



The Kano Society Bulletin



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Contents

- Remembering and Honouring Michael Leigh (1933-2026), by Stephanie Leigh
- Obituary – Michael Leigh, by British Judo Association
- Michael Leigh – A 9th Dan at 90, by Jo Crowley
- The IJF Mourns the Passing of Michael Leigh, 9th Dan, by Jo Crowley
- Forty-Four Years With One Coach – A Personal Reflection, by Martin Rivers
- Michael Leigh – Promotion History
- Michael Leigh – Photo Gallery
- Renjuku Academy
- Judo Collections

In This Edition

This special issue of the *Bulletin* pays tribute to Michael (Mick) Leigh, a British *judoka*, coach, referee, and administrator whose contribution to *judo* spanned more than 70 years. It includes tributes from his eldest daughter, Stephanie Leigh, the British Judo Association (BJA), Jo Crowley, and longtime student Martin Rivers.

These contributions highlight Leigh's leadership in developing British *judo* initiatives, including *kata*, veterans, youth, self-defence, and inclusion programmes, alongside a promotion history and photographic retrospective marking his legacy.

Editor's Comments

The Society is saddened by the passing of Mick Leigh, 9th Dan, aged 93 – President of the Southern Area and Vice President of the BJA. His dedication and contribution to *judo* will be remembered with great respect and gratitude.

Thanks to John Bowen for proofreading. Any remaining errors are mine.

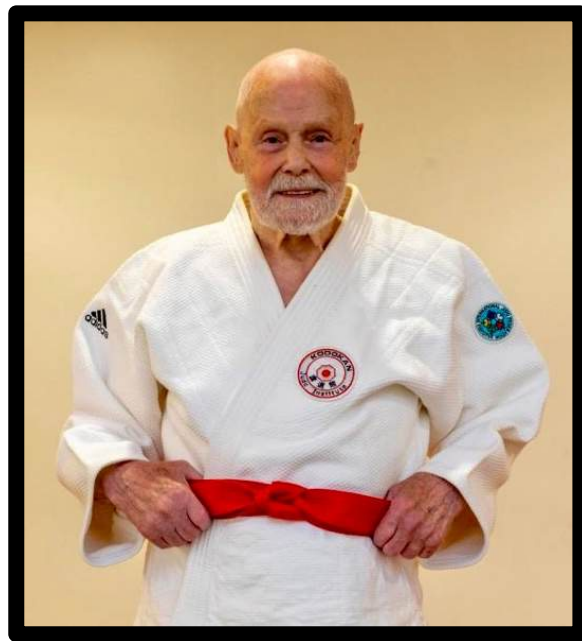
Contributions

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

Remembering and Honouring Michael Leigh (1933 – 2026)

By Stephanie Leigh



Michael (Mick) Leigh began his *judo* journey in 1955 at the London Judo Society (LJS) before later joining the Renshuden. Throughout his distinguished sporting career, he represented both England and Great Britain (GBR) in *judo* and in three styles of wrestling and was selected as a reserve for the GBR team at the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games.

In 1965, Mick moved to Sussex, where he founded several highly successful *judo* clubs and became a founding member of both the Southern Area and Sussex County organisations. His dedication to the sport was reflected in his service to the British Judo Association (BJA), where he served two terms as Chairman. He was also an International Judo Federation (IJF) B Referee, an Honorary National Coach, a Senior Examiner, and contributed to the European Judo Union's Olympic Solidarity Coaching Programme.

Mick was renowned for his innovation and vision within British *judo*. He was instrumental in establishing the *Kata* Working Party (now the *Kata* Commission), the National Veterans Championships (now the Masters Championships), the Self-Defence System, the Kai System for under-8s (Kano Club), and the Special Needs Working Party, which has since evolved into the Inclusion Commission.

In recognition of his exceptional contribution to *judo*, Mick was promoted to the grade of 9th Dan by the IJF in 2023. At the time of his passing in June 2026, aged 93, he continued to serve the sport he loved as a BJA Vice President and President of the Southern Area.

Mick Leigh's lifelong commitment, leadership, and pioneering work have left an enduring legacy that will continue to benefit generations of *judoka*. He will be remembered with great respect, gratitude, and affection.

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Obituary – Michael Leigh

British Judo Association

A version of this tribute was first published on the website of the British Judo Association – dated 02 July 2026



Mick devoted seventy years of his life to *Judo* and was still Vice President of the BJA, President of the Southern Area and President of Brighton *Judo* Club and Kin Ryu *Judo* Club, the Sussex clubs he founded sixty and fifty years ago respectively.

Mick was presented with his 9th *dan* in 2023, one of only 13 British recipients of the grade. He started *Judo* in 1955 at the London *Judo* Society (LJS). He later joined the *Renshuden* and then moved to Sussex in 1965 where he founded several successful clubs and was a founder member of Sussex County and the Southern Area. He represented England and GB in *judo* and three styles of wrestling and was a reserve for the GB Team for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.

He served two terms as BJA Chairman and was an IJF (B) referee, honorary national coach, senior examiner and worked for the European *Judo* Union (EJU) on their Olympic Solidarity Coaching programme. He was incredibly innovative, responsible for setting up the Kata Working Party (now Kata Commission), the National Veterans Championships, the Self-Defence system, the Kai system for U8s (Kano Club) and the Special Needs Working Party (now Inclusion Commission).

He continued to have influence into his eighties, coaching in the UK, South Africa and Australia and still enjoyed attending events and presenting medals. Mick was a very special man, supporting and influencing people across the *Judo* world for seven decades. He will be deeply missed.

Rowena Birch, President British *Judo* said:

"Mick has been part of the backbone of British Judo for several generations, inspiring, supporting and building judo both at home and abroad. His passion for learning, deep interest in all areas of judo, and the tireless desire to pass that knowledge, experience and thinking on, leaves behind a strong legacy and many friends. A truly valued member of our Judo Family who will not be forgotten."

In the words of Colin Draycott, Vice President British *Judo*:

"Mick you lived for your family, your clubs and JUDO. It is now time to rest. Goodbye my friend. Rest in peace."

Source: <https://www.britishjudo.org.uk/obituary-mick-leigh/>

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Michael Leigh – A 9th *Dan* at 90

By Jo Crowley, edited by Llyr Jones

A version of this article was first published on the website of the International *Judo* Federation – dated 5 May 2023

Michael (Mick) Leigh is 90 years old today, a party is deserved! Maybe some of the global *judo* community know the name and perhaps some of the newer members of the family don't but his contribution has been and still is substantial.

Hailing from London in Great Britain, originally, he has invested 70 years of his life in *judo*, both for his own learning but, as is so often the way with lifers, also for the great benefit of others. He has stories, anecdotes and important gems of *judo* wisdom oozing out of his brain, a brain which must be close to full as still no day goes by without Michael accumulating some new fact or experience related to the sport. His *judo* life began in 1955.



Michael Leigh competing in the 1982 British Veterans Championships – an event which he founded
[Photograph courtesy of the Leigh family]

"Back in those days once you got your black belt it was built in to the system that you also got your coaching, refereeing and examiner ticket at the same time".

Michael, therefore, studied judo through each of these modes.

Judo wasn't quite the same as it is now. Michael's experience at the beginning of his judo life would be impossible to replicate in 2023, as evolution has constructed a depth of education within each aspect of judo that means although the master-of-all-trades still exists, it is accomplished far more deliberately than it once was. Fewer people had access to judo in the mid-1950s when compared with these digital days and there certainly weren't the 200+ national federations we know now. Kano's constant push for diversity and inclusion was already wide-reaching in the mid-twentieth century, but the spread was slower than we have seen in more recent years, with only analogue communications available and transport to other countries being far less fluid than it is now.



Michael Leigh's ko-soto-gari became well known
[Photograph courtesy of the Leigh family]

"I began in 1955. The South London Judo Society had just changed its name to the London Judo Society (LJS), a name widely known internationally even now, despite its expiration some 30 years ago. I did a course on Monday and Wednesday evenings from 7-9pm for 8 weeks and went straight to yellow belt at the end of that.

Actually, I didn't want to do judo, but I liked wrestling type games. I knew no throws or holds but I knew that a submission was a win. At that time, I struggled to find a wrestling club and so judo was the next best thing."

Michael's ascent through the grades began at a pace:

- September 1955 5th Kyu (yellow)
- October 1955 4th Kyu (orange)
- December 1955 2nd Kyu (blue)
- January 1956 1st Kyu (brown)

He recalls:

"My 1st Dan was awarded in 1956 by Kenshiro Abbe, a senior 7th Dan from Japan. The British Judo Association (BJA) did not recognise Abbe's grades though and so I had to take it again. My 1st Dan from the BJA was awarded in May 1958 by Charlie Palmer and Mr George Chew.

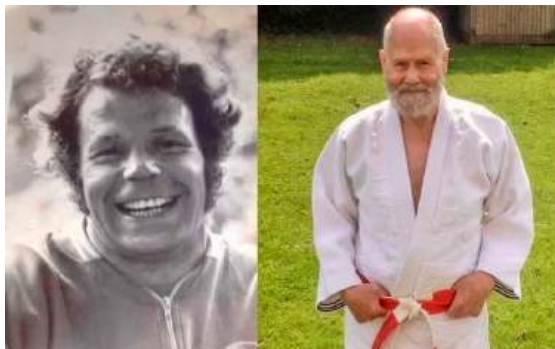
The first of those two men was President of the BJA for 24 years but most notably was the President of the International Judo Federation from 1965 to 1979 and also had a good stint as Chairman of the BOA. Mr Palmer was quite some person to receive a black belt from! Mr Chew also had a CV of interest as one of the founders of the aforementioned IJS. He was influential in the UK and as so many visitors and also Japanese instructors came to the British Isles in judo's early formation, that meant the influence stretched way beyond British borders. George Chew got me into politics and was therefore instrumental in my judo career."



At a coach education event in England with
Neil Adams in April 2022
[Photograph courtesy of Derek Hopkins]

Mr Leigh's subsequent grades carried some weight too with his 2nd Dan being awarded in 1961 by Trevor Leggett, Japanese 6th Dan and head of the BBC's Japanese Service, and Saburo Matsushita, former Managing Director of the AJJF and a member of the Japanese Olympic Committee, (later) a Kodokan 9th Dan himself. In 1966 Mr Leggett and Mr Palmer joined forces to award his 3rd Dan.

Michael Leigh obtained his 4th *Dan* in 1974, 5th *Dan* came in 1980, and the prestigious 6th *Dan* was presented in 1986, then 7th *Dan* a few years later too. In September 2005 he joined an elite group of lofty 8th *Dan* holders, a grade he has worn with pride ever since.



Michael Leigh, then and now
[Photographs courtesy of the Leigh family]

Having held the grade of 8th *Dan* for 18 years and with a continued active approach to *judo*, Leigh was thrilled to be given the news, just ahead of his 90th birthday, of his promotion to 9th *Dan*, a very special grade ratified back in April of this year. There will be a formal presentation of the red belt in the Autumn but on Monday of this week, a small group of family, friends, students and colleagues gathered for a local celebration and the presentation of the IJF certificate.



**Michael Leigh, 9th *Dan* with present BJA
Kata Commission Chair, Dr Llyr Jones**
[Photograph – courtesy of Llyr Jones]

Michael Leigh's *judo* journey has been remarkable and influential. Over seven decades, he has dedicated himself to learning, improving and giving back to the sport he loves – leaving a lasting impact on countless *judoka*. His promotion to 9th *Dan* recognises not only his achievements but also a lifetime of service to others and the *judo* community. All-in-all a thoroughly deserved honour for a man whose dedication, wisdom, and generosity have inspired generations.

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The IJF Mourns the Passing of Michael Leigh, 9th *Dan*

By Jo Crowley

A version of this article was first published on the website of the International Judo Federation – dated 8 July 2026

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Michael (Mick) Leigh, 9th *Dan*, on Tuesday 30th June 2026.

A great believer in the founding principles of *judo*, Mick invested 70 years of his life in the sport to the great benefit of others, not only in Great Britain but far beyond. His *judo* life began in 1955 and he never looked back!

Mick earned his 1st *Dan* in late 1956, presented to him by Kenshiro Abbe, then a senior 7th *Dan*. In 2023, 67 years later, the IJF awarded him the grade of 9th *Dan*, a rarity, recognition of his great contribution to the world of *judo*.



Michael Leigh (GBR) with his IJF 9th *Dan* Certificate

One very special anecdote that illustrates Mick Leigh's character comes from a special event held in 1957. In Mr Leigh's own words, "It was in about 1957 that I fought Anton Geesink at the Albert Hall during the London Judo Society's Festival of Judo. 'Judo Club Holland' came. Of course, no-one was really up to that task so I volunteered to fight him so that our best player, John Chaplin, could fight elsewhere in the team and win any other match. They were astounded I'd fight him! I decided to run around like a ferret until I ran out of steam. The referee, Geof Gleeson, smiled. I was twelve-and-a-half stone (79kg) at the time!"

Geesink and Leigh remained lifelong friends after that, exchanging Christmas cards throughout their lives, until Geesink passed away in 2010.

Michael Leigh's anecdotes and nuggets of wisdom were endless and thoroughly entertaining. His daughter, Stephanie Leigh, spoke after his passing, *"To be honest I could talk about him all day! The thing I will miss the most about my father is our long chats; he loved to debate, especially about judo. My dad shared his judo life with me and I will always be grateful for that."*

His influence on the judo community is far-reaching and impossible to summarise, but people will miss his face and conversation at events and meetings, he always had time for everyone. My dad found his purpose in *judo*, and he lived his life according to the judo values".



Michael Leigh

[Photograph from the family's personal collection]

The International *Judo* Federation extends heartfelt condolences to Michael Leigh's family and friends at this difficult time.

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Forty-Four Years With One Coach – A Personal Reflection

By Martin Rivers



Mick Leigh and Martin Rivers

I started *judo* as a 10-year-old, and for 44 years I had the same coach guiding me. He wasn't just the person who taught me technique – he shaped the way I grew up. Every stage of my life, from junior novice to 6th Dan, Senior Coach, National Examiner, International Referee, and Commission/Committee member, was built on the standards he set and the belief he had in me long before I earned anything.

At 54, losing him feels like losing the person who quietly stood behind almost every achievement I've had in *judo*. He was there when I was learning how to fall, and he was still there decades later when I was making decisions in International competitions. His influence is woven into how I coach, how I referee, how I examine, and how I carry myself in the sport.

What he gave me doesn't disappear. It lives in the way I teach others, the way I hold myself accountable, and the way I try to pass on the same standards he gave me. His legacy isn't just in what he did – it's in the people he shaped, and I'm proud to be one of them.

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Michael Leigh – Promotion History

Grade	Promotion Date
1 st Dan	25 May 1958
2 nd Dan	31 January 1961
3 rd Dan	09 March 1966
4 th Dan	06 October 1974
5 th Dan	14 April 1980
6 th Dan	14 April 1986
7 th Dan	16 December 1992
8 th Dan	27 January 2005
9 th Dan	24 April 2023

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Michael Leigh – Photo Gallery



Mick Leigh – executing *Kata-guruma*
[Photograph courtesy of the Leigh family]



Mick Leigh – executing *O-uchi-gari*
[Photograph courtesy of the Leigh family]



Mick Leigh with his eldest daughter
Stephanie Leigh – both *yudansha*, c. 1984
[Photograph courtesy of the Leigh family]



Mick Leigh – Celebrating a successful event
[Photograph courtesy of the Leigh family]



Mick Leigh – *Kodokan Goshin-jutsu* –
Armed attack – Stick
[Photograph courtesy of the Leigh family]



Mick Leigh – *Kodokan Goshin-jutsu* –
Armed attack – Pistol
[Photograph courtesy of the Leigh family]



Mick Leigh with IJF Dignitaries



L-R: Producer, Leila Birch, Mick Leigh and Director, Dr Diana Birch
at the Trevor Leggett Centenary Tribute film presentation
on 21 June 2014 at BAFTA
[Photograph courtesy of David Finch/Getty Images]



Newly elected BJA Chairman Mick Leigh, then 6th Dan
The Armoury, Forest Hill, London – December 1987
[Photograph courtesy of David Finch/Getty Images]



Mick Leigh presenting the medals at the C2
London International U18 Cadet Tournament
[Photograph courtesy of David Finch/Getty Images]



British Judo's Foremost Kata Experts – In Memoriam
L-R: Bob Thomas, Mick Leigh, Dennis Penfold, John Cornish



Mick Leigh – still practicing in his mid-80s
[Photograph courtesy of Richard Williams]

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>

Judo Collections



UNIVERSITY OF
BATH

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 17:00 hrs.



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