

Drum Rolls and High Scores

Researched, conducted and edited by Zishan Hui



In Chaoyang, Beijing, high school sophomore William has made a name for himself as a Taiko no Tatsujin player within the local player community in just three years.

So you have been playing Taiko no Tatsujin for 3 years, what triggered your interest in the beginning?

I first came across Taiko during the spring festival in 2021. I stumbled upon a live stream on Bilibili and got really intrigued by the music in Taiko, as well as the way you play it by actually hitting the drums.

I know, it is really different from other games you play with keyboards, right?

Actually, this game can be played with a Switch or on a computer simulator, but the logic of using a controller or keyboard is different from playing on a real drum. The skills don't really transfer over, so I stick with the physical drum setup for the authentic experience.

So where do you get to play the drum?

Before I got my own drum at home, game arcades were the only place I could play. A couple of months after I first played this game in arcades, I bought my own drum to practice at home.

In 2021, I spent about 1.5 hours every day at home practicing, so that's roughly 7.5 hours a week. On weekends, I'd head over to the arcade, taking the subway to Xidan Mall—sadly, the arcade there is closed now. The trip took me about 50 minutes, but it was worth it. I'd spend 5 to 8 hours there.

In 2022, I spent around 5 hours a week at a new arcade, taking the subway to Huaxi LIVE, which is about an hour's commute each way. At home, I practiced for about 3 hours per week.

In 2023, I visited the arcade once a week, heading to the Daxing Huiju, which is a bit further, about a 70-minute commute. My home practice was 4 hours a week. You know, keeping my skills sharp.

Wow, it sounds like you've really put a lot of effort into this.

Not only effort, but a lot of money as well. I got the physical drum from Taobao for 2300 yuan(about \$318). It feels a bit different from the arcade version, but it's fine I think. I also bought drumsticks from Taobao, around 250 yuan(about \$35) per pair.

That's surprisingly expensive, huh? I know you also make your own drumsticks. Is it because they are too pricey?

Yes and no... Well, I really wanted to make drumsticks that fit me perfectly. You gotta try different materials and shapes to find the right ones, you know? I usually get this special Japanese wood, 米ヒバ. I tend to choose wood that's heavier and denser. I use a Japanese plane for shaping and various grits of sandpaper for finishing. All of these were learned from a Taiko master on Japanese YouTube, I use the same tools as him.

So, you often watch videos online to learn about Taiko-related skills. Do you also post videos like that?

Yes, I post on Bilibili, a Chinese video platform. I have 352 followers there, although most of them are my friends from the Taiko player community. Bilibili is basically how I track and analyze my progress at each stage. It's primarily for recording and scrutinizing my improvements, not for teaching. I am far from that.

What's your ID? I want to follow you right away. And how did you get into the community?

It's 西单出勤人. When I was at the arcade, I met a lot of friends to play with. They invited me into an online chat group. I feel the Taiko community and the player groups are really inclusive. They're welcoming to players of all levels. We can meet up to play, discuss techniques, compete, and improve together. Being part of it has really helped my own skills grow.

That sounds like a wonderful community! Can you share a memorable experience or a particular moment?

Since I got into Taiko, I've visited many cities to meet with high-level players there. We'd spend the whole day at the arcade, ordering food delivery just to save time for playing. Every trip I've made for Taiko has been an unforgettable experience and a cherished memory.

Excellent experience! Since you are now a high-level player as well, do you have any advice for people who are just starting out?

Don't shy away from the tough tracks; they're actually great for leveling up. But also, don't just jump ahead without thinking. Sometimes, you gotta step back and practice the basics to really get good.

That's some solid advice! Thanks for sharing your insights!

No problem, when you're free, I can teach you if you want.