



The Kano Society Bulletin



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News

The *Kano Society* was saddened to learn of the passing of legendary *Budokwai judo* instructor, Kisaburo Watanabe who died recently at the age of 83.

An esteemed and much-loved teacher and friend, Watanabe-sensei arrived at The *Budokwai* in 1962. His portrait hangs in the main *dojo* and his legacy will never be forgotten. The *Kano Society* extends its sincerest condolences to Watanabe-sensei's widow, to his two daughters and to his many friends in *judo* and beyond.

Publisher's Comments

This issue of the *Bulletin* is a special homage to Kisaburo Watanabe.

The tributes to Watanabe-sensei were written by Brian N. Watson – a former *Renshuden*, *Budokwai* and Chuo University *judoka* as well as a *Kodokan kenshusei*. We are also pleased to include many historical photographs of Watanabe-sensei, from Brian's personal archive that he kindly shared with us. Thank you.

Llyr Jones prepared and edited this edition and also shared archive material.

Contributions

The backbone of the *Kano Society's* activities is this on-line publication. We welcome contributions articles or photographs etc. to "*The Bulletin*".

Thank you, Diana Birch

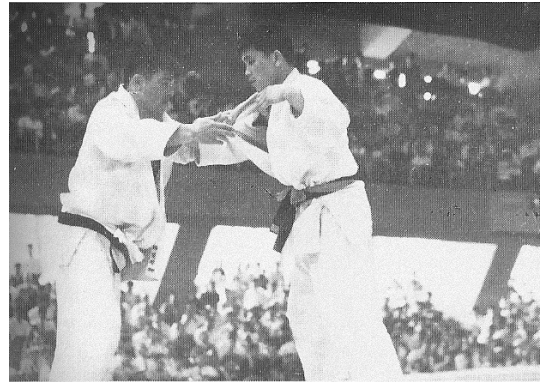
British *Judo's* Staunchest Friend – Kisaburo Watanabe (1936 - 2019) By Brian Watson



Sadly, British *judo* has lost its staunchest friend. Mr. Kisaburo Watanabe, aged 83, passed away on 25 September 2019. Born in Kamo City, Niigata Prefecture, on 29 January 1936, Watanabe started *judo* at high school when 16 years old – somewhat late by Japanese standards. Enrolling with the *Kodokan* on 16 April 1952 he made impressive progress, achieving *shodan* on 17 April 1952, 2nd *dan* on 9 April 1953, 3rd *dan* on 9 January 1955 and 4th *dan* on 5 July 1956. Watanabe entered the *kodansha* [high *dan*] ranks when he was promoted to 5th *dan* on 5 March 1959 and subsequently achieved 6th *dan* on 11 January 1970. His final promotion to 7th *dan* was awarded on 1 May 1977.

In his prime Watanabe stood some 175cm (5' 9") and weighed around 84 kg. Throughout his contest days there were no weight categories and all events were open weight. Despite his relatively small stature, Watanabe was as successful in student *judo* championships as his heavier rivals such as Akio Kaminaga (1936 - 1993) and Saburo Matsushita (born 1935). In 1959 Watanabe came third in the All Japan *Judo* Championship and won Gold at the 1958 Asian Games.

Watanabe was well known in the 1950s both as a stylist, and for his relentless, and at times, blistering attacking *judo*. He captained the Chuo University *judo* team and also the Japan national *judo* team that defeated the United States of America in an international tournament in 1957. Being Chuo's star performer, he had a marked inspiration on the University team's younger members. Three in particular went on to become prominent champions in their own right – namely Isao Okano, Hisashi Tsuzawa and Shinobu Sekine.



Kisaburo Watanabe participating in *shiai* in Japan (2)



1957 All Japan Students Championship

Left to Right: Saburo Matsushita 1st, Akio Kaminaga 2nd, Kisaburo Watanabe 3rd

Isao Okano, in the -80kg, category won Gold at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and again gained middleweight Gold at the 1965 World Championships. In both 1967 and 1969 Okano captured the All Japan *Judo* Championship. In addition, at the 1971 World *Judo* Championships, Hisashi Tsuzawa won the -70kg title. In 1972, middleweight Shinobu Sekine attained the All Japan *Judo* Championship and later that year won the -80kg gold medal at the 1972 Munich Olympics. Thanks to Watanabe and the feats of his juniors, the 1960-1970 decade proved to be the golden age for the Chuo University *Judo* Club.

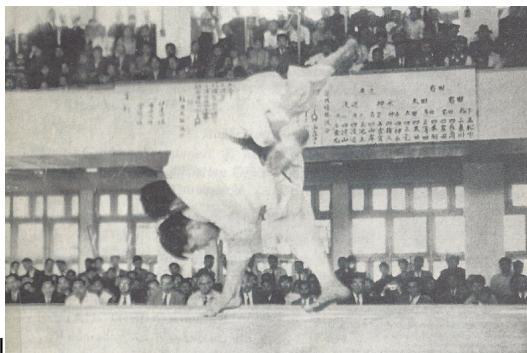


Kisaburo Watanabe throwing Gene LeBell with *Uchi-mata* in a Japan versus United States International match

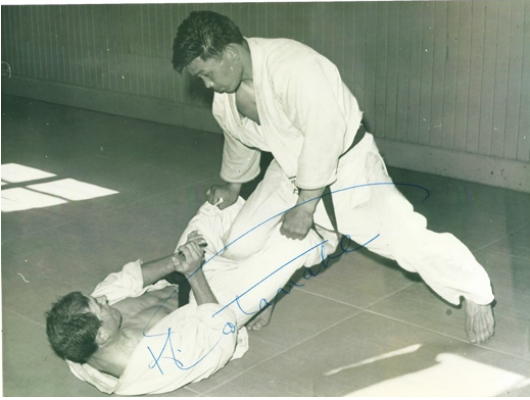


Kisaburo Watanabe and Trevor (TP) Leggett – early 1960s

Earlier, in 1961 Matsushita left the United Kingdom (UK) after a four-year stint of instruction and returned to Japan. Trevor Pryce (TP) Leggett (1914 - 2000) contacted George Whyman, who was then training at the *Kodokan*, and asked him to recommend a replacement. Whyman duly informed Leggett of the skills of Kisaburo Watanabe, then a 5th *dan*, and therefore, in 1962 Watanabe was invited to the UK. Watanabe stayed in the UK from June 1962 to 1967 where he taught principally at Leggett's *Renshuden Judo* Academy and at The *Budokwai*. He stayed at Leggett's house in Kensington, London, attended English language classes in the mornings, and gave *judo* instruction in the evenings. He also occasionally taught in mainland Europe.



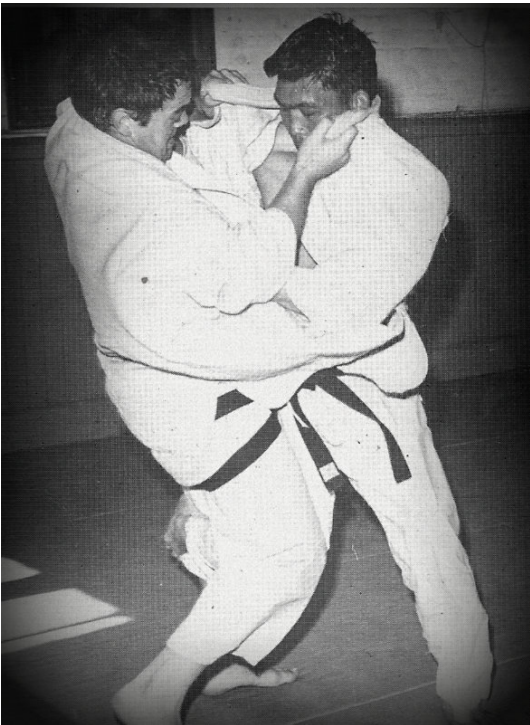
Kisaburo Watanabe participating in *shiai* in Japan (1)



Kisaburo Watanabe demonstrating how to get past defensive legs in *Newaza* at The *Budokwai*, 1966. Uke is Larry Ralph



Kisaburo Watanabe showing *Kata-guruma* from the *Nage-no-Kata* at The *Budokwai*



Kisaburo Watanabe enjoying *randori* with Toni Goffe at The *Budokwai*, April 1966. Photo by Cliff Nash



Kisaburo Watanabe throwing George Kerr in a performance of *Gonosen-no-Kata* at the Kelvin Hall, Glasgow, September 1963

While in the UK, Watanabe was appointed National *Judo* Coach for three years. Similar to his former days at Chuo, he influenced many young *judoka*, in particular Brian Jacks, David Starbrook and Angelo Parisi. I once said to Watanabe, "If you had remained in Japan, instead of going to the UK, you may have been included in Japan's *judo* team at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. Weren't you disappointed by giving up that opportunity?" His reply was, "Yes, I may have competed in the Olympics and may have won a medal. But I have never regretted accepting Mr Leggett's invitation. It was a great experience living in the UK, one I shall remember for the rest of my life".

Watanabe had an unusually wide repertoire of techniques [*waza*] and he often used a double-lapel grip to allow the attacking of both the left- and right-sides with *osoto-gari* [major outer reap], *seoi-nage* [back-carry throw] *uchi-mata* [inner thigh throw], *tai-otoshi* [body-drop] and *ashi-waza* [foot/leg techniques]. His versatility in performing techniques with power and control was rare to behold and, whether attacking or defending, his agility was cat-like. No matter the situation he always seemed able to maintain perfect balance.

I remember Watanabe taking a line-up of black belt *judoka* at the 1963 European *Judo* Championships in Geneva, Switzerland. The previous evening another Japanese had struggled embarrassingly during his line-up. It so happened that



Kisaburo Watanabe showing *Za-rei* and *Uki-otoshi* from the *Nage-no-Kata* at The *Budokwai*

the Japanese ambassador to Switzerland was in attendance when Watanabe stepped onto the mat to face his line-up. He did not disappoint. His performance was the best exhibition of pure technique that I ever witnessed. He held back and let each opponent attack him several times, then he unleashed just one devastating *ippon* on each of his opponents. What made his display so impressive, was that he threw each man with a different throw. As I recall, he never used the same technique twice. I was seated behind Anton Geesink (1934 - 2010). We both stood up at the end and with the many other knowledgeable spectators gave Watanabe a standing ovation. He had restored Japanese *judo*'s pride.

Watanabe became well-known in the UK since he had appeared several times on nationwide TV and had often travelled to provincial *dojo* to give instruction. After some five years in the UK, he returned to Japan in 1967. He joined the staff of the *Nippon Budokan* where he rose to head the Promotion Department. He sometimes asked me to assist by giving an English-language commentary for the benefit of the growing numbers of foreigners who attended a variety of *budo* events held at the *Budokan* in the 1970s and 1980s.

Watanabe was always caring and considerate to British *judoka* whenever they visited Japan on vacation or for training purposes. He and his wife would often greet, guide and entertain them. He was especially pleased in February 2018 to journey to London for what proved to be his final visit when he attended The *Budokwai* Centenary Banquet at the Rembrandt Hotel in Knightsbridge.



Kisaburo Watanabe with the author at the *Nippon Budokan*

In 1993, Watanabe travelled to London to attend the funeral of John Newman (1935 - 1993) and again in 2000 when he was present at Leggett's funeral. In his thirties, Watanabe took up golf and became a keen, accomplished exponent winning at least one amateur tournament that I recall. In 2001, at the age of 65, he retired from the *Budokan*.



Legendary *Budokwai* teacher Kisaburo Watanabe with *Budokwai* Chairman and Chief *Judo* Instructor Peter Blewett in front of Watanabe-sensei's portrait in the main *dojo*



Watched by BJA Vice-President, Brian Davies, *Budokwai* President Tony Sweeney, presents an Honorary Membership to Kisaburo Watanabe during the 2018 *Budokwai* Centenary Banquet



Kisaburo Watanabe arriving at the airport

He is survived by wife Reiko and two daughters, Kyoko and Satoko. It is with undying respect that he will be dearly missed by the international *judo* fraternity. Rest in peace - *Sensei*.

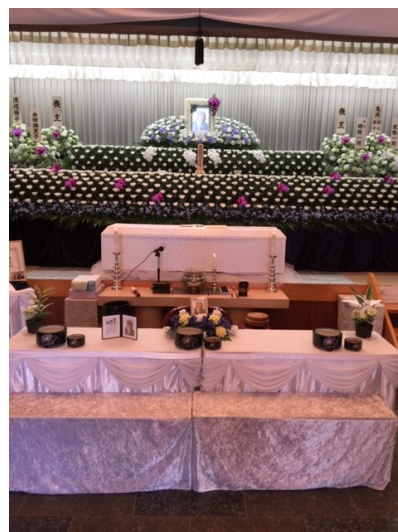
Kisaburo Watanabe's Funeral By Brian N. Watson

The funeral service for Kisaburo Watanabe, at which my wife and I attended, was held on Monday, 30 September 2019 at the *Hoseiji* Buddhist Temple in Akiruno City, Tokyo-to, Japan. There were some 40 mourners present, including family relations, *judo* friends and former *Nippon Budokan* colleagues.



Brian Watson attending Watanabe-sensei's funeral at the Hoseiji Buddhist Temple in Akiruno City

At the left side of the altar there was a small exhibition of photographs of Mr. Watanabe, newspaper and magazine cuttings, diplomas, certificates and a poster of a *Budokwai* Annual Display at the Royal Albert Hall in the 1960s. Behind the white coffin, there were many floral tributes on display, including one from The *Budokwai*.



Watanabe-sensei's funeral at the Hoseiji Temple



Watanabe-sensei's funeral ceremony at the Hoseiji Temple



Small exhibition of Watanabe-sensei's judo souvenirs

Several messages of sympathy were received and read out by widow Reiko. These included one from Tony Sweeney representing the British *Judo* Association (BJA) and one from Robin Otani representing the British *Judo* Council (BJC).

Kisaburo Watanabe's Arrival in the United Kingdom

As can be seen from the articles reproduced below, Kisaburo Watanabe's arrival to teach in the UK was enthusiastically reported upon in the *judo* press.



The Budokwai

In order that the Budokwai may keep ahead of developments in British judo the facilities and instruction have been increased. There will be special training on every day of the week by experienced 5th Dan judo teachers and separate grade classes for all members.

The ground floor dojo has been extended and now vinyl-covered tatami have been fitted in both dojos. Regular beginners, kyu grade and junior classes have been programmed so as to give maximum use of the two dressing and shower rooms.

Instruction at the Budokwai will be under the direct control of Charles Palmer (5th Dan), Chikashi Nakamishi (5th Dan) and Kisaburo Watanabe (5th Dan). Richard Bowen (6th Dan) will continue to be responsible for the junior section including new classes for the more advanced members.

A complete syllabus of training at the Budokwai will be published in the next issue of the *Judo Magazine*.

Full details of membership and information regarding Beginners' Courses will be sent on application. Address your enquiries to:

The Manager, The Budokwai, G.K. House, 4 Gilston Road, South Kensington, S.W.10.
Telephone: KENington 1540.

Advertisers Announcement

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Kisaburo Watanabe

5th DAN

Due to arrive shortly in this country is Kisaburo Watanabe (5th Dan). Five feet nine inches tall and weighing about 13 stones, Mr. Watanabe is one of the best stylists in Japan today, with a wide variety of waza.

He has been a prominent participant in many of the important championships in Japan since 1957, when he captained the team which won the Japan-United States match.

Whilst a student he was captain of the Chuo University team for four years, distinguishing himself in the Students' Championships and East-West contests.

His first big win came in Spring 1958, when he won the Asian Games championship, where other contestants included Matsushita, Kaminaga and Koga. He also features in the list of notables who have been Tokyo Champions.

When he arrives in this country Mr. Watanabe will instruct at the Budokwai and also two nights a week at the Remshuden. He will be joint instructor with John Newman (6th Dan), recently returned from Japan, on the Budokwai Summer Course. It is expected that Mr. Watanabe will also travel to other parts of the country to instruct on weekend courses for higher grades.

From the accounts received concerning Mr. Watanabe's style it is felt that British judo will benefit greatly from his stay in this country.

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Article in "Judo", Vol. VI, No.9, June 1962



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Kisaburo Watanabe

(5th dan)

Latest of a long line of distinguished Japanese instructors to teach in this country is the eminent stylist Kisaburo Watanabe (5th dan)

Since 1957, when he captained the team which won the Japan-United States match, a prominent participant in most of the important championships in Japan has been Kisaburo Watanabe. Now graded 5th dan, Mr. Watanabe is 26 years old, 5' 9" tall and weighs about 13 stones. He is considered one of the best stylists in Japan today, with a wide variety of waza.

He distinguished himself in the Student's Championships and East-West Contests and for four years was captain of Chuo University team. In the Spring of 1958, he won the Asian Games championship, against such formidable opposition as Matsushita, Kaminaga and Koga. Another of his noteworthy wins was the Tokyo Championship in 1959.

Mr. Watanabe has arrived in this country to stay for three years, instructing at the Budokwai, and also twice a week at the Remshuden. He will be joint instructor with John Newman, 6th dan, recently returned from Japan, on the Budokwai Summer Course. It is hoped that Mr. Watanabe will also instruct on week-end courses for higher grades in various parts of the country.

British judo should benefit greatly from the stay in this country of a stylist such as Kisaburo Watanabe.

Article in "Judo, the Quarterly Bulletin of The Budokwai", Issue No.70, July 1962

The Richard Bowen Collection



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In 1949, Richard Bowen began judo training in London at the Budokwai, of which he became Vice-President. He lived in Japan for four years to deepen his studies. A former British International, he fought in the first ever World Judo Championships in Japan in 1956. He was the author of more than eighty articles. Richard Bowen built up an extensive judo Library in the course of research for his articles and books, and he kindly donated it to the University of Bath Library. Items in the collection are for reference use only (not available for loan). Items can be viewed between 9am-5pm.