



Discuss AEJF and BJC grading system

The purpose of gradings is to look at the students' progress both in terms of their fighting skills and their technical ability and knowledge. However, even if these are excellent it is vital to show a good attitude and knowledge of the judo code. Ultimately, the colour of the belt will help those leading the session to estimate how much help the students will need and which techniques they will be expected to be familiar with so at which level to pitch the session. It is also needed to help keep the session safe.

The ranking system of Coloured belts measures students' progress from novice to white belt (6th Kyu) then up to yellow (5th Kyu), orange (4th Kyu), green (3rd Kyu), blue (2nd Kyu) and brown (1st Kyu). The black belt (1st Dan) is the ultimate colour, but above this 5th Dans can wear a red and white striped belt and a 9th Dan may wear red. Under 16s may wear their coloured belt at Blackwater Judo Club, but at competitions or if visiting other clubs they must only wear a maximum of green belt, with tabs of colour indicating their level of competence, to a maximum of three black tabs.

Breakfalls are one of the first things that are taught (and graded on) as they are needed to practice judo safely. Arm locks and strangles are not measured until brown belt, as these must be performed safely to avoid injuries. Kata is tested for brown belt, especially Nage no Kata and Katame no Kata.

Gradings look at fighting ability and technique. Many people will be better in one of these aspects than in the other, so grading tends to have a degree of flexibility, although the motivation to try hard must always be present. Some people may be limited in what they can achieve physically and they can then make up for this with a good technical knowledge.

Merit badges are awarded occasionally for exceptional attitude, courage or behaviour.

Under 8's are graded differently to over 8's because under 8s are generally less coordinated, have less developed motor skills, are less physically developed and often have a shorter attention span. They will be told the English translation of the Japanese term of the technique asked. They were awarded red tabs on a white belt for self-discipline, the ability to listen and to be prepared to try to do what they had been asked. The maximum number of red tabs they could have was five, and the student could then be awarded a red belt.

Recently, a foundation group has been started at Blackwater Judo Club, to teach the fundamentals of judo to children aged six to ten years from novice until:

1. They can perform the techniques detailed in the Foundation Syllabus to a satisfactory level
2. They show awareness of the Judo Code through demonstration and by their actions
3. They can demonstrate all breakfalls to a high standard
4. They can assist their partner by being Uke to a satisfactory level
5. They can demonstrate awareness of the Principal of Gentleness

The coaching style and session content is conducted to suit the age group and ability of the children with emphasis on the child's physical development, general motor skills and to incorporate all aspects of the Judo Code in every activity whilst keeping the training session fun and motivational. All members of the Foundation Group wear a red and white striped belt to show they belong to the group. The belt is like a dan grade belt as it continues the theme of

the circular basis of judo. It also helps distinguish them from other children. Every session two children receive a special belt (purple or white and red striped) to wear for their next session. These are awarded for especially good participation or effort during the session. At their next session they can line up at the top of the line and may help choose a game to play.

The Foundation Group members are graded at a club grading so they get used to the formality of the gradings. They are graded by a grading officer using a sheet where a number of things are measured: their ability to breakfall safely, perform a named particular throw, hold down, escape, knowledge of the judo code and familiarity of Japanese terminology. Some randori and shiai is part of the training programme but is not measured as part of their grading. Their overall performance at the grading will determine which certificate they will receive: koka, yuko, wazari or ippon. If they have reached age eight and have achieved an ippon certificate, they can progress to a yellow belt and they leave the foundation group. If they have not reached this standard by the age of 11, they will be considered on an individual basis and may join the main judo group with a white belt.

Area Gradings (with AEJF panels) are required for those looking to grade to Green Belt and over, whereas under Greens can be graded in club as all gradings under green belt are about gaining confidence and to prepare students towards obtaining a black belt. Over this colour belt, students benefit from fighting with a wider range of opponents, which they can experience at area gradings. Students are likely to have to cope with the added pressure of being graded in unfamiliar surroundings and by a less familiar sensei.

The difference between a yellow belt grading and a black belt grading is not just a matter of the number of techniques that have to be learnt. As the student gets closer to the black belt they should be more familiar with the ethos of judo and will also act as a role model for less experienced students. They are likely to be more involved in teaching, warm-ups, competitions and demonstrations. All dan grades must have passed a basic referee award and must referee at least three times in a twelve-month period to maintain their referee award, which they will also need to do to progress within the grade structure.

A grading officer will approach a senior judoka's first grading in a slightly different way to an under 8's first grading as the senior judoka is generally expected to be more mature and have a longer concentration span. They will be expected to be familiar with the Japanese terms of the techniques. However, both students will be nervous. The senior judoka may well be more nervous than the under 8, and a willingness to learn and a positive attitude and appreciation of the judo code will also be taken into account