opponent from Loyola College. My girlfriend was in the grandstands, and the center referee, Vance

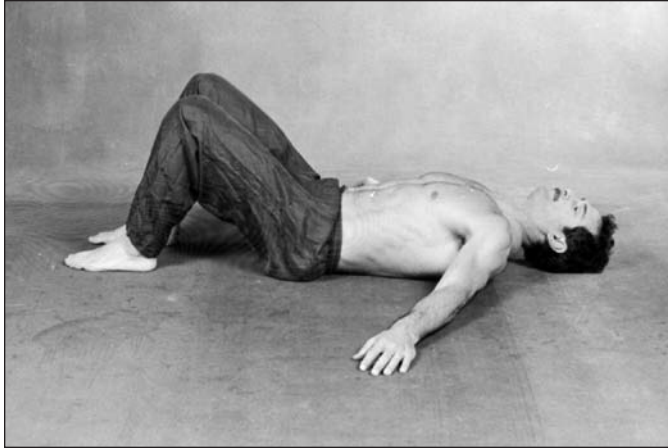


Fig 2-11

McLaughlin, was a karate hero of mine. I wanted to impress both of them. My high-kicking techniques scored heavily on my scrappy opponent.

In the final seconds of the last round, he caught me with a hard kick to my midsection. The force of the blow knocked the wind out of me, sending me doubled-over to the canvas. After writhing in pain a few moments, my hero, Mr. McLaughlin, pulled me up by my collar and commanded me to stand up straight. A time-out was called and I regained my composure for the final seconds of the match. Although I was declared the winner on points, it was a shallow victory. I was the one who was laid out on the mat. That match taught me the importance of strong abdominal muscles. Since then, I have devoted ten minutes each day to my abdominal program as presented here and I have never been hurt by a blow to the midsection. You will strengthen muscles in your upper and lower stomach as well as your waist by following this program. Slowly curl up on all abdominal exercises. “Feel” the muscles working. Place your hands under your hips if you have a delicate back.

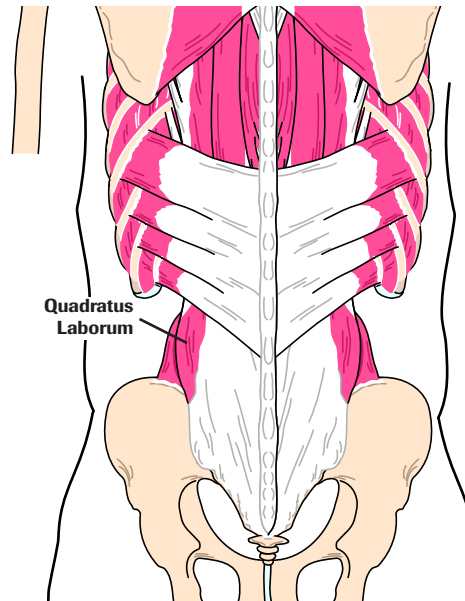


Fig 2-12. Deep Lower Back Muscles

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