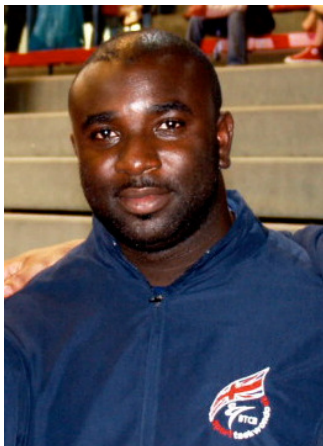




Instructor Richard Allen “At ATA Taekwondo is not just a sport – it’s a way of life”



With National, European and World titles under his belt, four visits to the Olympics to date and over 200 students all ready to follow in his footsteps, 4<sup>th</sup> Dan black belt taekwondo athlete, Richard ‘BIG RICH’ Allen has become somewhat of an icon in the federation of Taekwondo and an inspiration to the young the old, the black the white and both men and to women.

His Martial Arts school has assisted with the fight to keep local kids off the streets and out of trouble by giving them opportunities and positive goals to focus on. This in turn has made him well known within his community. *But where did it all begin?*

## Background, Childhood & Family

Born in New Jersey, U.S.A, Richard Allen received a years supply of nappies for baby of the year, weighing in at 12Lbs (Phew, now that's enough to make anyone's eyes water). Out of his eight siblings, three of them have studied Martial Arts; however Richard – the fifth youngest of the bunch, is the only one in his family to take Taekwondo to the highest level.

At aged three, his family moved to Africa where he spent time in both Ghana and Nigeria. It was a year later his fascination for Martial Arts began. He would follow his uncle, a medical student to University where he studied a combination of Martial Art forms including Karate, Judo, Kung Fu and of course Taekwondo.

*“It was my uncle who inspired me to take up martial arts. Watching Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and many other martial art films from a young age also got me interested.”*

Throughout his life he has always had his families loving support. Richard came from a very strict god-fearing family. His father was a boxer in the army and along with his mother; they ran a much disciplined household. He travelled many miles too and from school every day; this in turn helped to maintain his fitness, making him one of the best track and field athletes through his school years.

He held the record at his school for many years for running 100 meters sprint in 11 seconds flat.

*“I remember being ten years old and telling my father I was going to be in the Olympics one day. I didn't know what sport I would compete in, but I knew whatever it, I would be a success at it.”*

By the age of 12, he had gained a broader understanding of martial arts and with the assistance and guidance of his family, decided to pursue Taekwondo further. At 15, he and his brothers came to Great Britain. A rigorous training regime and a high level of self-discipline helped him to achieve his black belt a few months later.

## Career & Students

At the young age of 18, Richard Allen became British champion and held this title for ten years – and to this day remains, undefeated.

He has been teaching taekwondo for over a decade. His oldest student is in his fifties and currently holds a 1<sup>st</sup> Dan Black Belt.

*“Learning and teaching taekwondo is not about age. People are so surprised when they see me training with someone his age, but he is very able and doesn't have a problem keeping up with my younger students.”*

His youngest students are Dharnell 'Lil' Guv' Nugent, four who has been training since he was two and his own nephews, Sam, three and Daniel, who at aged five has already been training for two years and has achieved his green tag belt.

*“Both Sam and Daniel are following in my footsteps, just as I followed in my uncle's footsteps. These youngsters will be representing the country one day, just wait and see.”*

The Allen Taekwondo Academy holds trainings sessions at South Bank University as well as Croydon's local schools, sports halls and leisure centres. All in all, Richard trains over 200 students, both children and adults with the growing potential to frequent more schools. Richard's aim is to reach deeper within the community.

## The High and the Low points

Achieving the level of competing in the Olympics and World Championships is a high point especially in this game and Richard is very proud to say he has achieved both of these throughout his career.

A low point for Richard was competing in the World Championships and not winning a medal. It was his first time competing in the competition, and although he was one of the smallest, he was one of the fastest. But due to lack of experience he lost his fight. This did not stop him though. He continued training hard, gained more experience and became better at the sport and going on to achieving one of his goals and becoming a champion.

Richard has competed in a number of major competitions including 1991 World Championships; he was part of the 2000 British Olympic squad, held in Sydney Australia. He was one of the British Olympic Team Trainers for the 2004 Athens Olympics. He was 2007 national cadet coach. He has been a London Taekwondo Team coach since 2002, and he was the first Taekwondo Commonwealth England coach in 2006

*"In 1992 I was privileged to be part of the squad in the 25<sup>th</sup> Olympic Games in Barcelona. Although a demonstration, it was still an honour."*

Richard has been ten times British Open Champion and has held gold titles in the following throughout his career: Swedish, Danish, Spanish, United States, Belgium, Austria and Trination champion, featured on Sky Sports and Halton International Championships, held in Liverpool. At one point in his career he was staged within this country as achieving more international medals than anyone in the United Kingdom.

## Giving up the game

When asked if he would ever retire he replied,

*“there is no such thing as retiring in this game. If for one reason or another I had to give it up, I would be happy to see my daughter or one of my students take over.”*

Richard ceased competing professionally to devote his time to training his students. If he was given the opportunity to go back in the ring again - he would.

*“Seeing my student’s progress makes me a happy man. I am very proud of all my students.”*

With his fast and furious training scheme, Richard has had the honour of coaching many of today’s champions has helped many students achieve an array of titles at both national and international levels.

## Final thought from the Instructor

Richard is a high believer in teaching morals to his students the Korean tenants which every student learns are etiquette, modesty, self control, perseverance and indomitable spirit.



*“As a child going to school in Africa you have to learn fast and learn right from wrong at an early age. I was much disciplined as a child. I have incorporated a lot of things taught to me as a child into my Taekwondo regime and I try to instil these things into my students.”*

His training regime stems from ideas taken from old school and new school martial arts films, other sport activities and past teachings. As a graduate in sport science, he also teaches nutrition and the importance of fluid intake to his students.”

*“We are all learners. I am not too proud to learn from others.”*

Teaching taekwondo to children within his community and helping them become a part of the Olympic body is a positive thing and a way forward for them.

One parent said:

*“My son was forever getting into trouble both at school and at home. I enrolled him into the Allen Taekwondo Academy, just over a year ago and since he has started there, he has become a different child. His behaviour has improved, and he has more self-control – he is no longer getting into fights at school and his schoolwork has improved. His teacher has also seen a vast improvement on his school work, concentration and behaviour.”*

Taekwondo gives young people a sense of achievement. It is a sport which has no age limit and no prejudices.

This is not the last we will hear about the Allen Taekwondo Academy. For his students that are aiming to compete professionally or who have just joined to keep fit and make new friends, Richard Allen’s main focus is to make sure all his students achieve their goals.

*“I will do all I can to give my students the best of what I got and what I have worked towards throughout my whole career. My goal is for my students to continue where I stopped.”*

**By Tricha Hopkins,  
Journalist**