

## **A Brief History of Judo by Alex Mashadi**

**Judo** is a relatively new Japanese martial art developed in Japan in 1882 by Dr Kano Jigoro. Its aim is to either throw the opponent to the ground, immobilize or otherwise subdue the opponent, or force an opponent to submit by a strangle hold or arm lock.

Kano Jigoro was born in 1860 into an affluent Japanese family. His grandfather was a self-made man, a sake brewer from central Japan. However, Kano's father was not the eldest son and therefore did not inherit the business. Instead, he became a Shinto priest and government official, with enough influence for his son to enter Tokyo Imperial University.

Kano was a small, frail boy, who was often picked on by bullies. At the age of 17, he first started jujutsu but with little success. This was in part due to his difficulties finding a teacher who would take him on as a student. When he went to university to study literature at the age of 18, he continued his martial arts studies, eventually gaining a referral to Fukuda Hachinosuke (c.1828–c.1880), a teacher who stressed the importance of technique over formal exercise, which led to Kano's belief in the importance of free practice (randori).

A little more than a year after Kano joined Fukuda's school, Fukuda became ill and died. Kano then became a student in a number of other schools, where varying degrees of emphasis was put on the practice of pre-arranged forms (kata) or free practice. By this time, Kano was devising new techniques, such as the "shoulder wheel" (kata-guruma) and the "floating hip" (uki goshi) throw. Full of new ideas, Kano was full of new ideas and reformed jujutsu, with techniques based on sound scientific principles, and with focus on development of the body, mind and character of young men in addition to development of martial prowess. In May 1882, at the age of 22, when he was just about to finish his degree at the University, Kano took nine students to study jujutsu under him at a Buddhist temple. After two years the temple was called 'Kodokan' or 'place for teaching the way', this is now regarded as the Kodokan's founding.

Formalism and strict conduct are typical of traditional judo. Judo means: "The way of gentleness". The soft method uses indirect application of force to defeat an opponent by using one's opponent's strength against him. For example, if the attacker was to push against his opponent he would find his opponent stepping to the side and allowing his momentum to throw him forwards. Jujutsu techniques that relied only on greater strength were changed to redirect the opponent's force or off-balancing the opponent.

Ancient martial arts had the sole purpose of killing. Kano saw judo as a way to improve oneself physically, mentally, emotionally and morally. He even extended the physical principle of maximum efficiency into daily life, evolving it into "mutual prosperity". In this respect, judo is seen as a holistic approach to life extending well beyond the confines of the dojo.

A change introduced into judo since Kano's death is the use of weight categories. At first this was not welcomed as weight differences were not thought to be of importance and it was more down to the skill of the throw or move. There are at the moment seven weight divisions for adults.

The first time judo was seen in the Olympics was at the 1932 Games in Los Angeles, where Kano and about 200 judo students gave a demonstration. Judo became an Olympic sport for men in the 1964 Games in Tokyo. Judo became an Olympic sport for women as well in 1988. It is often stated that the men's judo event in 1964 was a demonstration event, but according to the International Judo Federation and the International Olympic Committee, judo was in fact an official sport in the 1964 games. Dutchman Anton Geesink won the first Olympic gold medal in the open division of judo by defeating Akio Kaminaga of Japan. Judo then lost the image of being "Japanese only" and went on to become one of the most widely practised sports in the world. The women's event was a demonstration event in 1988, and became an official medal event four years later. Men and women compete separately, although they often train together. Paralympic judo has been a Paralympic sport (for the visually impaired) since 1988; it is also one of the sports at the Special Olympics.

A judo teacher is called sensei, which comes from *sen* or *saki* (before) and *sei* (life), so it means one who has preceded you. In Western dojos, it is common to call any instructor of dan grade sensei. Traditionally, that title was reserved for instructors of 4th dan and above.

Practitioners of judo are called judoka. They traditionally wear white uniforms called judogi, which simply means "judo wear", for practising judo. Sometimes the word is shortened simply to gi (uniform). The judogi was created by Kano in 1907, and similar uniforms were later adopted by many other martial arts. The modern judogi consists of white or blue cotton drawstring pants and a matching white or blue quilted cotton jacket, fastened by a belt (obi). The belt is usually coloured to indicate rank. The jacket is intended to withstand the stresses of grappling and, as a result, is much thicker than that of a karate uniform. Judogi are designed to allow an opponent to hold onto it, while karategi are made from slicker material so that an opponent cannot get a grip on the material.

The modern use of the blue judogi was first suggested by Anton Geesink at the 1986 Maastricht IJF DC Meeting. For competition, a blue *jūdōgi* is worn by one of the two competitors to make it easier for the judges, referees, and spectators. In Japan, both judoka use a white judogi and the traditional red sash (based on the colours of the Japanese flag) is fixed to the belt of one competitor. Outside Japan, a coloured sash may also be used for convenience in minor competitions, the blue judogi only being used at the regional or higher levels. Japanese practitioners and purists tend to look down on the use of blue judogi.

Judo includes a variety of rolls, falls, throws, hold downs, strangles and arm locks but the main aim is on throwing and groundwork. Throws can be divided

in two groups of techniques, standing techniques and sacrifice techniques. Standing techniques can be further divided into hand techniques, hip techniques and foot and leg techniques. Sacrifice techniques are divided into those in which the thrower falls directly backwards and those in which he falls onto his side.

The ground fighting techniques are divided into attacks against the joints or joint locks, strangleholds or chokeholds, and holding or pinning techniques.

A kind of sparring is practised in judo, known as randori, meaning "free practice". In randori, two opponents may attack each other with any judo throw or grappling technique. For reasons of safety, chokeholds, joint locking and the sacrifice techniques are subject to age or rank restrictions. For example, in the United States one must be 13 or older to use chokeholds and 16 or older to use armlocks.

In randori and tournament practice, when an opponent successfully executes a chokehold or joint lock, one submits, or "taps out", by tapping the mat or one's opponent at least twice in a manner that clearly indicates the submission. When this occurs the match is over, the tapping player has lost, and the chokehold or joint lock ceases.