



## The Kano Society Bulletin



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### In This Edition

The primary article in this *Bulletin* is a 2009 interview with the great champion Isao Okano on *judo*'s development and evolution. It also features articles by Russian-born *judo* pioneer Dr. André Kolychkin, Jigoro Kano-*shihan*, and Italian *judo* scholar Alfredo Vismara. Collectively these pieces examine *judo*'s teaching methods and guiding principles.

### Editor's Comments

In these unpredictable times, may this Spring bring you renewed motivation, strength in body and mind, and continued success on and off the *tatami*. Let us keep supporting, learning from, and growing with one another – as players, teachers, and a united *judo* community.

I hope you enjoy this issue of our journal. Sincere thanks to John Bowen for his careful proofreading – any remaining errors are entirely my own.

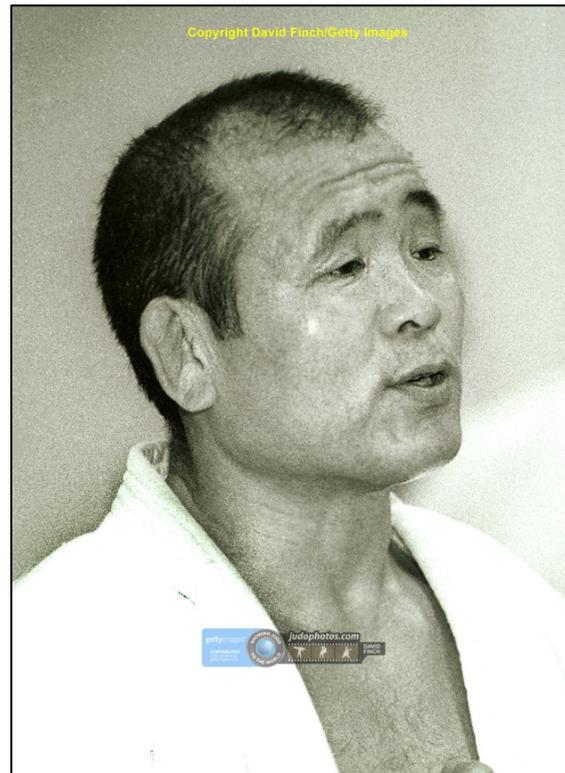
### Contributions

The Kano Society's main work is this online publication. We welcome contributions – articles, photos, or other relevant material – to “The *Bulletin*”.

Dr Llyr Jones

## Modern *Judo* as it is Practiced Today Will Not Produce True Masters – Interview with Isao Okano

Source: *Kindai Judo*, January 2009



1964 Tokyo Olympic champion, Isao Okano of Japan, at 49 years old, during the visit of Tokyo University to The Budokwai, London on 24 March 1993 (Photo by David Finch/Getty Images)

**Interviewer:** The world of *judo* seems to be drifting further from the principle of *ju yoku go wo seisu* – that strength can be overcome with flexibility.

**Okano:** That's correct. Soon, people may begin to feel that *judo* is no longer enjoyable and start calling for a return to traditional *judo*. But I question whether they would still have the drive to practice it the old-fashioned way. One problem with modern *judo* is that it has become “suit-style *judo*” rather than the looser, *kimono*-style practiced in Kano's era, when the sleeves allowed more freedom of movement. *Judo* should also return to an open-division format, where smaller and larger *judoka* competed against each other.

**Interviewer:** Jigoro Kano, who created the *kimono*-style *judogi*, designed it to support the diverse and dynamic techniques that characterised *judo* at the time.

**Okano:** Exactly. When wearing a *kimono*-style *keikogi*, you can adapt your gripping strategy to face opponents of varying sizes. In the earlier days of *jujutsu*, however, the *jujutsu-gi* was smaller and much more form-fitting.

**Interviewer:** Were the *keikogi* sleeveless?

**Okano:** That's correct. *Jujutsu*'s main purpose was to overpower and defeat an opponent through strength. *Judo*, on the other hand, is centred on the exchange of techniques. That difference explains why traditional *jujutsu* uniforms did not emphasise sleeves the way *judo* ones do. From the beginning, *judo* and *jujutsu* pursued different objectives. When *judo* was first introduced, the larger *keikogi* was accepted without question because the focus was on technical exchange rather than outright domination, as in *jujutsu*.

However, after weight divisions were introduced, *judo* uniforms gradually became smaller and more form-fitting. Over time, this led to what might be called a 'suit-style' approach – something more restrictive in nature. Recently, a *judogi* supplier told me that a competitor had asked for a *judogi* with shorter, tighter sleeves. The intention was clearly to make it harder for opponents to establish a grip. His concern was solely his own advantage and winning.

**Interviewer:** Has the All-Japan *Judo* Federation (AJJF) opposed this 'suit-style' version of *judo*?

**Okano:** They must clearly explain why this style of *keikogi* is inappropriate. Simply stating an opinion is not enough. They need to explain how it restricts the development and integrity of *judo* – and why, if things continue down this path, the art will ultimately cease to be true *judo*.

**Interviewer:** Is the idea of “*ju yoku go wo seisu*” becoming less relevant?

**Okano:** Yes. In *judo*, you have to grip your opponent to set up and exchange techniques. Nowadays, however, players often avoid being gripped altogether, and the situation is made worse by penalties for not attacking. This leads to incomplete timing, which frustrates players and makes matches less dynamic. Combinations become impossible, reducing attacks to a single technique. I genuinely feel sorry for competitive players today.

**Interviewer:** Under these conditions, is it correct that a lot of techniques will disappear?

**Okano:** Yes, that's correct. When I teach *judo* to beginners, I start with *o-goshi*, a technique where you control your opponent at the hip and throw both of their legs over. This approach covers leg movement, hip movement, and *hikite*. After that, we move on to *tsuri-komi-goshi*, then *uchi-mata*, and then *tai-otoshi*. This is very basic, step-by-step teaching.

Once students have mastered these, they often express interest in learning specific variations, like the *uchi-mata* of a prominent *judoka*. Being able to execute both right- and left-sided techniques represents a significant improvement. In my experience, this kind of structured progression isn't widely taught.

I believe that teaching this way allows students to explore far more techniques and even discover moves that don't yet have names. For example, I am the only one practicing my variation of *osoto-gaeshi*. If a technique isn't named or documented, it can easily be lost to future generations. That is

why I am creating a video – to preserve these techniques and make them accessible to others.

**Interviewer:** I see. You're saying a technique needs to be named to preserve it. You once said, “The time will come when *judo* needs to look back.” Let me ask you directly: In the future, will modern *judo* still be able to produce true masters of the art?

**Okano:** Absolutely not. It's not just that there won't be any true masters of *judo* – the real question is whether *judo* itself will even survive?

**Interviewer:** Will we ever see another *judo* master, or is the art of *judo* fading away?

**Okano:** Good *judo* is something that even a non-*judoka* can watch and appreciate for its beauty. Unfortunately, today's *judo* doesn't always reach that standard. For instance, when teaching techniques like *seoi-nage*, the typical *judogi* can make it difficult to turn your wrist because the *keikogi* is so tight. Japanese *judoka* tend to manage slightly better than foreigners, whose *keikogi* are often even tighter, but it's still a genuine challenge to execute the movement properly.

At the last championship held at the *Kodokan*, new rules were introduced regarding gripping, which made the matches easier to follow and more enjoyable to watch. I think this was a positive development.

**Interviewer:** The new rule also removed the use of *koka*?

**Okano:** That's correct. It is very difficult for referees to determine *koka* and *yuko*. Determining *waza-ari* and *ippon*, however, is much easier. Focusing only on *waza-ari* and *ippon* also extends the fighting time, and removing *koka* is actually a good decision according to *judo* rules. *Judo* rules should be simple enough for non-*judoka* to understand. Currently, some referees have to consult a rulebook in their pocket, which shouldn't be necessary. If the rules are too complicated, *judo* risks losing fans.

**Interviewer:** How do we get back to original *judo*?

**Okano:** In Japan, *judo* is declining – even new coaches like Mr. Shinohara and Mr. Sonoda won't be enough to reverse things. The whole system needs an overhaul. A 365-day training camp could be the solution.

For example, to transform the foundation, I've been practicing using the 'shoki-jiku style'. Right now, we have five or six training camps in a year – but that's not enough. Ideally, it should be 365.

(In *judo*, *shoki-jiku* [初起軸] most naturally translates to 'initial axis' or 'starting axis of rotation' – [*sho* 初 = initial / first; *ki* 起 = rise / initiate; *jiku* 軸 = axis]. For throwing techniques, this refers to the first axis of rotation created at the moment *kuzushi* [off-balancing] begins. It's the line or pivot point around which *Uke* starts to rotate when *Tori* initiates the throw.)

**Interviewer:** Is that a 365-day camp?

**Okano:** Good coaching and selecting *judo* players who stay in one place, live together, and train every day – essentially a year-round camp. If *judoka* commit this way, they can even compete at an additional weight class. After the Beijing Olympics, Satoshi Ishii left *judo* to become an MMA fighter. The remaining players, in my opinion, were quite weak. To be honest, they wouldn't have been able to keep winning at the world level. Most players belong to a company or are working – these companies aren't going to fund their *judo* development. As a result, they either participate only in the All-Japan camp or return to their old universities to train. Limited practice like this isn't enough to make them strong.

**Interviewer:** In what way exactly do you feel they are weak?

**Okano:** They lack both power in their technique and stamina. If someone tries to fight above their own weight class, how many *judoka* could actually manage that? Right now, everyone sticks to their own weight category. I'm not saying they must compete in the Open division, but in training, they should approach it with that mindset. Doing so will help them develop stamina and get power in their technique. If they maintained this approach, they could potentially fight up three weight classes and reach a level where they could compete at world level.

The concept is to create a 365-day training environment, similar to a *sumo-beya* [stable]. Ideally, there would be four or five clubs like this – training together, living together, and eating together. From this system, the strongest players could then be sent to compete at the World Championships.

I don't like the relaxed atmosphere in many *dojo* where they train in a very relaxed environment. To improve, you need tension and to practice over and over. Right now, it feels like it's 'good friends' *judo* practice. Each university has its own *judo* programme, but they rarely visit or challenge each other. The relationships between players and coaches aren't tense or demanding. People tend to practice what they enjoy rather than preparing for opponents who are stronger, bigger, or have an unusual style.

In Japan, one reason for *judo*'s declining competitiveness may be the rules or the *judogi*, but the biggest factor is this casual approach. I visit San Jose State University every summer and observe the Japanese students who visit there – most wear T-shirts under their *judogi*. American players rarely do this unless they're catching a cold. Wearing a T-shirt under the *judogi* is unnecessary. What is the purpose of *judo* if you aren't training seriously? Winter or summer training should have meaning. Most students bring a water bottle to the *dojo* and drink whenever they feel like it – there's no structured discipline. In contrast, France enforces stricter rules that are closer to *judo*'s original protocol. Regarding weight categories, they should return to the simpler divisions – light, middle, heavy, and open. The concept of an open division – where competitors of significantly different sizes can face one another - should remain a fundamental part of *judo*.

**Interviewer:** First, coaches need to change their mindset. In your (Okano's) era, the focus was on the open division, but today the situation has changed?

**Okano:** When we practiced *judo*, the main focus was the open division. Later, starting with the Tokyo Olympics, weight classes were introduced – light, middle, heavy, along with the open division. I believe they should return to that system of light, middle, heavy, and open categories. Today there are seven weight classes, so everybody only concentrates on their own division. No one thinks about the open division anymore. The reason for creating seven divisions was to help *judo* grow internationally by offering more medal opportunities to different countries. Now that *judo* has spread across the world, that goal has been achieved.

**Interviewer:** That's right.

**Okano:** *Judo* is now practiced all over the world, but unfortunately, the overall quality has declined. How can we restore it? At this point, reintroducing the light, middle, heavy, and open divisions seems like the best solution – it would naturally raise the level of competition.

If you can't compete against someone weighing 15kg more than you, that's not true *judo*. Back when I practiced, I won the middleweight division. As soon as I graduated university, I tried competing in the open division. One problem was that I was too light. If I didn't gain weight, they would place me back in the middleweight division – but I didn't want that.

So, before the tournament, I would eat so many rice balls, even in the middle of the night and early morning, and I avoided going to the bathroom until weigh-ins were over. Sometimes I even hid 2.5 kg dumbbells in my underwear before I weighed-in.

Even lightweights should be encouraged to move up a weight class if they want – it's all part of building real *judo* strength and skill.

**Interviewer:** Is that correct? You really wanted to move up to the open division?

**Okano:** Even now, there's always a smaller competitor who wants to challenge a bigger one, so a smaller person should have the option to move up a division. If they wanted, they could easily adjust the rulebook to allow it. That way, the idea of a proper open division could return.

**Interviewer:** That makes sense. It's not a difficult thing to do. If that isn't done, the concept of '*ju yoku go wo seisu*' is not going to develop. To bring back the original spirit of *judo*, it is going to be crucial to focus on *judo* education and also to teach children how to instruct other children. The key question is: how do you teach children effectively?

**Okano:** Right now, there are simply too many *judo* tournaments. When there are too many, the range of techniques used becomes limited. Players want to win, so they tend to rely on techniques that have worked for them before. That

is not good for *judo*. Tournaments should be held only twice a year. My core belief is to focus on practicing good *judo*.

**Interviewer:** Good *judo*?

**Okano:** Good *judo* begins with strong standing technique. There are five important points to achieve this:

1. Maintain good posture.
2. As a beginner, learn how to properly use *tsurite* [lifting hand – wrist and elbow control]. This is essential.
3. Develop good movement skills, including *ashi-waza* [foot/leg techniques].
4. Discover and refine your best technique.
5. Practice good *ukemi* [breakfalls]. Doing a lot of *ukemi* carries deep meaning.

**Interviewer:** Good *ukemi*?

**Okano:** You will improve if you do more and more *ukemi*. There are no shortcuts. When you practice *ukemi* repeatedly, your body becomes relaxed and adaptable. If someone avoids *ukemi*, their movement stays stiff and inflexible. The purpose of taking a lot of *ukemi* is to remove the fear of being thrown so you can immediately attack again. If you keep training this way, the quality of your *judo* will steadily improve. That is why it is so important to teach children how valuable *ukemi* really is.

When I was young, I spent my first three months practicing only *ukemi*. I understand that if you ask children today to train like that, they may not find it “fun” and might quit. That’s why, even while emphasising *ukemi*, you should also include some *ne-waza* to keep them engaged. Instead of holding a tournament, you could organize a *ukemi* exhibition where the most skilled students demonstrate, allowing others to see what excellent *ukemi* looks like.

**Interviewer:** If you keep doing good *judo*, its future will become brighter. You mentioned that *judoka* need their own special technique.

**Okano:** Nowadays, there are very few people, even among coaches, who have a truly unique technique of their own. A player with their own special technique is exciting to watch because you’re always wondering when they will use it. Unfortunately, there are fewer and fewer players like that today, which is very disappointing.

Very few people, including coaches, are skilled in *newaza*. Recently, Brazilian *Jiu-Jitsu* (BJJ) has become very popular in the United States. When I first saw it, I wondered what exactly it was, because much of what they were doing looked like *judo newaza*. In many ways, BJJ developed from *judo*, while also incorporating techniques from *sambo*, such as knee locks and leg locks. At one time, the technical level was lower than *judo newaza*, but because they focus almost exclusively on ground techniques, they have steadily improved. Even starting from imitation, consistent practice builds skill and confidence.

I have a friend who runs a *dojo* in Brazil. Some Japanese *judoka* went to train there, and my friend told me, “My *dojo* is not even high-level *jiu-jitsu*, but my students defeated the Japanese *judoka* easily”. I was very surprised to hear how weak the Japanese *judoka* were in *newaza*. I believe this is because coaches in Japan do not emphasise teaching *newaza* enough. In the United States, *judoka* often say that if you want to defeat Japanese *judoka*, you should take the match to *newaza*.

**Interviewer:** I see. So, they should start working on their *newaza* as soon as possible. What’s the best way to train if they want to become strong?

**Okano:** If Japan wants to build strong *newaza*, why not hold an All-Japan *Newaza* tournament? Without that kind of focus, Japan’s *newaza* will get weaker and weaker. A player who lacks confidence in *newaza* will always have fewer chances to win. For example, during gripping exchanges, if an opponent puts their knee on the mat, the player with good *newaza* will always have an advantage.

With the current *judogi* and rule situations, it has become difficult to establish grips effectively for *tachiwaza*. Most people can become very competent in *newaza* within about two years. However, if you begin with *newaza* before developing *tachiwaza*, your standing techniques will not become strong, and you will lack confidence in them. That is why it is important to first build some confidence in *tachiwaza* before focusing seriously on *newaza*.

Some people suggest that one way to develop better *newaza* is to structure matches, so they begin with *tachiwaza*, and even if someone scores a throw, it does not count until *newaza* starts. I think this is a good idea to help develop stronger *newaza*.

As for Satoshi Ishii, he moved into *kakutogi* (similar to MMA) in Japan. If he had not done this and continued to apply himself, he might have reached an even higher level in *judo*.

**Interviewer:** That’s interesting. I believe strengthening *newaza* is very important. Before the Beijing Olympics, Ishii *judoka* visited you. Did you give him any advice about *newaza*?

**Okano:** No, I didn’t give him any advice – especially since it was right before the Olympics. If I had advised him on his technique, it might have confused him, so I avoided discussing any technical matters.

**Interviewer:** I see. What do you think of Mr. Ishii’s *judo*?

**Okano:** His *judo* is getting stronger. Even though he has already become a champion, his *judo* isn’t yet complete. His *judo* is ‘only attack’, which makes it easy for opponents to study and anticipate his moves. Eventually, he might hit a wall. The next step is to let opponents attack him and develop counters. If he does this, his *judo* will become complete.

**Interviewer:** I see. But Mr. Ishii has moved to MMA in Japan, hasn't he?

**Okano:** That's correct. He decided to make the switch to MMA quickly.

**Interviewer:** If Mr. Ishii loses after moving to MMA, would that be a shame for Japanese *judo*?

**Okano:** I don't think so. This was his personal decision, and he's not competing as a representative of Japanese *judo*. Personally, I just hope he doesn't wear a *judogi* in the ring. In the past, some fighters have done that, and every time I've seen it, I haven't liked it. To be clear, I'm not criticising Mr. Ishii for moving to MMA – I just don't want him wearing a *judogi*.

**Interviewer:** Is the *judogi* considered a pure garment for a *judoka*?

**Okano:** Yes, exactly. The *judogi* is designed and made for practicing *judo*. If someone wants to do some sort of MMA, they should wear shorts – not a *judogi*, which represents traditional Japanese *judo*. Why doesn't the judo federation make a rule about this? If they did, martial artists would understand it clearly.

**Interviewer:** By the way, Okano-sensei, you are currently teaching at Ryutsu Keizai University. I hope it's not too forward, but have you thought about what you'd like to do after retirement?

**Okano:** I've been thinking about a lot of possibilities. Maybe opening a dojo, or maybe going abroad to help promote *judo*, but I haven't made a final decision yet.

**Interviewer:** As a final thing – do you have any other thoughts you'd like to share?

**Okano:** I've often mentioned that world *judo* sometimes hits a wall. When people think about *judo* today, I want them to have something to turn to – a book, a film, or technical resources that deepen their understanding. I see it as my duty to leave this behind. Without such a resource, *judo* risks losing its connection to its roots.

**Interviewer:** This interview is difficult for any coach or *judo* player to hear. If it bothers the reader, it's likely because they love *judo* and it disturbs them. I really hope, however, that it reaches those who truly love *judo*.

Here, the Essence is the ocean, and the Function is the waves. There can be many different waves, but they are all, ultimately, manifestations of the same ocean.

## Biography

Isao Okano (born 22 January 1944 in Ryugasaki, Ibaraki prefecture, Japan) won middleweight (–80 kg) gold at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and the 1965 World Championships in Rio de Janeiro. He also won the (open weight) All-Japan Judo Championships in 1967 and 1969. Known for his speed and technical precision, he retired from competitive *judo* at 25. He later served as head coach of the Japanese national team and earned widespread respect as an instructor and author on *judo* techniques.



1964 Olympic champion Isao Okano and Kodokan chief instructor Toshiro Daigo coaching the Japanese team at the Lausanne Judo World Championships held on 22-24 June 1973  
(Photo by David Finch/Getty Images)



1964 Tokyo Olympic champion Isao Okano of Japan demonstrates a technique during the visit of Tokyo University to The Budokwai, London on 24 March 1993  
(Photo by David Finch/Getty Images)

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## The New Didactics of *Judo* – a Teaching Method of André Kolychkine: *Kata* from Early Stages

André Kolychkine



Dr. André Kolychkine (1913–1997) 8<sup>th</sup> dan

### Introduction

For decades, many *judo* schools have treated *kata* as an ‘advanced chapter’ of *judo* - something introduced only after the students have learnt a wide range of techniques, or for when they approach higher grades. For example, when preparing for a *shodan* [1<sup>st</sup> dan] exam, students are usually expected to demonstrate proficiency in *Nage-no-Kata*.

In contrast, the teaching method proposed by André Kolychkine advocates introducing *kata* much earlier, at the intermediate *kyu*-grade level. The aim is for students to become familiar with the structure, rhythm, and purpose of *kata* from the start of their *judo* journey. By progressively building on learned techniques, they can approach *kata* with greater confidence and understanding, rather than seeing it as an entirely new challenge.

### *Kata* Not as an End Goal, but as a Training Tool

Under this approach, *kata* is no longer regarded as a ‘memory test’ or a demonstration requirement reserved when seeking promotion to higher grades. Instead, *kata* is recognised for what it truly is - a structured training method that enables *judoka* to:

- Understand *judo*'s fundamental principles - *kuzushi*, *tsukuri*, *kake* and distance, timing, direction.
- Improve their understanding and execution of *judo*'s basic elements (posture, grip, unbalancing, movement, falls).

- Further refine their technical finesse beyond what can be achieved through *randori* alone.
- Develop discipline, attention, and presence.
- Connect *judo* with its educational and cultural dimensions, not just its sports-competition aspect.

### Early Familiarity: Learning the ‘Language’ of *Kata* from the Outset

The basis of the reasoning is simple – nobody learns a language by starting with advanced literature. It is learned with basic vocabulary, simple structures, and intelligent repetition. In the same way, Kolychkine’s teaching method proposes that students learn the ‘language of *kata*’ from the early stages of their training – learning to walk, bow, enter, control, coordinate, and execute with intent – using techniques they have already studied.

This approach achieves something essential – naturalness. *Kata* no longer feels strange or intimidating – instead, it becomes a familiar and integral part of the student’s development.

### *Kata* by Level: Aligning Practice with the Student’s Current Stage of Learning

The innovative element of this approach is not merely introducing *kata* earlier but designing *kata* appropriate for each stage of learning. Starting from the intermediate *kyu* grades, students practice *kata* specifically adapted to the techniques they are already studying, rather than performing full formal sequences that may include techniques not yet studied or movements beyond their technical maturity.

At each stage, *kata* is designed to:

- Utilise techniques from the current syllabus, including basic combinations and throws already learnt.
- Reinforce principles relevant to that stage of learning, such as balance, grip control, and proper entries.
- Preserve a formal *kata* structure (order, etiquette, and intentionality) while keeping the content accessible.

The result is a logical, progressive learning cycle. The student studies a technique in its basic form, applies it in guided practice, tests it in *randori*, and finally refines and understands it through a level-appropriate *kata*.

### Technical and Pedagogical Benefits

Introducing early *kata* training with level-appropriate *kata* brings clear advantages:

- **Enhanced Technical Precision:** Students learn to perform techniques with proper form, control, and accuracy, rather than simply executing them.
- **Deeper Understanding of *Judo*:** They recognise that *judo* extends beyond contest - it is a method, a principle, and an educational system.
- **Link Between *Kihon* and *Randori*:** *Kata* serves as a bridge, connecting structured ‘classroom’ practice with practical, real-world applications.

- **Increased Safety and Reduced Injuries:** Practicing with control and structure improves the student's posture, movement, and coordination – minimising the risk of injury.
- **Dojo Culture and Identity Formation:** Early *kata* practice integrates it into the *judoka*'s identity, making it a core part of their development rather than a later obligation.

### Honouring Tradition, Embracing Progress: Preserving the essence, refining the approach

This teaching method is not meant to replace the traditional *Kodokan kata* or diminish their historical significance. Instead, it aims to prepare students more effectively, giving them a strong foundation and a deeper understanding of the reasons behind each *kata*.

By practicing progressive *kata* from the intermediate *kyu*-grade levels, *judoka* encounter the classical *kata* later on as a natural continuation of their learning. Rather than feeling like they are stepping into an unfamiliar world, they experience steady progression along a path they already know.

### Conclusion

Kolychkin's innovative teaching method presents a pedagogically sound approach. *Kata* should accompany students from the early stages, not as an incumbrance, but as a guiding tool. By introducing *kata* in progressive stages – built upon techniques already practiced – *kata* can fulfil its true purpose – shaping *judoka* who are more complete, precise, aware, and disciplined.

At its core, this approach is a return to the original spirit of *judo* as an educational system – learning more effectively, training more skilfully, and passing on knowledge with greater clarity.

### Biography

Dr. André Kolychkin (1913–1997) 8<sup>th</sup> *dan*, born in Petrograd (now Saint Petersburg), Russia, was a pioneering *judoka*, coach, and pedagogue widely known as the 'Father of Cuban *Judo*'. He introduced and developed *judo* in Cuba, founding both the Cuban *Judo* Federation and the Pan-American *Judo* Confederation.

The holder of a doctoral degree, he developed an innovative and comprehensive approach to *judo* instruction – leaving a significant legacy through his 'New Didactics of *Judo*' and integral training philosophy. His influence endures today through organisations such as the A. Kolychkin *Judo* Foundation, which is dedicated to preserving and promoting his teachings.

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### Extract from 'Judo and Competitive Disciplines', Sakko magazine November 1929 Jigoro Kano



Jigoro Kano

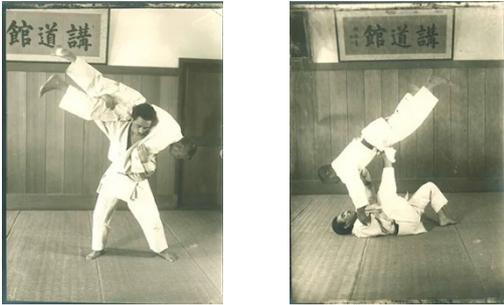
As competitive sports have become more popular in recent years, people often wonder about the relationship between competitive sports and *judo*. Questions can be asked in different ways, but to the extreme, some people reject competitive athletics, and while Japan has a variety of martial arts that are excellent for mental and physical education, why do foreigners agonise so much and get excited about competitive sports imported from Japan?

By practicing martial arts unique to Japan, you can naturally cultivate your Japanese spirit and cultivate other moral qualities, but if you indulge in foreign competitions, you will naturally become a stranger to your own soul. Others have preached on the benefits of competitive sports, saying that *judo* should follow the example of competitive sports and become popular, and that its training methods and competitions should all be similar to competitive sports today. None of this is a valid idea. I think it is extremely necessary to clarify what is the relationship between these two elements.

First of all, *judo*, as I often expound, is a great universal path. It is divided into different categories according to the type of application, such as martial arts, physical education, intellectual and moral education, and methods for real life. However, competitive exercise is a type of exercise in which people compete for success, but it is a system in which they naturally train their bodies and cultivate their minds while doing so. It is undeniable that competitive exercise, provided the method is used correctly, is very effective in training the mind and body. However, if the purpose of competitive exercise is simple and narrow, the purpose of *judo* is complex and extensive. In other words, competitive exercise only attempts to accomplish one part of the goal of *judo*. Of course, it is possible and acceptable to treat *judo* competitively but simply doing so will not allow the original goal of *judo* to be achieved. Therefore, while recognising that treating *judo* as a competitive sport meets the demands of today's time, we must never forget where *judo*'s true essence lies.

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## Nage-no-kata – Beyond Techniques



Nage-no-kata

### A Lesson on the Principles of Throwing

In Japanese, *nage* 投 means 'to throw', and *kata* 形 signifies a 'form', 'model' or 'ideal pattern'. Therefore, *Nage-no-kata* 投の形 literally translates as 'Forms of Throwing', yet its meaning goes far beyond a simple set of techniques.

*Nage-no-kata* is not about memorising throws, it is an exploration of the principles that make them effective – *kuzushi* [breaking balance], *tsukuri* [proper positioning], and *kake* [execution]. Every movement in the *kata* exists to teach why a throw works, not just how to perform it.

### A Study of Balance, not Strength

One of the central teachings of *Nage-no-kata* is that a throw succeeds because Uke's balance is taken at the right moment, not because of force. This reflects the core principle established by Jigoro Kano – *Seiryoku Zen'yo* [Maximum efficiency with minimum effort].

### A Comprehensive Guide to Throwing Principles

The *kata* is divided into five groups, each expressing a different throwing concept:

1. *Te-waza* – hand control and timing
2. *Koshi-waza* – using the hips as a central axis
3. *Ashi-waza* – movement, rhythm, and foot control
4. *Ma-sutemi-waza* – rear sacrifice for space control
5. *Yoko-sutemi-waza* – timed side sacrifice

Collectively, they form a systematic study of human movement and balance.

### A Dialogue Between *Tori* and *Uke*

*Nage-no-kata* teaches that throwing is not a solo act, but a conversation. *Uke* attacks sincerely, *Tori* responds with precision and calm, with mutual respect being constant. This embodies *Jita Kyoei* [mutual welfare and benefit].

### A Bridge between Tradition and Randori

The real purpose of *Nage-no-kata* is to preserve classical principles, refine posture, distance, and timing, and improve effectiveness in free practice [randori]. *Judoka* who truly understand *Nage-no-kata* throw better, move better, and waste less energy.

In essence *Nage-no-kata* is the philosophy of throwing made visible. It teaches that technique is born from balance, power is secondary to timing, and that *judo* requires cooperation in pursuit of mastery.

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## Shin-Gi-Tai

心 技 体  
Shin Gi Tai

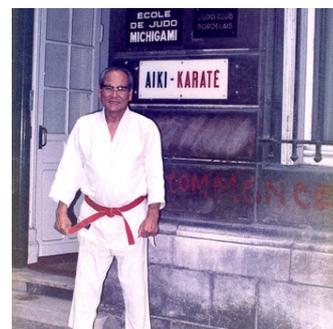
The term *Shin-Gi-Tai* is a foundational concept in the Japanese martial arts. It literally translates as:

- *Shin* 心 – Mind / Spirit
- *Gi* 技 – Technique / Skill
- *Tai* 体 – Body / Physicality

The expression was coined in the 1940s by Japanese *judoka* and *judo* master Haku Michigami (1912-2002) 9<sup>th</sup> dan.

[...] *The foreigners he associated with often asked him, "What is Judo?" When he replied that it was the combination of suppleness and strength, it was (Ju yoku go wo seisuru) difficult to grasp, so he used the word shingitai. No one had used this term before Haku Michigami. It's a word that was born thanks to him.*

*Nowadays, everyone in Japan knows this term, and it's often used in the sports world. [...]*



Haku Michigami 9<sup>th</sup> dan

### Source

*Mononofu*, the monologues of Yuho Michigami. 16 May 2014.

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## The Judo One Ultimately Embodies

Alfredo Vismara



Alfredo Vismara

In *judo*, there are visible elements — technique, posture, and timing. These may be taught, corrected, and refined through diligent practice. Yet beyond these tangible aspects lies another dimension, one that is not explicitly taught but quietly embodied by the teacher.

It may be perceived in the composed balance of a well-executed *randori*, in a posture that remains unwavering, and in a composure that endures even under pressure.

This dimension cannot be conveyed solely through explanation — it must mature gradually within the practitioner. When pursued with sincerity, *judo* is not merely an accumulation of techniques, but a disciplined path that shapes the character of the individual who undertakes it.

At first, the student seeks to understand how to perform. With time, the desire to succeed becomes paramount. Eventually, a deeper awareness emerges — an understanding of who one is becoming through sustained practice.

*Judo* offers no assurances of victory. Rather, it cultivates steadiness amid changing circumstances, suppleness in moments of force, and an awareness that every action reflects one's inner state.

On the *tatami*, one encounters more than physical technique; one encounters oneself, revealed through engagement with another.

There are principles a teacher may demonstrate. Yet there remains an aspect that each practitioner must realise independently, through quiet persistence over time.

As the body is disciplined, the mind attains clarity. With clarity, actions become authentic, and their influence extends beyond the dojo into daily life.

*Judo* is not a destination to be reached. It is a lifelong process of becoming.

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## Points to Ponder

Brian Watson

*“Food for Thought*

*Philanthropy: Devoting one's life to charitable endeavours, focussing on global health and education, reflects the pursuit of an ultimate good by impacting humanity positively.”*

*“Win without arrogance, lose with grace.”*

*“Wisdom isn't just knowing the right path, It's knowing which path NOT to take.*

*Sometimes, wisdom lies in restraint – in sensing the subtle warnings and choosing not to follow a tempting path can be the bravest act of all.”*

*“Learn from your experiences, especially the bad ones.”*

*“If man protects the planet, the planet will protect man.”*

*“Professor Jigoro Kano passed away on 4 May 1938, while at sea aboard the Hikawa Maru. His legacy, like ripples from a stone dropped in water, continues to shape the world of martial arts and education.”*

*“The perfection of oneself is ultimately the best use of one's energies.”*

*“Trevor P. Leggett, polymath (1914-2000) saw judo as training for life, as much about character development as about combat on the mat.”*

*“What is desirable in life?*

*Mens sana in corpore sano.*

*‘A healthy mind in a healthy body.’*

*It's fascinating how often throughout history movements or philosophies in martial arts have echoed this timeless Latin truth, combining mental discipline with physical well-being to help inspire transformative social change.”*

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## Renjuku Academy

The Kano Society is pleased to endorse the *Judo* Black Belt Association’s “*Renjuku Academy*” as an outstanding *judo* education programme. Its comprehensive 12-month home-study curriculum delivers a rigorous and immersive experience, with a focus on five fundamental domains of *judo* leadership:



1. Biomechanics of *Judo*
2. *Judo* as Physical Education
3. *Kata*
4. *Judo* History and Philosophy
5. *Judo* Terminology



The demanding programme concludes with the submission of a formal dissertation on any aspect of *judo*.

<http://www.judoblackbelt.com>

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## Judo Collections



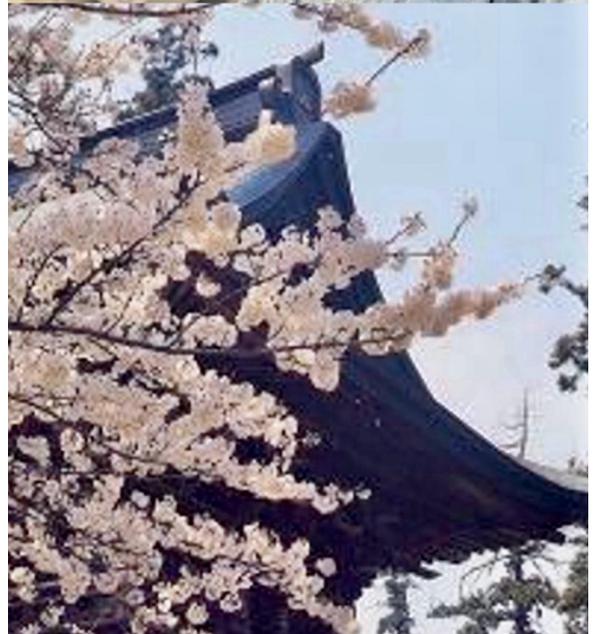
The “Bowen Collection” at the University of Bath Library houses an extensive archive on *judo*, compiled by *judoka* and scholar Richard Bowen during the course of his research for numerous books and publications.

Complementing this is the personal book collection of Syd Hoare, which features many rare and valuable *judo* texts – some in Japanese – gifted to him by Trevor Leggett. In addition to the books, the collection includes a bound volume of Syd Hoare’s educational articles and lectures.

Also held at the University is the “Woodard (*Judo*) Collection,” a valuable archive focused on the history of women’s *judo*, assembled by Marion and Graham Woodard.

Together, these collections form a rich resource for current and future *judo* researchers. They are available for reference use only (not for loan) and can be viewed between 09:00 and 1700 hrs.

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