

## Teaching Paraplegics Tai Chi

January 13, 2011

7:53 PM MST



Master Nikolas teaching Tai Chi from a wheelchair

<http://www.helistaichi.hr>

Six months ago, [Croatia Paraplegic and Tetraplegic Association](#) called Master [Nikolas Maricic](#) and asked him to organize a [Tai Chi](#) program for its members. According to him, the results have been most favorable with 70% of participants feeling benefits and enjoying the exercise.

Similar to some other martial artists, Master Maricic (nicknamed Wolf) started Wushu training in 1985 and learned Karate, Wushu, Judo, and Taekwondo. In 1988, he began training in Tai Chi and [Qigong](#) with [Erle Montaigne](#), Michelle Knoll, Wang Z Ksiang, [Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei](#), [Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang](#), and Grandmaster Zhu Tiancai. He studies the [Yang Style](#), Wu Long Tai Chi form, and [Chen Style Tai Chi](#). He discovered that Tai Chi improved his health as well as concentration. It also enhanced his other [martial arts](#) performance and helped him with schoolwork.

To give people a tool to make it through life easier and become champions in life in his or her own way,

he started to teach Tai Chi and Qigong in 1994. First, he taught his hard style martial arts students. After he was invited to a radio show addressing the benefits of Tai Chi and Qigong, many came to take lessons for various needs, i.e. allergies, asthma, diabetes. With the success of his students, Master Maricic was interviewed on national TV multiple times. To further promote Tai Chi and Qigong, he has been organizing [World Tai Chi & Qigong Day](#) in [Zagreb, Croatia](#) since 2000.

Master Nikolas has won numerous Wushu and Tai Chi titles in national and international tournaments. He participated at the European Tai Chi Chuan and Internal Martial Arts Championships in 2000, in Utrecht, Netherlands, which he won the bronze medal with the Yang Style 24 Form. He won a gold medal with the combined 42 Form at the Switzerland Open Tai Chi Chuan Championships, Geneva in 2002. His most exciting win was at the 4th International Jiaozuo Tai Chi Chuan Exchange Competition in 2007. Jiaozuo, China is city where Chen Village locates. During the competition, Nikolas won a gold medal with the 42 Form and the other gold medal with his team (my students). Last November during the 4th Mediterranean Wushu Cup, he won two gold medals and a big cup for helping in organizing the event.

Additionally, he represented Croatia and competed at two world Wushu Championships: one in the [Beijing Good Luck World Championships](#) in the Olympic village in 2007 and the other one at 2009 [World Wushu Championships](#) in Toronto, Canada.

For conditioning purposes, Master Maricic sometimes practices Tai Chi, Qigong, and other martial arts forms seated. This became extremely helpful for teaching paraplegics. Currently, he has 15 students. His curriculum includes active and passive Qigong, the Yang Style long form, as well as some Chen Style movements. Since the one-hour class is right after work at their work location, Nikolas would see how his students feel to and determine exactly what movements to teach. Sometimes they work outdoors close to a nearby lake. He mixes and matches movements and makes the class fun. He fondly calls the program Chinese Dance. To best teach his students, Master Nikolas teaches in a wheelchair most of the time, or squats while demonstrating.

The students are not required to memorize the form. Instead they are relaxing and enjoying the moment of practicing Tai Chi. Master Nikolas finds this group of students is much easier to teach since they know much more about bones and body structure than average people. He helps them not just to get a good workout but also way to balance Qi. With the success of this program, the National Paraplegics and Tetraplegics Association has an article reporting it in their latest issue of the magazine.

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**Violet Li**

Tai Chi Examiner

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