

JUDO RON 33 - Victory or Defeat in Judo

"A hero is a man who does what he can."

You deserve to become your own hero and in turn inspire others.ⁱ

In the past months, I have observed several judo shiai or competitions and paid particular attention at the ways younger judokas under 17 years were treated by their coaches or instructors when undertaking a judo match and how they were talked to after they completed their bout. There, I found a marked difference in the ways the winning athletes were treated in front of others, or how, in private, the less fortunate's who came second or did not classify, obtained their feedback from their mentors.

It seemed to me that victors and vanquished get branded too easily and that the latter's self esteem takes an unwarranted bashing. We have to recognize that almost nobody is a pure loser or pure winner. We all have our good qualities and some weaknesses that we need to work on. Judo competition should be a growing experience, not a drama. Shiai is an event selected during a single time frame where the judoka challenge another to display his or her skills superiority. During that sequence, both will try to outsmart and out point the other. At that moment, results may favor one or the other depending on the effort, the opportunity, the application of rules and the experience.

As a coach or instructor, we have to remind ourselves that the young judoka has come to judo for many reasons, principally to have fun and to feel successful when he feels he is improving both as a young adult and as a judoka. Unfortunately, what I saw or heard left me to understand that some coaches want the judoka to compete for an entire different set of reasons; and that's where the trouble starts.

By observing some coaches at work, it is evident that some of them may live their unfulfilled dreams through their athlete or that they see in the judoka's performance a reflection of their own and past when they acquired some fame or success. Those projected goals are never revealed to the judoka, they are kept secret until they are exposed by the very same comportment and attitude of the coaches near the tatamis. Those goals imposed intentionally or not on the judoka will eventually take the fun out of the activity and turn the young judoka away from the game.

One few occasions, I saw and heard coaches scream at young judokas, scold them in public for their mistakes, demonstrate great sorrows and disappointment when the judoka was eliminated and even behave erratically around the tatamis thus proving to me that they may even have lost control of the situation. Even the founder of judo Jigoro Kano condemned such an attitude when he said;" *This negative form of complaining is certainly not to be considered "Seiryoku Zenyo"*ⁱⁱ.

Sensei Michel Novovitch 8th Dan identified the more pronounced differences between the judo Randori and the Shiai as follow:ⁱⁱⁱ Shiai or competition is practiced like Randori (free exercise) with three essential differences:

1. Partners become opponent “Randori partner becomes the opponent in Shiai because the spirit of victory, which is absent in Randori, takes on a great deal of importance in Shiai”.
2. He outlined the differences in executing the Gake or the ending of a move with more force, speed and precision in order to prevent undue exposures by counter techniques.
3. The third aspect is the respect for the adversary that must be maintained even during the heat of battle or during the most exciting of moments.

Even when considering the above, and it may be different for an adult, but for most youths, the goals of the competition or the event are to demonstrate the level of their skills and expose the technical improvements they have achieved. They already have proven their worth in Randori, but now they face an opponent with different intentions. At the same time, the Shiai environment should offers an opportunity to display mutual benefits and welfare by playing by the rules, having fun and making friends.

In sharing these true goals, surely, the coaches can adopt a more positive attitude towards the acceptance of the deliberate efforts displayed by the judoka and offer to give him or her the right support sought after by the young athlete.

The right attitude from the coach can make his athlete perform better while at the same time render the event a memorable one for both. It is to be remembered that success in sports is more than just winning. That does not mean the coach should not encourage his judoka to perform well and test his skills against an opponent with equal or unknown expertise; but he needs to emphasize other factors as well, such as: giving their best, facing adversity with determination and preparation, pursuing improvements, maintaining proper behavior, learning from the mistakes, assuming the responsibilities for the actions or mistakes, never be discouraged and never give up. Words such as good, very good, good try, bravo, well done etc, will surely express the supporting message needed.

On the other side, the wrong attitude can cripple for good the athlete desiring to pursue a judo career. Towards that goal, coaches should be restrained from yelling or screaming at athletes, condemning the judoka for missed opportunities, mistakes or poor performances; punishing him or her if they do not pass “go”, let alone criticizing them in front of others. Coaches have to remember that the young athletes will make plenty of mistakes and that is how they will learn the game. What is important is that they keep trying doing their best and gain some pleasure through the engagement and in so doing, discover a greater love for judo.

It is often said that: “The only way to avoid mistakes is to gain experience, and the only way to gain experience is to make mistakes.” Are you one of those coaches who can look at competition results or performances as positive or negative experiences? Have you been taught that it’s wrong to fail or that it’s good to fail? Have you really taken the time to properly assess if the mistakes made during the match help your judoka or cause harm to himself or others?

As a coach or mentor, you need to establish and maintain a good rapport with your judoka since they depend upon your skills and abilities to provide due counsel, encouragement and savoir faire. You may assist when called upon, but you should refrain from being possessive, dogmatic, and usurp the authority of your students. The latter are the Ones who should make the final decision and be responsible for their actions, **NOT YOU.**

You need not to worry; judoka will grow with time and experience. As individuals, they will make their own choices. *“You can choose to watch and applaud champions or you can create your own victory in life. There are no limits to what you can do once you have set powerful goals and work on your talents and weaknesses. If you care to leave a legacy when your time arrives, let others remember you as a star who determines your own fate and inspire others along the way. »^{iv}*

Since our early childhood, most of us seem to recognize only limited fears such as the fear of falling, fear of strangers and the fear of loud noises. As we progress in life, all other fear is brought about through the experiences we gained by contacts with others and from confronting bizarre, peculiar and difficult situations. Our actions have been influenced by the ways we faced these events; not all have carried the same weight or value. Some have been positive, others, neutral or negative. We all made mistakes of different scale, magnitude and impact in our past.

Generally speaking, mistakes highlight some areas in need of improvement just like physical pain highlights a zone in need of medical attention. If you consider Judo as a way to make self - improvements in several dimensions: social, physical, mental and in the technical spheres, then judo is a microcosm of life. In such a context and it is my view, there is neither true loser nor victor in a judo match. The only important victory you will experience and cherish is the one made over yourself: to assume a better control of all your talents you so that we can be a better person and offer higher quality services to others.

As mentioned, not everything we do or say is an immediate success, but everything we undertake does contribute to our growth. Judo is no exception. There are plenty of applications. Take for example the receipt of a bad assessment on your first grading examination, at the time, it may have represented a catastrophe of extreme proportion and you may have thought that your future was jeopardy by it.

Because you reviewed your goals and settled forth some modifications to your preparation, the next trial was much better. You took stock of your talents, believed in your potentials and presented yourself before the examiners with greater confidence and thus created your own enthusiasm in the pursuit of excellence. You showed signs that you overcome difficulties and thus became a winner.

On the other hand, you may have taken your poor showing in a negative sense. You did the wrong moves or techniques, made the mistake of saying the wrong thing on a particular question or even challenged the instructor at the wrong time; from the comments, markings or attitudes received, you feel that you have been chastised or even ridiculed by a group of peers having witnessed your display. From this event, you may have adopted a temporary and safe lockdown strategy, developed a no-risk philosophy for fear that any similar attempts would likely produce similar failure. You may have decided to proceed with caution, resort to a more passive attitude and avoid pushing yourself to improve further.

You have been hesitant, your young mind was steered towards a defeatist attitude and you even have had a tendency to avoid difficult situations in the future. Even when faced with such hardship, you were not a loser. You may have delayed some positive reaction or direct involvement but you are certainly not a vanquished. Because you still maintained your practices, had the discipline to renew, you were on the road to recovery from your wounded heart. You still had enough determination and confidence to face new situations, to focus on the moment and were persistent enough to make it through another day and used other resources at hand. You have grown and will likely undertake and reach new and successful objectives.

Now, I hope you understand that in my perspective, winning is not the most important objective in judo and losing is not a sign of failure. Neither success nor failure depends on the outcome of a contest or on being in receipt of a won-lost record. Success is related to effort and you're never a "loser" if you have given it your best.

Chris Alford a professional motivator said: « *Great coaches become great coaches by using past player mistakes to refine current player skill. Great coaches encourage players to make mistakes as they watch for them on game films and correct them on the field. Mistakes allow the best opportunity to learn.* »^v

*Being a winner requires a lot of hard work
Losing requires no effort at all.*

Just to reassure ourselves that we are on the right track with our definitions, let us try to qualify what we mean by winner or loser. The general characteristics offered by psychologists list the following attributes:^{vi}

Winners aim to achieve success	Losers aim to avoid failure
Winners aim for activity results	Losers aim for personal kudos
Winners grow by helping others	Losers criticize others
Winners talk solutions and take action	Losers talk problems and do nothing
Winners work to priorities	Losers never have priorities
Winners know failure is deferred success	Losers think success is only deferred failure
Winners conquer fear	Losers quit when the going gets tough
Winners make an effort to take control	Losers rely on luck and live in hope
Winners have direction and goals	Losers have hopes and wishes
Winners seek new knowledge	Losers are satisfied with status quo

Most judoka I have been acquainted with have the left side characteristics. What makes them good judokas or successful ones? Well, I have previously discussed these attributes of importance in my article “Shin Gi Tai”^{vii}.

Two key elements come to mind: the coach and the athlete. Having a good and dedicated coach will assist, but the primary ingredient is YOU and how you display the right attitude.

The difference between success and failure is to be found in your attitude. It's in the way you think or feel about yourself, about other training partners and programs and how you handle difficult situations. It is your mental attitude, your thoughts that will guide what you undertake, go after and get out of life. You need to have the belief, the commitment and put in a lot of training hours and hard work.

These are the requisites for the right attitude. You are free and should keep that liberty to choose what you want to think, to feel, to accomplish and to have. People and circumstances will only influence you if you allow them to do so. It will take lots of courage to maintain full control of your actions because the influence of others is a constant that shows up at different times and under different forms.

To be a winner, there is only one way: you need to take responsibility for your success. Too many judokas let others interfere or have unconsciously or consciously decided that success depends on external factors such as: luck, connections, fate, other people, etc. You have to decide where you want to go, and then you take responsibility for getting yourself there. With the right attitude, you can tackle the planning and preparation cycles of your action plan.

This is the time to set your aim, goals and objectives. These elements are indications of your personal commitments and they will show your seriousness in becoming a true champion or hero over your own life.

You should list down your priorities and break them down over a given time frame. Activities should be stepping stones for greater accomplishments. Then, when you draw up your strategy you will be able to use it as a beacon to undertake positive actions. These constructive activities will pave the way to greater success and bring rewarding outcomes.

Do not wait for others to act, create your own enthusiasm. Think about the accumulated successes you can achieve every day. Get excited by being able to perform one or two additional movements or techniques in your daily practice. Try to maintain the discipline to renew your practices and share your enthusiasm with others. Use these occasions to reconnect with peers and teachers, to observe how things are being performed, to improve the way you listen to instructions and to select the methods you use to experiment with additional tactics. Whatever you do, try to do it to the best of your abilities.

It may sound complicated but with the right attitude, good preparation, and high expectations, doing your best will come easy. You will soon develop the mindset to act consistently upon your goals. Have patience, making substantial improvements in judo will take time and lots of hard work. First, keep practicing and doing the activities that you control best and follow up with incremental improvements which will develop your chances of performing better and reaching personal goals.

There is a limit to everything and a time to know when to quit. The expression *tomaru tokoro o shire* was used by Jigoro Kano to make us understand that comes a time when we must know to stop. You may venture to make use of your best technique up to a certain point, but when you have reached that point you must stop. You won't live long enough to learn and display all the techniques, tactics and strategies in judo.

Despite this limitation, you should proceed boldly when circumstances and opportunities present themselves and apply your knowledge to the best of your abilities. Try to maximize your shortcomings by selecting your instructors and coaches carefully and by learning from those who have preceded you or are identified as winners and champions. Keep your dreams alive, look forward to the day you will have conquered yourself and mastered an opponent of your own rights.

In conclusion, let us remind ourselves the words of Jigoro Kano about the cultivation of aesthetic sentiments: *"I hope that students of judo will master their own Waza and enjoy watching the Waza of others. I hope they will come to appreciate the beauty in their own movements and come to appreciate the graceful and dynamic movements of others."*^{viii}

It is more important to learn how best to use you skills in life then being a champion declared for an hour or a day.

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- i <http://www.about-personal-growth.com/winner>
- ii Kano Jigoro, *Mind over Muscle*, Kodansha, Japan, 2005
- iii Novovitch Michel, *Judo Zero Gravity*, Casablanca, 2003
- iv <http://www.about-personal-growth.com/winner.html>
- v Chris Alford. President of Motivate America: *Autosuccessonline 2010*.
- vi <http://poweressence.com/winners-vs-losers>
- vii Désormeaux Ronald, Discovery of Judo Arsenal, *Shin Gi Tai*, August 2008
- viii Kano Jigoro, *Mind over Muscle*, Kodansha, Japan 2005