

Jigoro Kano, The Founding, History & Evolution Of Judo

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Part 7

Judo's Future

There have been two main developments in Judo over the years. The first was the introduction of weight categories. In the early days, weight differences were not considered important. Everyone fought everyone else, with the result that, if two players were equally matched in skill, the bigger man usually won. There was much opposition to the introduction of weight categories. Some masters feared that it meant the end of Judo as a skilful art. Initially there were three categories, and later this was made into five. Inclusion of the sport in the Olympic Games in 1964 helped to hasten this important reform.

The second development was the teaching of Judo to children. In the early days, it was thought much too dangerous to teach children because they would not have the self-discipline to avoid using it outside the club. Today many clubs are composed largely of junior membership.

There are different styles of Judo. With its inclusion in the Olympics, there has been a shift toward a contest style practice. In clubs where this style is taught, practice becomes largely a continuous contest. Other schools stress skill. They favour repetitive movements to make them instinctive, and the development of speed through practice with little resistance. Such clubs usually also teach the Kata. These clubs could be considered traditional Judo clubs.

Competition

The first World Championships were held in 1956 in Tokyo, with 31 contestants from 21 countries. The rapidly expanding popularity of Judo internationally justified the construction of a new Kodokan in 1958 in the Bunkyo-ku district of Tokyo, close to the former location in the Suidobashi district.

During this time, European Judo federations had been advocating weight divisions for international Judo competitions. The Kodokan resisted these efforts as not consistent with Judo's technical theory that weight and strength were irrelevant.

So, at the 1956 World Championships, and the next two World Championships held in Tokyo, and then Paris, in 1961, international competitions were traditional "open" style, with no weight, rank, or age distinctions. The first World Championship was won by Shokichi Natsui, and the second by Yasuji Sone. In Paris, however, with 57 contestants from 25 countries, Anton Geesink of Holland won. This was a big shock for Japanese Judo. With a non-Japanese as World Champion for the first time, the International Judo Federation quickly agreed to recognize weight divisions in future world championships.

At the 1960 meeting of the International Olympic Committee, Judo was accepted as a demonstration sport for the 1964 Tokyo Summer Olympic Games. This was fitting, as Japan hosted the games in memory of the founder of amateur athletics in Japan, Jigoro Kano. The matches were held in the newly constructed Nippon Budokan, and consisted of three weight divisions, light, middle and heavy, as well as an open category. The shocker again, for the Japanese, was Geesink's win in the open division over Akio Kaminaga.

Judo was not included in the 1968 Games in Mexico City, but was finally selected as a full medal sport for the 1972 Olympic Games, the first martial art to be so recognized, although its formal debut as a permanent medal sport was overshadowed by the terrorist murders of Israeli athletes.

In 1982, Judo celebrated its 100th anniversary at the Kodokan, and initiated construction greatly expanding the Kodokan and renaming it the Kodokan International Judo Centre. Construction was completed in 1984.

By 1995, the World Championships, once again held in Japan, were attended by 625 competitors from 100 nations, with medallists from Japan, Korea, France, Cuba, Russia, and Germany, showing that expertise in Judo was no longer limited to Japan.

Judo Today

The Kodokan is no longer the primary authority in Judo either in Japan, where Judo is regulated by the All Japan Judo Federation, or internationally, where the IJF is now headquartered in Seoul, Korea, under president Yong Sung Park (*now presided and officed by Mr. Marius Vizer of Hungary as of September 2007). However, it is Kodokan rank, which many practitioners still seek, and the Kodokan still enjoys a powerful technical and philosophical influence on Judo around the world. For most, this is in respect to Jigoro Kano.

Today, the International Judo Federation is a member of the International Olympic Committee, and although the IJF claims that Judo ranks second only to football as the most popular sport in the world, it is surely one of the most widely practiced sports in the world. With 175 member nations, the IJF is the largest international sport federation in the IOC.

Judo remains one of the most popular sports, bringing the culture and honour of Japan's fighting tradition to the world. For people around the world, it remains an

outstanding martial art, martial sport, and cultural study. People of all cultures enjoy Judo. It is an important gift of Japanese culture to the world, and was an important development in sport. Most importantly, in light of the intention of its founder Jigoro Kano, Judoka practice Judo together, from around the world, regardless of language, colour, race, or creed. Judo transcends politics, culture, and geography. The Kodokan remains the important symbolic heart of Judo. It is the enduring monument to Jigoro Kano.

From Kano's humble beginnings of just 9 students to his vision of world Judo, today Judo is practiced by over 6 million people worldwide.

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