

**The foundations of**

**Vovinam Viet Vo Dao:**

**Fundamentals to build a solid future**

**by**  
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## INDEX

- 1 Characteristics
  - Power and speed
  - Concentration of power
  - Role of the muscle power
  - Rhythm
  - Choice of time
  - Lower abdomen and hips
  
- 2 Warm-up
  - Exercises to enhance and maintenance strengths
  - Stretching exercises
  
- 3 Dam – Punches
  - Position effect
  
- 4 Da – kicks
  - Front-kick
  - Push-kick
  - Side-kick
  - Roundhouse kick
  - Back-kick
  
- 5 Conclusion

## **CHARACTERISTICS**

To practise Vovinam it is important to hold a correct posture. Actually, each part of your body should work in harmony to create the perfect balance, which is necessary to strike a punch or a kick. The Vovinam student often needs to stand only on one foot to attack or to defend himself. This is why a good balance is of great importance. By standing with both feet slightly apart and, consequently, lowering the body's centre of gravity, kicks or punches will be more powerful. If the body's centre of gravity were higher and feet a bit closer, it would be easier to move. However if you try to get a solid balance by excessively looking after your body's centre of gravity as well as by bending your knees too much, your kick will be less effective. Therefore, your body position and its centre of gravity change depending on circumstances.

Sometimes the weight of the body is equally distributed over both feet. Sometimes it is heavier on one foot only. For example when you are performing a DA DAP (side-kick) your body weight is transferred fully only onto one foot. In this instance, you need to be strongly standing on one leg otherwise the knockback of the kick that you deliver, will reverse your body balance.

### **Power and speed**

It is not sufficient to have a strong muscular strength; you need to use it efficiently.

The power of each movement depends on a number of factors. One of the most important ones is speed.

The basic techniques to strike a kick and a punch are enhanced by applying maximum strength at the point of impact. This strength is linked to the speed of your movements. Therefore, a faster speed will result in enhanced power.

Speed is an important element in applying strength, but it is efficient only if properly well controlled.

### **Concentration of power**

A punch or a kick will result to be weak if performed by using only the strength of an arm or a leg. It is in fact necessary to involve the entire body strengths to achieve maximum results. When you throw a punch or a kick, their power moves through the muscles from the centre of your body to the hand or the foot.

Training should teach how to concentrate all available strengths to the hand when throwing a punch and to the foot when striking a kick.

It is important that muscles are loose and relaxed. This will allow releasing the accumulated power at the time of impact and then getting immediately ready for the next move.

### **Role of the muscle power**

Muscle supply the dynamic force of the body. When practicing Vovinam muscles must be well trained, powerful and elastic. The fact that a student knows the Vovinam techniques and dynamics of movements is not sufficient if his muscles are not strong enough. This is why training is important to strengthen them.

When performing a new technique efficiently it is important to use the right muscles. On the contrary, the use of wrong muscles will hinder the movement, make it less efficient and result in a waste of energy.

Also the faster a muscle contracts, the greater the power will be.

### **Rhythm**

Rhythm is essential in executing a series of martial art movement, as it is essential in all sport activities. In Vovinam, it is essential to gain a good rhythm in basic techniques first and later in combat. Rhythm is key when performing 'shapes'. The main elements to perform a technique are the application of strength at the right time, the speed control of movements, and the smoothly body transition from one technique to the following one.

Without rhythm, these requirements cannot be met.

### **Choice of time**

Time is key when deciding the right moment to strike a punch or a kick. Chose the wrong time (too early or too late) to hit your target and your actions will be unsuccessful.

In Vovinam, the attack starts from a guarded or defensive position.

Obviously, hands and feet must always be placed in the proper position to easily deliver the techniques. As soon as one move is performed, they need to get back to their original position and be ready for the next move.

Throughout these moves, the body needs to stay relaxed, but vigilant

### **Lower abdomen and hips**

A correct position will allow the Vovinam student to keep his upper body and lower body in good balance as well as allow his muscle to work in harmony with low energy waste.

The centre of the body, the lower abdomen and the hips play a key role in most Vovinam movements. Therefore, it is appropriate to punch with your hips, to kick with your hips and to defend with your hips.

## **WARM-UP**

Stretching is important. It also helps in preventing injuries. The best way to teach how to stretch is to set the example yourself, enjoy its benefits and transmit your enthusiasm to others.

When teaching how to stretch, students should be told not to compare each other's results because each body is different and physical requirements are different.

Stretching needs to be practised carefully and with common sense. There is no need for students to push their body over its limits.

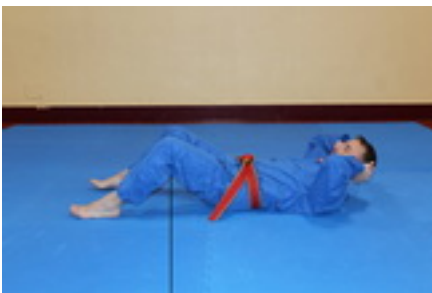
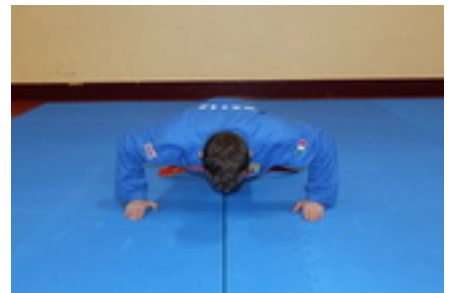
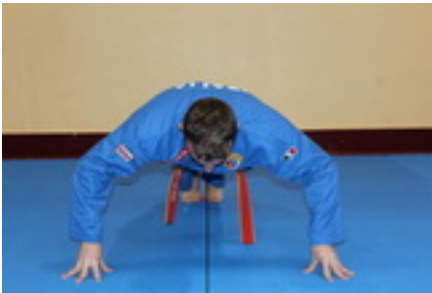
### **Exercises to enhance and maintain strenghts**

Resistance and strength are keys to the following exercises. They aim to increase them both. It is important to be committed and constant otherwise no improvement is achievable.

The abdominal muscles represent a great point of strength for the body. They play a key role in the body resistance. They avoid injuries to the back; they help your breathing and are essential to control movements.

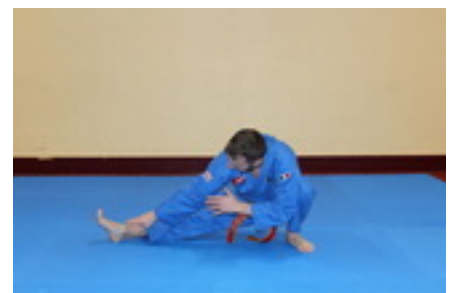
The best exercises to enhance the power of the abdominal muscles are performed in the 'seated position'.

Push-ups are very important exercises to develop your upper body muscles and to keep a good muscle tone. They can be performed in different ways and affect different parts of your arms and trunk



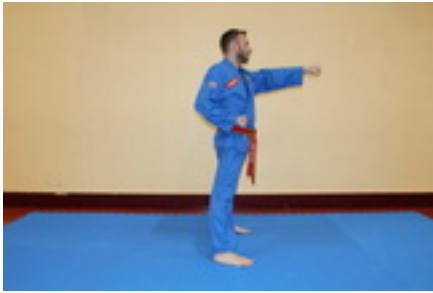
## Stretching exercises

After having performed push-ups and sit-ups, it is important to stretch as displayed in the pictures here below.



## ***DAM – PUNCHES***

- 1) Take the CIUBIN position. Face straight forward. Relax shoulders and arms. Place hands on hips;
- 2) Raise the left hand up to the level of your chest. Palm of the hand open and facing down, as if it were trying to catch an object. Place the right hand slightly above your hip, make a fist and move the elbow backwards.



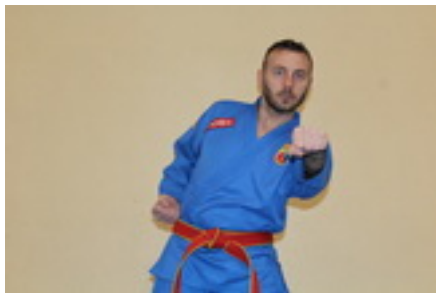
- 3) Retrieve the left hand backwards to your hip, while making a fist. The left hand is taking the same position of the right hand on the opposite hip. Simultaneously move the right hand forward keeping it in straight line towards the target. As you move it, rotate the forearm so that the back of your fist is facing upward. Punch the target.



- 4) Repeat the exercise described at point 3) by using the left hand to strike a punch and by retrieving the right hand to your hip. This type of training will allow the student to perform by keep a relaxed body and keeping his fists between one punch and another.

## Points to remember

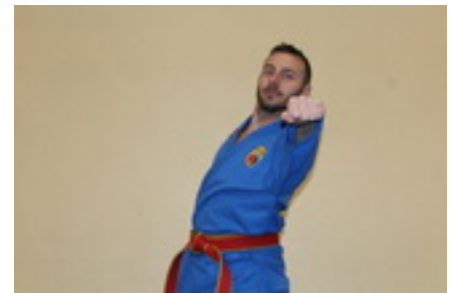
- 1) Keep the trunk of your body perpendicular to the ground. Do not lean forward.



Shoulder bent  
too low



Shoulder bent  
too high



Shoulder bent  
too forward

- 2) Make sure that the body moves toward its target in a straight line;
- 3) Retrieve the hand as fast as possible;
- 4) Keep shoulders relaxed and in a natural position;
- 5) Correctly contract the abdominal muscles;



If the shoulder is too high, the hand will move toward its target following an incorrect trajectory



Keep the shoulders relaxed, in a natural position and still during the movement.

## To remember

- 1) When moving, hips tend to move up. Keep them low. Also, apply strength to keep your soles on the ground.
- 2) While striking a punch, the elbow of the striking arm tends to move away from the hip. Consequently, the hand will move toward the target in an incorrect direction. The elbow should slide along the hip when striking a punch.



- 3) The shoulder tends to move earlier than the hip. Relax your shoulder and strike the punch only by using the power generated by your hips.
- 4) Move arms and body in the following order (also remember that both hands move simultaneously):
  - Hand that retrieves: hand, arm, shoulder, trunk and hips;
  - Hand that strikes the punch: hips, trunk, shoulder, arm and hand;
- 5) At the time of impact the shoulder of the striking arm could be positioned forward that the hips. If this is the case, the hip muscles cannot contract and consequently the technique is inefficient.
- 6) Hips rotation needs to be fast and powerful. The fastest it occurs, the better it is.
- 7) At the time of impact, the trunk tends to bend forward. Avoid this incorrect position.

### **Effect of the position**



To enhance the power of the attack, increase the distance between the feet and lower your hips.

For example, an attack from the DINH TAN position (guarded position) where hips are high and feet too closed to each other will result in a weaker scope of the punch. Trying to increase this scope by leaning forward will result in loss of balance and in an inefficient attack.

Instead, it would be necessary to increase the distance between the feet, to move toward the target with the front foot and to lower the hips.

These three pictures show how the different positions of the feet and the height of the hips affect the scope of the punch.

Notice that the greater scope is achieved by moving the front foot toward the target, while keeping the back foot still.

If this move does not allow you to hit the target because there is a gap between your fist and the target, do not lean forward. Attack with your foot instead to cover the remaining space between you and the target.

## **DA – KICK**

Raise high and bend the knee of the leg, which is kicking. This is an important preliminary for the kick. This exercise helps the body to balance on one leg only and represents the first part for a correct kick execution. It is important to keep the weight of the kicking leg closer to the trunk. In fact, the kick is more powerful if the leg is initially closer to the body. A bent knee creates a great lever for a fast and powerful kick.

While kicking, keep the other supporting leg still, the knee slightly bent, slightly lean the leg forward, to contract the muscle and to keep the sole firmly on the ground.

An efficient kick is delivered by using the strength of the leg as well as quick movement of the hips. Push the hips forward toward the target when the leg is out straight, and move them backward as soon as the leg retracts.

The ankle of the supporting leg will act as a spring to absorb the movement of the hips and the pushback of the kick. The ankle will also act to keep the sole firmly on the ground during the kick. Actually, if the sole is risen, the supporting area is smaller, so both balance and stability will decrease.

The ankle of the supporting leg plays a pivotal role in all kicking techniques.

An elastic and strong ankle allows the hips to move freely and efficiently. The knee of the supporting leg needs to be still to guarantee the right balance.

The kick could also be performed ahead with the front leg. Raise the knee and bend it as much as possible until the heel is the closest to the buttocks. Launch the foot forward towards the target. This is a useful technique to use against our opponent who is launching an attack toward us. When kicking from this position, the body weight is supported shortly by the back leg only.

Any Vovinam student must be able to kick with both his front and back leg. This depends on the situations that he has to face and adapt to. Any student must always be aware of how to change position, of the distance between him and his opponent and where his target is.

## **DA THANG (Front kick)**

This type of kick is performed to attack a target placed straight in front of us. It can efficiently kick any part of the body of our opponent, including the face, the chin, the chest, the abdomen, the groin and the thighs. Hips tend to raise during a high-kick with the back leg. Therefore, the knee of the supporting leg must not be straightened and hips must be kept at the same horizontal level. When the trunk is out of balance, it is impossible to kick efficiently and impossible that the kicking foot move straight along the shortest trajectory toward the target.



Picture A shows that the body centre of gravity falls within the area of the supporting foot. This guarantees a good balance. This helps to deliver a great high-kick upward, to face the opponent's counterattack, and to adapt quickly to any possible change of the situation.

Picture B shows that the body centre of gravity falls outside the area of the supporting foot. However, a good balance is still possible. The body moving forward can strengthen the kick. In addition, the foot can easily move out or upward toward the target. Once the kick has been executed the foot can be positioned on the ground in front of the supporting foot and easily keep the balance. It is also possible to return the kicking foot to its original position without compromising the balance.

Picture C shows that the body centre of gravity falls far from the area of the supporting foot. The balance is therefore precarious. The hips are back behind the shoulders therefore it would be difficult to give power to any kicks. Once the kick is delivered, the foot will be placed on the ground in front of the supporting foot. There is no possibility to position it in the initial position. Considering that the body is leaning forward, it would be difficult to face the attacks of the opponent. A kick from this position means that our opponent has the opportunity to attack us by punching us in the face.

### **Points to remember**

- 1) Push the hips forward when kicking. If not, the trunk will lean too much forward and the face will be exposed to be attacked by our opponent.



Notice the difference: when the hips move forward and when the trunk leans forward.

- 2) Keep the hips lower to improve stability. However, if they are too low, the knee of the supporting leg will lower during the kick. This will reduce stability and shorten the kick range. It is necessary to bend the knee of the supporting leg just enough to allow a vertical line to draw from the knee to the toes.
- 3) When kicking, the knee of the supporting leg must face in the direction of the target. If not, the kicking foot tends to move away from the target and we compromise the empowerment of the strike at impact.  
Make sure that the knee of the supporting leg is contracted and that both the knee and the toes are facing the direction of the target.

### Training method

- 1) Raise the knee while keeping the sole parallel to the ground.
- 2) Knee and toes should face the same direction.
- 3) Move the toes upward and contract the ankle.
- 4) Relax the knee joint and keep it flexible and ready for the next move.



## **Push - kick**

As you stand with the kicking leg high up, stretch the knee powerfully and push forward towards the target. A too high up kick will result in a precarious balance for the person performing the kick.

Contract fully and powerfully the knee of the kicking leg so to avoid that the impact pushes the leg backward.

As you stand with a high and bent knee, the push-kick can be performed straight ahead or aside. A target can be hit at the belt level or higher up.

Keep the movement flowing and quick as you start the kick, but maximize the power in the foot at the time of impact.

It is important to evaluate correctly the distance from our opponent. If not, our kick will fail. A successful kick will depend from a correct evaluation of the distance and from the right choice of time to hit.

The foot must hit the target when the leg is completely straight. Actually if the foot kicks the target earlier or later, the effect of the kick will decrease and we will be pushed backward. This negative reaction is greater when, even if the leg is straight, it hits the target before the movement has been well coordinated.

### **Points to remember**

- 1) Contract the ankle and the knee of the supporting leg.
- 2) Force the trunk to face the direction of your kick. Otherwise, the balance will be lost and in the worst cases, you are pushed back from the target after impact.
- 3) Use the hips by moving them towards the direction of the kick.

### **Training methods for push-kicks**

- 1) Shift the body weight onto the left leg and raise the right leg by bending the knee completely.
- 2) Quickly and powerfully, contract the knee and move the push-kick toward the belly or the groin of the opponent. While kicking keep the foot of the supporting leg firmly on the ground.
- 3) Push the hips forward while kicking.



## **Da Dap (side-kick).**

This kick is usually used to kick on a side without turning your body. The side of the foot is used to hit the target. This side-kick could also be used to hit a target placed directly in front of us by adopting a hip and body 90-degree rotation, either to the right or to the left. Depending on the position of our opponent and on other circumstances, we can efficiently performed either a high-kick or a push-kick.

The DA DAP is a high-kick, which uses the side of the foot to attack the opponent, who stands on our side. This kick can hit the arm of our opponent as he attacks from downward upward, as well as hit his groin, the side of his chest or his chin.

While kicking, if the hips move backward, the body leans forward. Consequently, the kick is inefficient. Therefore, it is important to avoid this mistake by keeping the hips forward. In order to kick efficiently with the side of the foot it is important to contract the kicking foot, to contract and to bend the ankle by pushing the heel to the direction of the kick. Keep the heel and the sides of the supporting foot firmly to the ground; otherwise, the balance will be lost. Also, keep the knee and the ankle of the supporting leg strongly still.

While kicking, do not move nor bend the trunk in any direction. A correct and well-balanced position will strengthen the body and guarantee a firm base for any following movement.

### **Points to remember**

- 1) While kicking, the foot and the knee of the supporting leg must face forward. The full sole of the foot must firmly touch the ground.
- 2) Raise the kicking foot to the level of the knee of the supporting leg. The knee of the kicking leg must face diagonally on the side and to the level of the hips. The foot must face straight ahead. Rotate the foot downward so that its side is parallel to the ground.
- 3) It is easy to lose balance when performing a side-kick. This happens because the trunk leans too much to the opposite direction of the direction of the kick. It is therefore necessary to push the trunk toward the direction of the target.
- 4) Quickly retract the kicking foot to its original position and take a stable position. We are now ready for our next movement.
- 5) Perform this kick by launching the foot upward drawing a semi-circle and using the knee as weight. If the target is higher up, raise further up the knee of the kicking leg.

### **Training method**

- 1) Take the DIHN TAN position (guarded position).
- 2) Move the body weight to the left leg. Raise the right foot on the knee of the supporting leg by slightly touching its internal side with the sole of the foot.
- 3) Launch the foot directly sideways and hit the target with the side of the foot.
- 4) Retract the foot to the position described at point 2)
- 5) Return to the initial position

Practice the kicks on both sides



### **Da Tat (roundhouse kick)**

The roundhouse kick means that we kick our opponent by using the upper part of the foot as we charge our leg from the side.

As we raise the kicking leg on a side, the trunk tends to lean forward or on a side. If this happens, it is not possible to easily rotate the hips and the kick will be weak. Therefore, it is necessary to keep the body straight as much as possible by pushing out the chest and by pushing the hip of the supporting leg upward and forward.

To stretch the arch of the kick and imparting maximum strength when hitting the target, it is necessary to raise the bent knee of the kicking leg to the level of the belt as well as to raise the heel near the buttocks.

The roundhouse kick is strong and efficient; however, it is easy to lose balance after having kicked. For example if we rotate our hips too much, it will be difficult to return to the starting position and consequently we could be in danger of exposing our back to the attacks of our opponent. Therefore, an excessive hip rotation must be avoided. In this case, it is preferable to combine a number of kicks by moving from a roundhouse kick to a side-kick. This will require a great hip rotation.

At the time of impact, the knee of the supporting leg tends to straighten and the heel tends to raise. To avoid this it is necessary to contract the knee and the ankle of the supporting leg so to keep the knee bent and the foot firmly to the ground.

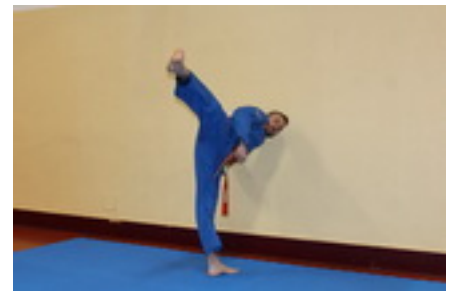
### **Points to remember**

- 1) Use the roundhouse kick to attack with the instep of the foot our opponent standing in front of us. The kick can be done with either the front or the back leg. When attacking, rotate the foot around the body by creating a large circle and rotating the hips.
- 2) The DA TAT can strongly hit the face, the neck and the abdomen of the opponent. It is also possible to kick from inside toward the outside, but this is a difficult move which is better left to be performed by expert students.
- 3) Do not kick only with the strength of the leg. Instead, direct the foot quickly toward the target by performing a quick and strong hip rotation.
- 4) By rotating the hips, the supporting foot moves in the same direction of the rotation. Therefore, make sure that it stays firmly to the ground and moves as little as possible.



## Training methods

- 1) Take the DIHN TAN position (guarded position)
  - 2) Move the body weight onto the front leg. At this point quickly and smoothly, raise the back knee sideways. Raise the foot until the knee, the shin and the foot are at the same level and horizontal to the ground. Fully bend the knee of the kicking leg and move the heel closer to the back of the leg. At this point, the toes of the kicking foot should face sideways, while the sole of the foot should face backward.
  - 3) Rotate the hips anti-clockwise and launch the foot out and in a circular direction toward the target.
  - 4) Return the hips and the kicking foot to the position described at point 2).
  - 5) Return to position 1).
- Repeat this exercise on both hips, right first and then left.



## **Back - kick**

The back-kick is performed by hitting with the heel the target standing behind us. It can be performed with a powerful push or jump. It is also possible to perform a back-kick when hitting by surprise an opponent standing in front of us by rotating and pushing the foot out. However, the back-kick is particularly efficient to hit an opponent who is attacking us from behind. The expert students often perform it as a continuation of the roundhouse kick or in combination with it.

In the back-kick, the position of the supporting leg should match the one for the front-kick. When kicking it is important to push as much as possible upward the kicking foot.



Move the heel of the kicking foot toward the target. At the time of impact, the toes should face the ground at a 45-degree angle.

Even if the target is straight behind the hips, it is possible to miss it. It usually happens when the kicking leg was not straight backwards. While pushed backward, the knee of the kicking leg should slightly touch the knee of the supporting leg.

### Important points

- 1) Because it is difficult to hit with a back-kick, make sure that the body is in the correct position before kicking. Move the hip toward the target. If the body is correctly in line with the target, you are less likely to miss.
- 2) While kicking, avoid bending too much the trunk forward.
- 3) Take advantage of the power of the hips, as if they were a spring, to push backward the kicking leg.
- 4) Take advantage of the muscles of the buttocks to make the kick more powerful.

### Training method

- 1) Move the body weight onto the left leg and raise the right knee in front of you.
- 2) Bend the trunk slightly forward. At the same time stretch the knee and push the foot toward the target who stands behind us.



## CONCLUSIONS

In my experience as a teacher - Vovinam Viet Vo Dao master, I realize that many people are not used to look at sport disciplines from an educational point of view. Sports should be considered as a means to communicate universal values. Sports are a school of life and through each small gesture; it creates the citizen of today and tomorrow.

When we talk about education, we mean to promote a personal growth process, where adults and children gradually learn to empower themselves and learn to respect the environment around them and learn about responsibilities, human relations, commitment and freedom. Through the sport discipline, the teacher-educator will try to get the best out of every student. He will try to find their talent and develop it with courage. Teaching is training, it is listening to and it is interpreting what hides inside each student. In this context, VOVINAM helps to build a harmonious and balanced personality. This forms the basis to develop values such as culture, being socially active, and trying to find deeper meanings in our daily materialistic life.

A well- structured and organized training will trigger the energies of the mind, the heart, as well as the sensitivity and the desire of the students. The teacher makes suggestions, mentors and supports the student in this journey.

One key element, which is taught to children (who will become adults) and to adults, is self-discipline. In fact, to be in the best psychophysical conditions to train and compete, it is necessary to teach good life practices to the students. The teacher will set the example.

This is important for each person personal-growth. It teaches students to manage their time, to control their impulses, to control their feelings, to respect themselves and others in their daily life.

Through the rules of competition, we teach ourselves to have a set of values and rules, which will then help us in our daily life to make choices, to value and shape our life and our lifestyle.

Martial arts teach us to win and to lose. In order to deeply understand this message, we need to think of sports in terms of not only winning and achieving a positive result. When we lose, this helps us to look back at what we did and learn from our mistakes.

I believe that practising Vovinam Viet Vo Dao is a great source of education. It helps a person to mature as an individual and teaches values such as strain and sacrifice. It helps to appreciate the results achieved with commitment and perseverance. To promote friendship, and a culture of peace and acceptance. It teaches to lose with no humiliation and to win with no arrogance.

One of my main objectives for the future is to be able to transmit my passion for this martial art, from a sport and human side, to all my students and see them grow, get better and improve in Vovinam Viet Vo Dao.