

## **Blackwater Judo Club Grading**

Every six months, a grading is held within the club to establish the technical ability and knowledge of judokas, as well as highlight areas of weakness within the syllabus for instructors to focus on upon completion of the grading process e.g. hani-goshi!! The grading experience should be a relaxed environment, whereby judokas feel able to perform to their personal best and be willing to be questioned and tested upon their judo knowledge and skill. I also feel the grading offers the opportunity for people to work together, supporting each other to achieve, being supportive and assisting one another by being a willing uki and developing a sense of being a team player.

Until a child reaches an orange belt + 3 tabs, their knowledge of judo is assessed within the club, usually by 2 senior judokas. The senior judokas work together to establish the child's ability to recognise the name of the technique, and execute the throw accordingly. The senior judokas will use their knowledge and judgement as to how far to progress using the grading criteria with individual junior judokas. The judgement is based on how well the children perform requested techniques and the knowledge expressed. The adult is able to judge each individual technique using a point scoring system, dependent on ability to carry out required actions to successfully execute a technique – namely, stepping in, breaking balance (kuzushi) and being committed to the technique. If these concepts as well as the correct technique are displayed full points – 7 are awarded, if two of these concepts are used - 5 points awarded, 1 concept gains 3 points and no concepts will receive 0 points.

The senior judokas are very positive and reassuring to the junior judoka and are supportive to the efforts made, during this testing time. Senior judokas are able to write comments on the grading criteria form, which can enrich and progress judoka's skill as well as be informative to Sensei, who will make the final decision as to the

grade given.

National gradings also take place, six monthly, whereby the assessment is made outside of the club environment, working with judokas from other clubs and participating in shiai to perform, both technical and fighting skill and be tested against other club judokas. National gradings have a different expectation from the judokas, as they are for higher grades to be assessed.

When being assessed, the differentiation of executing techniques must be recognised, as different instructors/Sensei's/clubs/associations, have their own understanding and interpretation of how a technique is to be carried out. As long as the foundations of the technique are the same, variation is still within the realm e.g. a hip throw still using the hip and able to explain the throw accordingly, the knowledge and performance should be graded appropriately.

Children under the age of 8 are given increased adult support and encouragement throughout the grading process. The names of the techniques are described both in English and Japanese terms; praise is given for any attempt made at the technique, even if committing to another technique than was asked – as to encourage the child to continue participating in judo, not discouraging their ability to try. It is the adult's responsibility to be supportive and reassuring, to show positive feedback and inform the child of the name of the technique executed, then model the originally requested technique allowing the judoka to try. At this young age, children's confidence to attempt judo should be encouraged and seen as a positive contribution to participating.

Above the age of 8 judoka's are expected to understand the Japanese term for a technique and commit to the action. If they are unsure, senior judokas use their judgement to scaffold knowledge, either by using the English term or encouragement given to try the technique they think it is. Judokas are expected to treat the grading respectfully and understand they are being assessed on their personal ability and understand the importance to perform to their personal best, both as uki and as tori. At club gradings, Sensei can award judokas with individual tabs or by obi (belt), dependent on the feedback at the grading and general observations at training sessions.

Seniors to be graded up to orange belt, are assessed within the club by Sensei solely. Above orange belt, seniors must go to national grading to display ability – both technical and shiai.

Judo is seen as circular; therefore the beginning and end of the obi sequence are both red. Children under the age of 8 are required to wear white belts only, with a maximum of 5 red tabs. Sensei can award a red obi if a young judoka has acquired 5 red tabs prior to their 8<sup>th</sup> birthday. Over the age of 8, novice judokas should wear a red belt, which will display their basic learning of techniques is still taking place, e.g. breakfalls – but usually, novices begin with a white belt and progress through a tab system. Once a judoka has acquired 3 tabs, the judoka has then progressed to the next obi. The tabs awarded are of the next colour belt to aspire to – e.g. yellow belt with 2 orange tabs emphasises the next belt to achieve is orange.

Under 16 year old judokas within the club environment and dojo are treated with the respect their obi deserves and are able to wear blue, brown and black obi's accordingly. When visiting other clubs or competing, outside of the club dojo, junior judokas must wear a green belt with tabs displaying their status e.g. blue belt will have green belt + blue tab, black belt will have green belt + black tab etc.

Senior judokas begin as a white (6<sup>th</sup> kyu) obi, then progress to yellow (5<sup>th</sup> kyu), orange (4<sup>th</sup> kyu), green (3<sup>rd</sup> kyu), blue (2<sup>nd</sup> kyu), brown (1<sup>st</sup> kyu), black (1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> dan), red + white (5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> dan), then as a 9<sup>th</sup> dan a red obi, same as the beginning.

Within every obi criteria, there is a varied knowledge base of areas of judo explored. The technique and skill is enhanced upon each obi syllabus, and require commitment to learning the technique as well as repetition to enforce the association between technique name and execution. As a judoka progresses within a belt status, the aspect of judo is broken down into more detail – e.g. airwork – shoulder throw, hip throw, foot sweep are to be assessed to progress to orange belt, allowing the judoka to experience and differentiate between types of throws that can be used within airwork.

As a judoka progresses, through the obi, their knowledge and responsibility within the

club are increased. Respect is always given to all judokas, but always a higher level of respect is shown to judokas wearing higher obi than yourself. When a higher graded judoka rei to other judoka, it is respectful that the lower grade always bows lower – courteous to the higher grade, showing willingness to listen and learn.

On rare occasions, a judoka can be awarded a higher grade whilst at a shiai competition, from Sensei that have observed fighting ability and feel the judoka is able to compete at a higher grade. This is a honour to the judoka to highlight their skill.

Blackwater Judo Club have devised a coaching assessment programme, which progresses in accordance to belt status and knowledge as well as written assessments and practical ability within the dojo. Whether you are a junior or senior judoka participating in the coaching programme, the initial criteria depends on your belt status – e.g. Junior Assistant Instructor must be age 14 and 3<sup>rd</sup> kyu + 3 blue tabs, advancing to Junior Instructor – must be 2 black tab grade. Adults can begin the coaching scheme once they have gained 3<sup>rd</sup> kyu, working towards Senior Club Instructor, and progressing both in grade and position towards Senior Club Coach – must be 1<sup>st</sup> Dan.

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