

Zuihitsu - Random notes on Judo by Ronald Desormeaux

Judo Ron 48: Addressing Bogyo Shisei / Defensive Posturing

Judo matches and encounters begin with both partners standing in a natural posture. The world of judo comprises Randori, Kata and Shiai. In Randori the judoka practice doing standing judo techniques from Shizentai or the natural posture. They follow with ground techniques in the spirit of camaraderie. There are no idle periods; all movements are done with determination and to the best of one's abilities. During various Kata training sessions, students enhance their techniques by learning the mechanics of properly using the total body as a principal source of judo displacements or Shintai and tai- sabaki. During regular training sessions they will practice both the Shizentai and the Jigo hontai or straight defensive postures from which techniques can be launched or countered.

In Shiai or competition, the judoka attempt to gain victory over an opponent through the use of all kinds of natural and learned skills with the aim of securing the necessary technical advantage and avoid a fall. At times, and too frequently, the techniques used include resorting to extreme defensive positions known as **Bogyo Shisei** to apply a strong defense against an opponent's attack and restrict his initiatives.



Professors Jigoro Kano and Kyuzo Mifune in Jigo-tai practice

Kodokan Institute Public Archives

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Current assessment of judo practices

If asked to give an appraisal as to the kind of judo practices one undergoes in general, what kind of answers can be expected? Most respondents will likely answer positively. The local judo practices are dynamic exercises, sufficiently demanding both physically and mentally, are practical, technically enriching and mentally engaging. The majority will say that the camaraderie and respect being offered to opponents and training partners are attractions of considerable weight in their decision. All answers will note that there are sufficient signs of progress with individual development to warrant a frequent return to training sessions.

It is fair to say that most judoka who have attained a certain degree of training maturity will enjoy the different forms of Randori (free practice) as the latter provide them an exposure of free and personal expression of their capacities in order to deal with and manage an array of changing combat situations.

Because the Randori are performed with a partner and not with a person identified as an opponent or enemy, there are numerous occasions to learn from each other, to help in the acquisition of improved technical skill sets and to seek the right opportunity to apply the right technique at the right moment.

Randori are also the best platforms to study difficult situations, normally associated with competitive judo, where one is often restricted in his or her movements by extra defensive actions from the other combatant. In contrast with the Shiai, it is in the Randori format that one can apply practical solutions to regain the initiative without worrying about “loosing” a decisive confrontation. As an educator, Jigoro Kano, the founder of judo, was particularly stressing the discovery of the best learning conditions when he said:

“In practice, if you think only about winning from the start, you will never be able to do so. In order to develop the strength to win someday, you must be satisfied with practicing losing for a time...and even if you are at risk of losing, you must take the offensive, try various waza and train hard.” Jigoro Kano

Aim of the Presentation

This essay will try to highlight the dangers of having frequent recourses to **Bogyo Shisei** thus placing oneself into a strong defensive position where movements of both players are limited and choices of techniques are diminished. It will expose a number of the restrictions imposed upon the other combatant and identify some ways and means to eradicate such danger by the intelligent use of indirect tactics.

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The Evolution

Entrenchment into a defensive posture or reliance upon the **Bogyo Shisei** evolved with the transformation of judo competition at the international level and with the coming of international combat rules and regulations during the 1960's, thus transforming the "open judo" into restricted activities governed by weight classes. Such change brought considerable adjustments to the technical baggage of players and the ways techniques were performed to secure the "IPPON" score. Judo federations, academics and coaches have since devoted many years of researches into findings the best ways and means to cope with the changing rules for scoring and preparing the athletes for the podium. Training methods have constantly changed, new educational skills have been introduced and new psychological preparation introduced.

In the 1970's, the rules were changed again to allow for expression of technical superiority based upon the Koka and Yuko scores and introduced their equivalent penalties for non-compliances. Once more, major adjustments in both training methods and technical behaviors were made to permit judoka of various nations to display sufficient technical superiority at decision time. During the course of the next 20-25 years, we witnessed the arrival of Hikikomi or take down techniques with strong pursuit actions towards ground work or ne-waza techniques highlighted by the quick applications of arm locks and strangulations.

The predominance of technically strong and clear Tachi-waza (standing technique) dominating the tatami since the earlier days of judo competitions took a severe setback during the last ten years. Today's style of elite judo competitions is made up of a mixture of about 50% Tachi and 50% Ne- Waza techniques being applied.

As a result of all these changes, the judoka's profile is shifting. Nowadays, there is an array of judoka possessing excellent physical fitness, having concentrated strengths in the upper torso and legs segments and displaying a high level of endurance to sustain numerous and successive matches. The speed, agility and mastery needed to perform the difficult major techniques have been for most, replaced with new skills adapted for quick and short movements. The latter are used effectively for minor techniques that will secure an early dominance, prevent the opponent of his or her freedom while ensuring that they in turn, can employ complementary ground work with a certain ease.

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SCOUTING FOR STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS

The establishments of judo grand prix competitions and monthly events where senior competitors are fighting each other to gain points and obtain a superior ranking in the world standings have contributed to the development of a new art: the judo scouting. Nowadays, for the sake of national prestige, gaining prize-money or being granted special recognition, the winning of a match has become that more important. Tactics and strategies are in a constant mutation and necessitate an array of assistants to seize all the changes.

Whenever a new comer appears for his or her first official judo competition-match, there are films, videos and interviews made and analyzed by various professionals/expertise's who determine relative strength and weakness as well as psychological profile of the incumbent. The same scenario is adopted for subsequent matches. The information is then passed along to offensive and defensive coaches who analyze preferred postures and techniques and then design strategic and tactical counters that can become part of a new technical baggage for their own "gladiator". Months of special training with other judoka of similar stature and disposition are combined with new educational skills development to refine the offensive and defensive strategies. As mentioned, the current general statistics reveal that 50% of victories are secured by the clear IPPON score and that 50% of victories result from cumulative superiority obtained through the combination of Waza-Ari followed with appropriate Ne-Waza techniques.

IMPORTANCE OF KUMI KATA

Today, the Kumi-kata or the form of grasping the costume has taken a strategic importance whereby each opponent tries to lock in with the other from the start of the contest and restrict the potentials for explosive entries from the latter. The frequent logjams that occur and the imposition of one's strength over the other are conducive to excessive use of defensive posture known as Bogyo Shisei.

This preferred defensive posture is now recurring in most matches. Risk aversion and imposition of early dominance are fast becoming the current strategies. It is common to observe that most players make a solid combination of Tachi Waza and Ne-Waza since they have an array of effective ground techniques at their disposal including the recourse to Juji-gatame and Okuri-eri-jime, (arm lock and strangulation) which can be applied to quickly secure either superiority or deliver the match point.

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Is winning that important, and at what cost? Sensei Shozo Awazu 9th dan commented in 2008 about the competition style as follow:

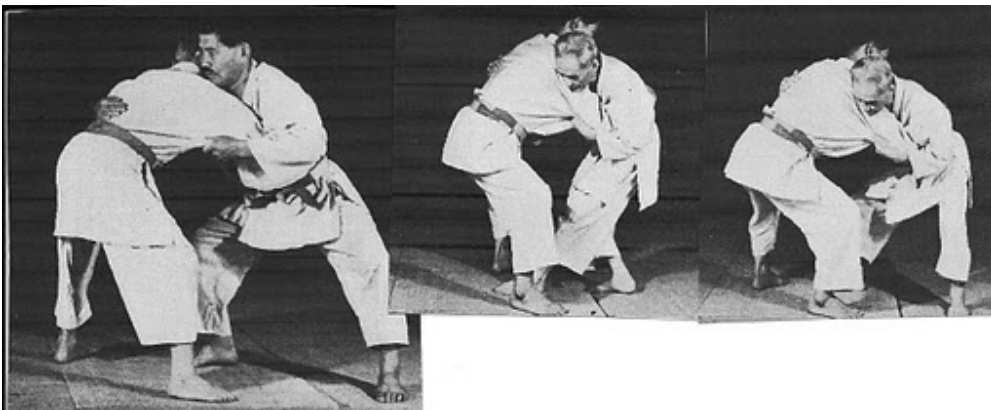
“Bien sûr on peut gagner la victoire par le règlement mais si c’est juste pour la décoration de la médaille ce n’est pas intéressant. Il faut estimer la qualité de la victoire. Il faut se demander avec quoi le champion gagne. On ne peut pas gagner vraiment avec une mauvaise attitude cela veut dire que l’on ne comprend pas l’esprit de ce que l’on fait. La compétition c’est une façon de montrer de ce que l’on sait faire par la qualité de nos attaques et de notre technique. »ⁱⁱ

To resume his saying: Winning for the sake of the medals is not satisfying. One must seek to display high quality in both the offensive tactics used and the variety of techniques performed.

Characteristics of Bogyo Shisei

Jigotai also addressed as **Bogyo Shisei** is characterized as a self defense posture. It has its right application in judo. It is normally of temporary nature and its principal purpose is to reinforce the stability of the judoka’s stance when strongly challenged. The increase stability is produced by lowering the centre of gravity with a drop of the hips lower than that of the opponent, bending the knees and slightly increasing the spread of the supporting legs. The torso should remains well aligned as demonstrated by the previous photo involving professors Kano and Mifune.

As mentioned, today’s fighters exaggerate the posture by bending the torso forward and solidly controlling the Kumi kata with extra strength. Hereafter, is a picture taken of professor Mifune 10th Dan preparing his escape from such a difficult embrace?



Composite abstract from Mifune’s *Canon of Judo*, 1963, p 240. showing K.Mifune and S.Shirai in practice.

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Adopting a defensive posture for too long is not natural. In combat situation the players tend to lean upon the other and make use of the additional strength and weight to embarrass, to frustrate and to align the body for inner throws. Adapting the **Bogyo Shisei** has certain advantages, namely:

1. To destabilize the opponent, mentally and physically.
2. To facilitate counter techniques.
3. To quickly apply minor techniques.
4. To provide easiness for the application of takedowns and transitional techniques.
5. To better control and limit the movements of the opponent.
6. To assume favorite posturing for one's Tokui waza (favorite techniques).
7. To increase the intensity of the match, to fatigue and force the deployment of more energies.

In the negative aspects, there are some noteworthy disadvantages to consider, amongst them:

1. The creativity and technical innovation have been lost.
2. The judoka technical baggage is substantially reduced.
3. The risk taking is no longer at the forefront of combat strategies.
4. Tori will likely favor turning the body in front of Uke thus limiting his actions.
5. Uke can easily forecast and anticipate the deep and low technical moves.
6. Tori greatly limit his areas of movements and distances.
7. Uke has more facilities to counter or escape from the sides.
8. Tori's attack can be predicted from his Tokui waza stance and Kumi kata.
9. There is limited variety of techniques that can be effective on first trial.
10. Key advantages of scoring at the beginning of the match or by direct attack are lost.

The great technician and judo master that was Kyuzo Mifune 10th Dan recommended two cases where self-defense postures have their merit: one is to secure self-stability by defending against the opponent's attack and the other is to make use of it to frustrate the opponent and win a victory on technical superiority. It must be recognized that the great judo master excelled in the use of flexibility and intelligent use of energy. He was highly skilled in observing circumstances, assessing strength and weakness and making the better use of circumstances with surprising improvisation and creativity. He encouraged the flexible way of fighting when he said:

"In order to win a victory in free-play (Randori) match, you should do your best adopting yourself to change of postures. In other words, manage yourself sometimes like a butterfly lightly enough to attack the opponent weak point and at the next chance, hold an advantageous position balancing your weight like a huge rock and overcome an advantageous position."ⁱⁱⁱ

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TRAINING TO OVERCOME

It is well recognized that all judo techniques can be applied successfully when the three basic components are present e.g.: *Kuzushi, Tsukuri and Kake*. To be remarkable, the techniques are to be applied at the right moment in a quick response to a given opportunity and preferably at the zero gravity point. (Lift-up and pull-down having reached equal status)

Judo training program must be designed to offer the judoka the freedom to maintain the initiative and carry the attack to the weaker points of the opponent where there will be least resistance. If impaired by the opponent's excessive use of **Bogyo Shisei**, one must attempt to overcome or nullify it whenever it is encountered. Match strategies and tactics involving greater use space management^{iv} must be considered and adapted to circumstances in order to pursue the offensive with the minimum external restraints. It is important to remain in control of the situation and not give way to the temptation of responding to strength with corresponding strength as one's strength must not be revealed prematurely for the opponent may have sufficient time to prepare his defense, identify your weakness and apply his techniques first.

During regular Randori training sessions, a flexible attack strategy can be formulated around the following circumstances:

1. Attacks made upon entry into the combat zone.
2. Direct attack timely scheduled during opportune moments or guided by developing opportunity.
3. Successive attacks employing the same technique and made in several directions.
4. Combination of principal attacks with complementary techniques in the same direction.
5. Making maximum use of action-reaction to launch the explosive attacks.
6. Ensuring some mastery of Hikikomi and transitional techniques to ne-waza.
7. Adaptation of Waza to fit the personality profile.
8. Making greater use of sensory perception to observe and plan counter-techniques.

As mentioned before, the ideal platform to study these strategies is through the conduct of combat situation analysis as an integral part of and during Randori practices. These analyses can be performed to respond to specific situations and be held more or less frequently depending upon the individual needs and the degree of comfort shown in mastering counter measures.

Particular Randori practices could be identified with set goals or themes for each and different encounter or oriented around a global program designed to address ways and means to counter general **Bogyo Shisei**. Within this perspective, Professor Tsutomu Oshima of Waseda University once remarked: "***Making use of defensive tactics is not a matter of confronting strength with strength, but making intelligent use of our energy and our technical savoir-faire.***"

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Another interesting platform engaged to study these difficult encounters is through the practice of Kata. One can find in Kata, several circumstances where the partner is in Jigotai or **Bogyo Shisei** such as in the *Nage No Kata* when performing the Sumi-Gaeshi (corner overthrowing) and Uki- Waza. The *Ju-Go no kata* also contains several examples of defensive positions and countering techniques. Unfortunately, this kata is not extensively performed in dojos nowadays. Similar examples can be found in the many sacrifice-type throws contained in the study of the Gokyo assigned to each grading requirements. One can think of testing the efficiency of several effective techniques such as: Uranage, Yokowakare, Ouchigari, Taniotoshi, Sotomotehari, Hikikomi gaeshi, obitorigeashi and many others. The advanced students can also try to master different attacks originating from under the curvature of Uke or develop his Tai Sabaki variations to be comfortable with attacking either side of the opponent where greater vulnerabilities can be found.

Conclusion

Judo training is made up of a multitude of experiences involving solving difficult situations through the intelligent use of energy and in consideration for the opponent. Dealing with the problem of **Bogyo Shisei** is just another aspect to be mastered. To become great judo champions, it is imperative that judoka practice demonstrate and execute techniques of high quality and efficiency. Also of paramount importance is that each performance in combat reflects the true spirit and principles of judo.

Have a good practice. Hajime

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Sources:

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ⁱⁱ Awazu Shozo, *L'esprit de la compétition*, entrevue du 20 Nov. 2008, Renshikan judo Crozon.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mifune Kyuzo, *Canon of Judo, Principle and Technique*, JPT Company, Tokyo, 1963, page 37.

^{iv} Desormeaux Ronald, *Judo Ron 10, Gestion des Intervalles*, WWW.Scribd.com, 2008

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