

JUDO RON 53 - A Glimpse at Katame/Ne waza in judo

Preamble

In judo, it has been demonstrated that one cannot achieve great mastery if the training is concentrated upon the exclusive development of either his Tachi waza or his Katame waza. The two elements need to be addressed simultaneously in the training regime. (They must fit together like hands and gloves). Of the importance of Katame waza, two great Kodokan judo masters that were Sumiyuki Kotani and Kazuzo Kudo said:

“With Nage waza, Ne waza are like the two wheels of a cart, they should be evenly practiced by every judoka. Any chance to enter Ne waza should not be missed”ⁱ

“The judo throws and the grappling techniques are inseparable as the front and rear wheels of an automobile the two works together in assisting each other to decide victory or defeat. Of course the grappling techniques are more effective if they follow a throw and the throws can generate greater power if they are followed by a grappling technique.”ⁱⁱ

Often in the past, I have discussed fundamental elements of the Tachi waza or the standing judo. I also informed you about the environment of the strangulation and the resuscitation, I now propose to give an outline of what constitute the basic rudiments of the Katame waza.

Aim

My objective is to provide the students with a brief exposé of the principal components making the Katame waza and highlight the importance of this facet within the overall judo educational system.

Grappling introduction into judo

Different wrestling forms existed in ancient fighting-styles of many nations. In Japan, we relate an assortment of types of fighting techniques with various martial arts and Jujutsu schools or Ryu. In the 1800's when Professor Jigoro Kano sought to capture the essence of Jujutsu and convert it to his Kodokan judo, he studied under several masters of his time such as T. Yagi, H Fukuda, M.Iso, and T. Iikido from either the Tenshin Shinyo or the Kito schools. He researched the instructions and techniques of many other reputed jujutsu schools including the famous Daito and Totsuka Schools who were main rivals. Furthermore, he associated and admitted to his school a number of Jujutsu experts who taught both the standing techniques and the mat work. Professor Kano then took the best techniques from all and incorporated them into his educational syllabus.

After observing and experimenting with several forms of techniques including the Atemiwaza (striking), he set out his priorities and formulated his Gokyo with the help of Yoshiaki Yamashita-san and other specialists such as K. Imai, K Aoyagi, A. Tanabe, H. Sato, K. Iami, H. Isogai, and S. Nagaoka. He introduced a formal training program which reflected his preferences for the study of Tachi waza. At the time of the introduction of the Gokyo syllabus which comprised 5 groups of 8 representative techniques, the elements to be found in the Katame waza corpus were still under consideration and yet to be formalized. He did however consider their ensemble as a complement to the former. In his memoirs, he stated:

"I came to believe that the Nage waza should be emphasized in the technical training aspects of judo. This does not mean I consider Katame waza to be useless; of course, I stress practicing Nage waza first, followed by Katame waza. This is because doing Katame waza first hinders progress in Nage waza while it makes sense that learning Nage waza first makes it easier to remember Katame waza at a later stage. When I established the Kodokan (1882) I encourage the practice of Nage Waza precisely for that reason." p29ⁱⁱⁱ

As was the custom in those days, there were frequent inter-school challenges and competitions to establish both a reputation and some degree of supremacy. A major event took place in Tokyo in 1887 at the tournament of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Dept. While fighting against other Ryu, the Kodokan students had no difficulty securing advantages with Nage Waza but struggled against practitioners possessing higher skills in Katame waza. (Note that in those early days, there was no time limit set for a match, only abandon or scoring mattered). After securing a just victory, Professor Jigoro Kano analyzed the results and he later went on a shopping spree to find additional Katame waza experts and invited them to teach his Kodokan students thus ensuring their continued improvement in their performance for future matches.

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Professor Kano had set his mission to revive the appropriate teaching of martial arts and particularly impose his Kodokan Judo throughout Japan. The reality was that there were other styles of fighting taught in various cities and regions by other experts who had known some success. In an effort of consolidation he took the leadership to participate in a special committee organized with the Butokukai (Kyoto 1895) and where the principal Jujutsu schools masters and representative of the Kodokan had gathered to exchange their methods and approaches. Amongst the topics of discussions, the study of Kata and changes to the rules of competition where time limits would be imposed on matches and scoring rules clarified were hot items.

While the Kodokan judo system expanded throughout Japan during the period 1882--1914 so did the Butokukai of Kyoto and its affiliated schools. After the 1895 meeting, some of the Kodokan experts were left in Kyoto to teach the Kodokan judo style while a number of Jujutsu experts were engaged in an exchange program with the Kano School in Tokyo. Harmonization of teaching methods had begun.



Gathering of Jujutsu experts in Kyoto circa 1895. Jigoro Kano at the centre (Kodokan Archives)

Competitions and challenges

As mentioned, in those early transition days of the Meiji period, there were several competitions venues or leagues organized to challenge the degree of expertise amongst rival schools. One of the popular venues was the interscholastic challenge. Within this popular competition league, participants came from the major high schools of Osaka, Hokkaido, Tohoku, Tokyo, Nagoya, Kyoto and Kyushu. Different styles of judo were exhibited.

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Some of these technical schools were particularly known to perform well both in the standing techniques and they particularly excelled in their mat work which contained various specialties not yet taught in the Kodokan syllabus but which originated from old Jujutsu schools rivals to the Kodokan. The former obtained several successes over the Kodokan students who participated in these contests.

Professor Kano was adamant of having his Kodokan Judo attain a superior status so that he could introduce it throughout the Japanese education system both as a combative art and as a general physical education system. To that effect, he presided over the 1914 All Japan High School Championships at the Kyoto Imperial University. (This sportive event was called Kosen^{iv} for high school) and upon observing the results, he revised his Kodokan technical packages.

During a ten year adjustment program, many experts amongst them: Yoshiaki Yamashita, Hirata Kanae, Tsunejiro Tomita, Hajime Isogai, Kotaro Okano and Sakujiro Yokoyama were tasked to invent new series of movements, escapes, and submissions. The Kodokan Katame waza took off and became very popular; so much so, that Professor Kano had to make changes to his syllabus. (Training program was to be made up of 70% standing techniques and be complemented by 30% ground fighting techniques.)

This pedagogical approach or new teaching rule was devised to place the emphasis on the use of Tachi waza and still retain a fair proportion of training time for the Katame waza. Subsequently, the general contest scoring rules were modified to have contest start from a standing position and favor the allocation of scoring within a limited time span. After WWII, the Kodokan Judo philosophy and style were adapted to the changing cultural environments and the national receptivity to Western ideas. The upcoming introduction of Judo into the Olympics accelerated the Kodokan style popularity.

Rules of Application for Katame Waza

By 1952, the Kodokan judo had expanded into hundreds of countries and was practiced in all continents. The International judo Federation was created from the Paris gathering of representatives from those national entities and became the prime regulator of the new contest rules. We now follow the international contest rules. The current regulations state in part:

IFF Article 15 – Start of contest^v

..".Contestants must bow onto and off the competition area and contest area at the start and end of each contest. After bowing onto the contest area the contestants move forward to their respective marks and must bow simultaneously towards each other and take a step forward.

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Once the contest is over and the referee has award the result, the contestants simultaneously take a step back and must bow to each other. The contest shall always begin in the standing position.

Article 16 – Entry into ne-waza

...”The contestants shall be able to change from standing position to ne-waza in the following cases, but should the employment of the technique not be continuous, the referee orders both contestants to resume the standing position:

- a) When a contestant, after obtaining some result by a throwing technique changes without interruption into ne-waza and takes the offensive.*
- b) When one of the contestants falls to the ground, following the unsuccessful application of a throwing technique, the other may take advantage of his opponent's unbalanced position to take him to the ground.*
- c) When one contestant obtains some considerable effect by applying a shime waza or kansetsu-waza in the standing position and then changes without interruption to ne-waza.*
- d) When one contestant takes his opponent down into ne-waza by the particularly skilful application of a movement which does not qualify as a throwing technique.*
- e) In any other case where one contestant may fall down or be about to fall down, not covered by the preceding sub-sections of this article, the other contestant may take advantage of his opponent's position to go into ne-waza.”*

Appendix Article 16 – Entry into ne-waza

...”When one contestant pulls his opponent down into ne-waza not in accordance with Article 16 and his opponent does not take advantage of this to continue into ne-waza, the referee shall announce matte, stop the contest and award shido to the contestant who has infringed Article 27 (viii).

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When one contestant pulls his opponent down into ne-waza not in accordance with the rules of Article 16 and his opponent takes advantage of this to continue into ne-waza, the contest should be allowed to continue but the referee should award shido to the contestant who has infringed Article 27 (viii)."

Scoring advantages

Within the current rules, you can generally win a contest by technical superiority points derived from a clean IPPON with various forms of standing techniques, a submission resulting from a choking technique or arm lock or by pinning down the opponent with an immobilization or hold down for 25 seconds. You can also win a contest by points scored for penalties awarded to your opponent, by a withdrawal due to injury, by the performance of derogatory gestures. A victory can also be secured with a cumulative and or combination of the above factors.

It is to be noted that some form of Kansetsu waza may be applied while standing up but the rules forbid the application of a lock while standing and dragging the opponent down with it. Conversely, should the opponent go to the ground in an attempt to escape from a lock applied while standing up; it is permissible to continue the lock on the ground. Arm bars are always applied at the elbow joints and any other form to apply pressure to the spine, the neck or ankles are forbidden.

As previously discussed in JUDO RON 38, Shime waza techniques are of two kinds: those strangulations performed against the conduit of the air flow and those against the flow of blood to the brain. This kind of techniques should be performed quickly and without warning and can be applied both from a standing position and on the ground.

Understanding the definitions

You have to be familiar with some definitions: Ne Shisei refers to a mat posture in a prone or supine position including position with one knee up. Ne Sobu is the grappling actions during mat work while Ne waza is a general classification for the various techniques executed from non standing postures. Ne waza Randori is the free mat work or exercise with a partner. Katame waza or Katame no kata are forms of grappling and the terms refer to hold downs, (osaekomi) strangles (shime waza) and joints locks (kansetsu waza) used in grappling.

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Preliminaries understandings

Katame waza practices are often overlooked and rarely given a position of importance. Many objections are raised in support of this attitude: one of the reasons is attributed to the lack of mat space needed to engage in Ne waza Randori practices, another is the misconception by many players that think that in Katame waza, the bigger and stronger judoka always has the advantage.

It is true that in Ne waza, the judoka does use his strength differently but the same principles apply (Kuzushi-Tsukuri-Kake). In standing judo, the use of energy is sporadic, there are several moments of détente preceding or following the outburst of offensive tactics. Continuous efforts never exceed 30-40 seconds at the time.

The deployment of strength in Katame waza is more continuous as the contact between opponents must be maintained. It is interjected with moments of relaxation and the application of additional flexible body movements and different moments of force to maximize different leverage areas, to keep a safe distance between the partners or to gain superiority with an extended contact surface.

The judo teacher Eric Dominy made the following observation about this particular combination when he said:

“Tori, though he might be somewhat stronger than Uke, cannot maintain a hold down if he is tense, cannot strangle if his arms are stiff and cannot apply arm locks if he fails to control Uke. p 122^{vi}

The early Kodokan ground techniques specialists also noted the different employment of body strength when doing ground work when they reported:

“It is true that in Nage waza, you must exercise your strength, but you must take advantage of the strength of your opponent and thus avoid using your strength unnecessarily. In osaekomi waza, however, both you and your opponent use much more strength that is because you must use all your strength in order to prevent him from getting up, while he uses his strength in order to push you off and rise. The manner of using your strength in osaekomi waza is very different from the Nage waza; in the former, both you and your antagonist exercise the muscles which are not brought into play in the latter. Osaekomi like Newaza are very necessary for physical development and are very effective... Shime waza and Kansetsu waza may not be said that they are the best physical exercises because they are chiefly used as a means of overcoming your antagonist.” p252^{vii}

Making the parallel

In general, you will find that Ne Waza is not easier to master than Tachi waza. There are three elements essential to your success in Katame waza: Place your opponent into a broken posture (Kuzushi), place yourself in the right posture (Tsukuri) and perform your selected technique in a proper manner (Kake). Both training dimensions employ the same principles: discovery of the right moment or opportunity, freedom of movement at the hip, control and restraint over the movement of the opponent, speed of reaction, ingenuity and imagination. All these factors make the intelligent use of the energy possible.

As in Nage waza, Katame waza generally depends upon good body movements. There are prescriptive movements essential to take the offensive and grappling your opponent and there are other movements especially used to ward off the opponent, escape and counter attack. As you practice those drills, you will note that in Katame waza you make greater use of your hands, arms, legs, hips, shoulders and head.

General advices

To be able to master the numerous techniques, you will need to practice the body coordination, the relaxation and their combined usage as needed. You are required to understand your various body positions and use them at will to effect smooth transition actions as you follow the opponent around and secure your superiority. When required, the concomitant use of the legs, the hands and arms will provide the needed opportunities to escape or neutralize the opponent's power

You will soon realized that defensive tactics alone does not lead to victory. You must observe, seek out the weak points, judge distances and assess proper weight distribution. You need to act in a coordinated manner to secure your hold or escape from attacks. Always be on the look out to take the initiative. When on the offensive trail, you have to prepare your attack by placing yourself in the best advantageous posture, making use of the weakest points presented by the opponent and try to prevent him to make use of his most powerful limb or joints.

Because of the distance between you and the opponent is somewhat shorter on the ground than in Tachi waza, you need to refine your sensorial system and be able to detect and feel more signals from the opponents in order to provide maximum time of reaction.

Keep moving your body in order to place yourself in the most advantageous position. Do not become stagnant. Distribute your power base to be more stable. Apply your strength freely and with rhythm. Try to anticipate the next move of the opponent whenever possible.

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You cannot have the luxury of being tense and preoccupied with victory or defeat; you must make the maximum use of the present moment and situation to ripe the advantage from every opportunity that you can seize. Do not waist your energy with movements that have no purpose and meaning. Remember that if one attempt fails, try again, find a space to use by shifting your body motion to pursue your attack in another direction.

You may want to consider the observation made by Judo researchers Jiichi Watanabe and Lindy Avakian who have summarized the attitude to take while engaged in ground or mat work as follow:

“Force must precede speed and lightness of motion in grappling: you must attack your opponent with as large a force as possible, at the same time making as much use as you can of quick and light movements. First consider how to produce the largest momentum possible and how to apply it effectively... inducing momentum by shifting your body forward or your chest sideways “. (Momentum) p136-7ⁱⁱⁱ

What priority should be followed?

With these considerations in mind, you may want to proceed with a gradual training program. All judo teachers will recommend a progressive way to learn the Katame waza. The standard approach is to ensure the mastery of key positions and principles before attempting the more complementary techniques. The mastery of the various techniques comes with their application from the right side or left side with series of combinations sequences associated with the osaekomi or hold downs first, followed with the shime waza or strangulation and then, training on the locks or kansetsu waza. Hereafter is summary of the most current osaekomi.



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It is a good thing to remember that when on top, you must lower your centre of gravity as low as possible while spreading its support base as far away as possible from the opponent. You should keep the elbows close to your body and your chin close to the chest. If you become trapped under, try to gain some space between you and the opponent. Try to bundle up and keep the smallest surface in contact with the mat. Always hold on to the judogi of the opponent, do not let go. You may find the opportunities you are looking for.

It is important to improve your style and technique with every practice session. Try to observe copy and imitate the techniques shown by the teacher or practiced by others. It is most important to practice, to correct and try again and again. Do not be afraid to explore, without exploration, there are no discoveries.

Recommended improvement exercises

At every opportunity, you should attempt to explore different ways to enter and exit, to exploit your capacities through different sets of exercises. Hereunder are some suggestions for consideration:

Exercises performed alone or with a partner

Sit ups, lobster curls, back rolls, side body bending, leg stretch, legs kicks, legs rotation, body dipping, stretch pushups, side twisting and bending, crawling forward and backward, one leg jump and twist, body back arch, head rest, pushing and pulling using the costume, hand extension and closing, wrist curls, grip exercises, hand stands, shoulder rolls, shoulder bridging, Entering onto the prone position through the opponent's legs, the side, or the head, pushing the opponent with the legs, and of course performing combinations on the right and left sides.

All sketches of Osaekomi waza are from Public Open Source



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Conclusion

With some efforts and courage, you can make substantial improvements. Just think that in 1961, at the World Championships in Paris, Anthon Geesink was able to take away the Japanese supremacy in Judo by beating the great Sone with an Osaekomi. Since then competition results show that 40% of matches are won on the ground and that Osaekomi is employed in 70% of the time to secure an Ippon while 30% results from Shime and Kansetsu waza.

When performing miscellaneous grappling techniques, always remember that you should try to keep our opponent constantly on the bottom and that you should attack from the top. If it turns out that you are pinned down, try to employ the basic protective measures of curling up and distancing yourself as much as possible. Think about leverages to turn him around and resort to further use of strangles and elbow joint locks as part of your counter attack. Do not give up in your practices. Practicing a technique is much harder than just reading about it. The result is that you educate your whole body and mind and this is the only way to make improvements...

I close my argument with the remarks of the senior Kodokan Sensei Ichiro Abe 10th Dan who said: **“Travail debout, travail au sol...le judo est un tout qui est admirable » p107^{ix}**

Translated to mean: “Tachi waza, Ne waza, judo is an outstanding and admirable entity”

Have a great session

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