

What's Randori?

The confusing thing about judo is that sometimes it requires total cooperation, but at other times each judoka has to look out for him or herself. Beginners are often left at a loss trying to work out when they should resist and when they should cooperate. Most decide that it is better to just resist, surely that is what judo is all about – not being thrown? Only with experience do judoka realise that the reason so much attention is given to perfecting break falls is that it is often a lot less painful to go with a throw rather than attempting to resist.

Whilst cooperation is needed when learning how to do techniques, at some point judoka have to learn how to make those techniques work against a partner who does not want to be thrown or held down. Unfortunately, whilst you are concentrating on getting it right, you can not help but leave yourself open; thereby giving your partner the opportunity to take advantage of your movements, and throwing you. That is what judo is about, being able to throw effortlessly, and that is why randori or free practise is essential to the practice of judo.

There are no winners or losers in randori because it is about practice. ‘The principle of Ju becomes paramount in the exercise of randori. Ju being the qualities of flexibility and adaptability to changing circumstances. Ju is not becoming fixated upon winning come what may, but finding an opening when uki offers it and effortlessly taking advantage of it. The only way to understand and learn this is to practice’ (Fehlhaber, 1996). If you are thrown you get up and try again. If you throw, it does not mean that you are better than your partner. It may only mean that on an occasion when your technique worked your partner, maybe, allowed you to complete your move so that next time he could counter it.

There are many different ways of using randori in your judo training. You may want to simply do *throw for throw*. You work with your partner, calmly taking it in turns to practise techniques of your choosing. Or at the other extreme you might both decide that will be no cooperation, no give or take. Each attack will be totally committed with no consideration or concern for your opponent. Mostly randori tends to lie somewhere between these two extremes.

Randori is about trying to achieve the perfect technique, *whilst* moving around the mat. Each partner learns how to take advantage of the other's weaknesses, taking advantage of any openings that he or she gives you - it would be rude to refuse. Feeling when your partner is off balance and making the most of it. Sometimes everything comes right and the technique just happens, other times because you are focused on what you want to achieve you leave yourself open to an attack and you hit the deck. That's life.

Randori should not just about be about tori's actions. Uki should take the opportunity to feel where her weaknesses lie, when and how she is vulnerable to being attacked and what to do about it. Randori is the time to make your mistakes, it provides the opportunity to learn and find elegant solutions. All too often *throw for throw* randori becomes merely a cooperative, passive, alternating practise of static techniques. Uki stands still submissively waiting for tori to have his turn. Instead uki, whilst waiting to be thrown, should be moving round the mat so that tori can feel when the time is

right to launch an attack. Unfortunately if uki is too adept at avoiding being thrown, he or she never gets a go so uki must learn to feel how much defensive judo is needed to make it difficult for tori to throw but not impossible.

Throw for throw randori allows judoka to practise turning in for straightforward techniques but it does not give an opportunity to practise counters and combinations. This calls for better role-playing. If students want to practise more complex movements then they can try leaving themselves open to a specific attack in the hope that their partner will attack as desired. However, at least to begin with, it is more effective to explain to your partner what you have in mind and to ask for their cooperation.

Students respond to randori practise in many ways. Students who are motivated, especially those who are working towards a big competition will take the opportunity *to get stuck in* striking fear into the hearts of those student who are only there for a bit of gentle exercise and a *good old natter*. Very young judoka can often seem a bit lost when told they are now free to put into practise what they have just been learning. For all students the mere announcement that they will now spend a few minutes doing randori, usually cause *randori amnesia*. All knowledge of any techniques other than ogoshi, ippon seoi-nage and their tokui-waza (favourite technique) immediately vanishes.

So rather than simply announcing its time for randori, a kindly sensei might find it is appreciated if he or she places restrictions on the way in which the randori is to be done. Sensei can compensate for the sudden amnesia by announcing which techniques are to be permitted and whether attacks should be totally committed using strength and technique or if only good technique is acceptable. Students can be told how long they have with each partner so they can know whether to conserve their energy and be a bit defensive or if they need to get on with it.

Other suggestions for varying randori practise;

Standing / Throwing Randori

Trading / throw for throw

Each person gets one attempt to throw then the other person gets one. A great way to warm up.

Side Limited

Only left sided techniques allowed - this will show who is working both sides of the body. Start slow with this one.

Role Limited

Nominate one person to do all the throwing, whilst the partner can avoid but **not** throw. Uke-tori randori

Or either partner can set her self up to be thrown. uke-uke.

Either partner can throw at any time – similar to shiai. Tori-tori.

Original Judo

Permit only perfect throws; ippon (one point) throws. Continue until one person gets a perfect throw. You need a judge to watch and score. Great way for new students to see what perfect is.

Ne Waza / Randori on the ground

Technique Limited

Allow only certain techniques, strangles, arm locks or hold downs, to help focus training.

Starting Position

One person starts on their back, in the turtle; in a pin or the straddle mount and both work techniques and escapes from a specific position.¹

ⁱ Suggestions for varying randori practise taken from an article by.
Fehlhaber, Ted. **Randori** in *The Kiai Echo* - Summer 1996
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