

A winning coach: Sifu Herb Parran

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Sifu Herb Parran and students in 2012

Herb Parran

In the St. Louis metropolitan area, there are at least four-dozen instructors teaching the art of [Tai Chi](#) (Taiji) and Qigong. One third of them are actively participating in community activities. Some have strong backgrounds in Tai Chi theory and skills. Some have extensive teaching experience. When it comes to training award-winning champions, [Sifu Parran](#) has an astonishing record that might top any other instructor.



Herb Parran

Born in 1955, Sifu Parran has been physically active all his life due to his father's influence. He played every position in baseball as a kid and participated in basketball and football throughout school. He remembers a big German coach from his high school football team who taught him the ethics of diligent practice. As an adult, he joined a flag football league and played after work. In 1990, through a recommendation of a friend on the team, he attended Sifu **Justin Meehan's** Tai Chi class. Sifu Justin Meehan is considered a pioneer of Tai Chi in St. Louis and has profound knowledge of the art. Right away, Herb was attracted by the art. He learned Yang Style and Chen Style Tai Chi. Diligent as he was, he became skilled quickly. At the recommendation of Justin, he started competing in 1992 until 1997. Sometimes he participated in two to three tournaments a year. He brought home medals from the regional, national and international championship games. He recalls the friendship he developed with Tai Chi practitioners from other states and cities through competitions, especially with all-time American grand champion **Jose Figueroa**. He considered Jose a gentleman who rooted for him even in the same tournament. To Herb, Justin was a good teacher who was strict. Herb followed orders and took notes from tournaments to share with his fellow classmates.

Back at Justin's school, Herb was asked to assist teaching from 1995 to 1998. He was known at that time as an African American brother who did Tai Chi in St. Louis. Again, with encouragement from Sifu Meehan, Herb started his own school in 1998. Justin even asked some of his own students to study with Herb. Sifu Parran continued to advance his knowledge by learning from Justin and went to Justin's house for one-on-one Push Hands training. He went to Finland and China with Justin to attend workshops hosted by Chen Style Hun Yuan Tai Chi creator Grandmaster **Feng Zhiqiang** and learned from Grandmaster **Zhang Xue Xin** in San Francisco. Last year, Sifu Herb Parran became a disciple of

Grandmaster Zhang at the recommendation of Sifu Justin.

Sifu Herb Parran is humble. When asked how many students he has taught, he said about 75 in the past 15 years. He did not include hundreds of students that he taught on special workshops, community colleges and other occasions. Herb Parran teaches students of all demographics. He teaches all racial background, kids less than 10 years old and even seniors in their 90's. Some of his students are medical professionals, like famous psychiatrist [Dr. Dale Anderson](#) and physical therapist [Shawn Tucker](#), who now is a Tai Chi instructor himself. He is so modest that he did not even recognize he had trained most champions in St. Louis until I pointed out the fact.

He appreciates his tournament experience. He shares it with his students and motivates them to participate. According to him, if one really wants to know his skill level, he should compete and be judged by experts who are not his own teacher. In preparing for a competition, he can really explore his art at a much closer level and bring up the skill level. Once you practice long enough for a tournament, you should just let the cards fall into their places. When your human fortitude falls short of expectation, "just take it with grace," said Herb.

Following in his steps, a dozen or so students collectively won over 100 medals at various tournaments including grand champions from international tournaments. The youngest medalist was Jaeden Deskins, who took 10 gold medals at the Gateway Chinese [Martial Arts](#) Championships in 2010 at age 10. Kathi Aston won her first medal in her 60's.

Who impressed me most is gold medalist [Jim McClung](#), who is a diligent practitioner. He came to Herb's beginner class even after he became a grand champion. Per him, Sifu Parran focuses on fundamentals, which are essential for Tai Chi. Jim still likes to drill with Herb. Evident in Jim's modesty, it is clear that Herb not only instilled Tai Chi technique but also his values.

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Violet Li

St. Louis Tai Chi Examiner

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