

TWO BRIEF HISTORIES OF BRITISH JUDO

'Judo, a creation meant to represent modernized, forward-thinking ideas of physical and mental culture, is constantly criticized as being too antiquated and bound up in tradition. Almost as soon as Kano founded the art, there were people, Westerners and Easterners alike, who wanted to pare off all of the "philosophical malarkey" so that nothing but pure sport would remain. These people seem to have seen nothing sacred about the original conception of the founder'¹

Having started judo at the age of 15, I read somewhere that Kano was the son of a farmer who being small created judo as a way to protect himself from being bullied. In my mind this conjured up the romantic notion of Kano as the poorly educated son of a poverty stricken farm labourer who through his efforts at Judo overcame the hardships of his humble beginnings. Subsequent research into the history of Judo and reading commentaries on Kano's philosophies and his life have shown me that first impressions are not always right – sometimes they are way off course.

This is why I think that all judoka should have some idea of the history of their sport. They should know how and why its physical techniques have evolved but also how Kano's philosophies were influenced by world history and how the story of Judo has continued to unfold.

The following snippets of Judo history are put forward as starting points for those who would like to investigate further for their own personal reasons.

(244 words)

Jiu-jitsu to Judo

- **In 1882**, at the age of 22, Jigaro Kano created Kodokan Judo².
- It is usually said that in seeking to establish a physical training program which could be taught in Japanese academic institutions Jigaro Kano developed Kodokan Judo out of ju-jitsu. Judo is often described as jiu-jitsu with the dangerous techniques removed and an ethos of respect, morality and service to others added.

- *The term Kodokan breaks down into Ko (lecture, study, method), Do (way or path), and Kan (hall or place). Thus it means "a place to study the way." Similarly Judo breaks down into ju (gentle) and do (way or path) or "the gentle way".*

¹ <http://www.kanosociety.org/Bulletins/bulletin8-part2.htm>

² <http://www.judoinfo.com/jhist4.htm>

- *The categorization of Kodokan Judo was completed about 1887. The Kodokan had three broad aims: physical education, contest proficiency and mental training. Its structure as a martial art was such that it could be practiced as a competitive sport. Blows, kicks, certain joint locks, and other techniques too dangerous for competition, were taught only to the higher ranks³.*
- The implication is that from the 1880's Japanese students could choose to learn either the new scientific judo or a more traditional jiu-jitsu.

Japanese Martial Arts to Western Amusement

- During the early decades of the twentieth century a number of Japanese left their homes in the Far East, to build new lives in the West. Some found they could use their traditional training in the Samurai martial arts to fund a new Western way of life. They became Music Hall entertainers. Diminutive Japanese fighters were booked to perform their 'tricks' for the amusement of theatre goers. They were able to demonstrate the superiority of Eastern style fighting 'tricks' over the traditional Western style of grappling.
- Within a few decades of watching the skills of these Japanese performers, Westerners - both men and women - wanted to learn how do these defensive 'tricks' for themselves. Japanese martial arts masters were able to give up the performing life and became teachers of Eastern self-defense styles.
- Unfortunately there were not enough Japanese masters to instruct everyone who wanted to learn. So some immigrants, in collaboration with English speaking students of judo and Western publishers, produced illustrated books from which students could teach themselves.
- Uyenshi⁴ suggested that those students who could not buy the Japanese style clothing shown in his books could wear *'a rough stout jacket and a pair of bathing draws'* to train in. Whilst in the absence of thick mats he suggested that *'a rough grass plot'* was a suitable surface for landing on!
- By 1914, before the outbreak of the Great War, Judo was being described as a sport that could be practised without its participants risking serious injury, it was considered to be a safe leisure activity.

³ www.judoinfo.com/jhist4.htm

⁴ Uyenshi, S.K. The Textbook Of Ju-Jitsu As Practised In Japan (London: Athletic publications, Ltd, 1905)

The Peaceful Inter-War Years

- After 1918, with the declaration of peace, people began to pick up the threads of their disrupted lives. Once again there was time to enjoy leisure activities.
- Some Japanese masters who had made London their home opened the doors to what has become judo's most famous dojo, The Budokwai⁵.
- In Japan in 1920, the Go Kyo No Waza, the technical base of Judo was revised and a core of 40 throws was established. Since then as judo as evolved there have been further revisions, but Judo has remained true to its origins.
- In 1933, Jigaro Kano visited London. He spoke of the Budokwai becoming the London Branch of the Kodokan. This did not happen, but British judo did make its first move towards helping judo become an international sport. The first international event involving a British team took part in Frankfurt. The Germans were beaten and it was argued that the main reason was because the British had the advantage of learning from trained Japanese teachers whereas the Germans had had to rely on learning their techniques from American jujitsu style books.

The Second World War

- By the start of the Second World War Judo was increasingly being practiced for exercise, for health. It was not taught with the expectation that its students would need or want to inflict serious damage to an opponent, and certainly not with the intent to kill. However some teachers had retained their knowledge of how judo techniques could be adapted to be used in close contact situations for deadly unarmed combat. During the Second World War these killing techniques were taught to those selected for commando and special services training. However Judoka never lost sight of the sporting side of judo. Many judoka who subsequently went on to make their mark in international sport judo learnt their art in prisoner of war camps, where judo was tolerated as a recreational activity.

Judo Officially Recognized As a Sport

- By the end of the 1940's as the world struggled once again towards peaceful coexistence, Judo again sort to emphasize its sporting nature, playing down its combat side.
- The British victories in inter-war international competitions had given British judoka an enthusiasm for global sporting success. Soon after Peace in Europe had been declared the British Judo Association was formed to unify British judo and to promote the supremacy of British judo through international competitions. From the beginning the committees set up to promote judo found it difficult to agree as to which rules and regulations needed to be imposed; they had to be reminded that they were there to promote the practice of judo not stifle it.

⁵ http://www.budokwai.co.uk/the_club/history

- The first post war internationals were fought against the French but over the next few years Budokwai officials were involved in discussions with other nations in their efforts to instigate civilized combat events in the form of international judo competitions.
- Initially only men were allowed to fight in competitions; women were deemed unfit for competitive judo on medical grounds. When Japan hosted the 1964 Olympics, men's Judo was given its first opportunity to reveal its sporting face to the watching world. Some Japanese masters feared that entry into the Olympics as a sport would mean the end of Judo as a skillful art.
- At the first Olympic Games male judoka were divided into just 3 fighting categories, including an open. As more judo competitions were held so more rules and regulations evolved. By the Seoul Olympics of 1988, the open weight category had been dropped; male judo was divided into 7 weight groups, but by now women⁶ were allowed to fight each other in public and judo for the visually impaired was also included in the Paralympics⁷.
- Alongside the acceptance of women into the competitive arena, increasing numbers of children have swelled the membership of clubs. In Judo's early years, it was thought much too dangerous to teach Judo techniques to 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, and regularly compete in their own age-matched or weight matched competitions.

Judo Today

- In many ways Kodokan Judo, as explained by Uyenshi, has changed very little since Kano revealed it in 1882. The techniques that are illustrated in early text books still form the basis of judo today. However, in other ways it has come a long way. The modifications Kano made to the Samurai martial art of ju-jitsu created a scientific form of exercise that could be built on and practiced safely by men, women and children across the modern world.

(1231 words)

⁶ <http://www.fsclub.com/history/judo-hist-e.shtml>

⁷ <http://www.accessibility.com.au/paralympics/judo>