

Miami event to turn entrepreneurs into 'TekFighters'

By Nancy Dahlberg

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Michael Landsberg and Binsen Gonzalez / TekFight

Jose Antonio Hernandez-Solaun and Saif Ishoof are the co-founders of TekFight, which is coming to Miami Dade College's Wolfson campus on Friday.

Martial arts meets entrepreneurship this Friday, in an event that will turn Miami Dade College into a startup arena.

[TekFight](#) is a free tournament-style all-day entrepreneurship event being organized by co-founders Saif Ishoof and Jose Antonio Hernandez-Solaun, as well as Binsen J. Gonzalez and Jeff Goudie and a host of sponsors. About 30 prominent local entrepreneurs, investors and professionals will be participating as sensei. Ishoof (or Master Sai-Fu in the TekFight world), City Year Miami's executive director, recently answered questions about TekFight, which is a personal project.

Q. What is TekFight?

A. TekFight is not a mixed martial arts fight like the UFC! TekFight is a place where entrepreneurs, angel investors and technologists can trade ideas and resources, and build relationships in the same way that students exchange knowledge in a karate studio. My co-founder Jo-Sensei (also known as Jose Antonio Hernandez-Solaun) and I believe that Miami can be a place where ideas can be transformed into careers through entrepreneurship.

Q. Why did you create TekFight?

A. We believe entrepreneurship should be an open-source process where people can gain exposure to those who can help them sharpen the skills they need to build great products, services and companies. We want to bridge relationships between Miami's emerging innovators and top-level decision-makers to speed opportunity creation.

Martial arts is a fitting setting to place our work, since it is a world that honors those who are committed to helping others achieve while fostering a competitive spirit.

Our DoJo was a product of phenomenal mentors like Madeline Pumariega, the president of MDC's Wolfson Campus, who has a persistent vision for a downtown education hub, as

well as the leadership and energy of Knight Foundation's Matt Haggman, and finally a corporate chieftain like Greenberg Traurig's Co-Managing Partner, Jaret Davis.

Q. What will the tournament look like?

A. We will have multiple rounds throughout the day with leading entrepreneurs, funders, innovators and tech professionals. As the name implies ... yes, we are set up like a technology martial arts tournament. Everyone enters TekFight as a white belt. Participants can acquire a yellow belt or higher, if they truly commit to the TekFight tournament.

Q. How do you 'belt up'?

A. Tweet comments/questions to @TekFight. Volunteer to help out at the tournament. Spread the word about TekFight. Make a commitment to help someone at the tournament, i.e., offering to help write code for a project ... review a business plan ... help market an idea ... mentor a fellow student.

Tyler McIntyre of Lucid Technologies created an app, App.tekfight.com, which will allow participants to start earning points toward their higher belt and it will help Dojo participants connect with others during training. The App is a true start of incorporating a gamification element to real world entrepreneurship.

Q. Why acquire a yellow belt?

A. Yellow belt status or higher will grant you access to special rounds including a yellow belt luncheon with angel investors, an Iron-Fist Session with tech/VC lawyers, and an exclusive session with (Terremark founder) Manny Medina.

Q. What will participants and sensei walk away with?

A. It is our hope that the 300+ participants will acquire a deeper relationship with the key partners they need to bring their ideas to life. We also hope that those that are creators (i.e., developers) will be able to unlock critical funding relationships as well as potential clients from enterprise clients. In a similar vein, we seek that enterprise users and funders will see the richness of talent in our South Florida community.

The entire day promises to be filled with surprises. Two must-see elements include the featured address from the director of the U.S. Department of Defense's Office of Small Business Procurement, Andre Gudger. Director Gudger oversees a multi-billion dollar acquisition budget and his work is aimed at helping small enterprise unlock large federal contracting opportunities. ... The other must-see speaker is Miami technology luminary Manny Medina who will be sharing in an intimate session, "Tea with the Master," his unique perspective of Miami's continued promise as a technology hub.

Beyond these two featured speakers, the real excitement will come from several of our rounds that allow an airing of the real frustrations and challenges that entrepreneurs and funders alike have about the innovation sector in South Florida.

TekFight is more than just a conference — it is a movement. Bruce Lee said "I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once, but rather the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times."

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