

ZUIHITSU- Random notes on Judo by Ronald Desormeaux

Judo Ron 49: Managing critical conditions in a judo confrontation.

I was once told by my former Sensei Bernard Gauthier, that discovering the true values of judo was like cultivating a precious seed. The requirement to see it bloom and ripe all of its benefits will depend upon where, when and on whom it had been implanted. If not sowed on time and in the right individual, many false conceptions and interpretations will appear, on the contrary, when properly placed in the right individual, its precious virtues will emerge.

A similar philosophy can be applied to the current judo competition process. As we near the London judo Olympics in the summer of 2012, we are likely to witness various kinds of judo applications. Diverse attitudes and tactics by competitors will reveal their training philosophies seeds and their resourcefulness to secure an Olympic Victory. Combat ambiances will vary from total defiance and resistance between the opponents to selected use of disparate tactics such as dominating Kumi-Kata, spoiling tactics, bent postures, stalling techniques, use of penalties and other wrestling type maneuvers will be evident. It can be predicted that the exponents showing a dynamic style of judo by making various uses of true technical and versatile judo skills will be the minority. This statement emanates from observation of the elite judo competitive milieu during the past few years.

In the last two decades, several styles of fighting have emerged. The majority of approaches have stipulated that forces need to be met with corresponding or superior energy levels; others emphasized the playing on the rules to obtain the victory without risking too much. Another mode practiced by a few judoka tended to resort to greater flexibility, resourcefulness and quick displacement in order to maximize on the basic judo principle intelligent use of energy.

All the above avenues provide an adequate solution to the outcome of the confrontation, yet, only the latter is the one respecting the true principles of Judo as established by Jigoro Kano in 1882. In Judo Ron-46 of August 2011, we have already reported the Master Kano as saying:

“During Randori, stay relaxed and move freely”

In earlier discussion documents in the Judo-Ron series (WWW.Scribd.com), we have previously discussed the preparation and planning processes associated with the various competition objectives. It frequently reported the assertion made by Sensei M Kawaishi encouraging his students to perform Randori-Butsukari as often as possible in order to improve the application of techniques and gain the experiences of dealing with spontaneous and conflicting situations. The Sensei, as many other judo technicians, saw in the Randori, the finest opportunity for the judoka to choose a “special” Tokui-Waza and develop proper combination programs to situate his attacks from all directions and distances and against all styles of fighting opponents. The question remains: can this seed of knowledge be perpetuated and truly applied in Shiai?

“To learn and do, is not that a pleasure!” Confucius, Book 1

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The seeds of combat knowledge

“Not making the most of my mind, want of thoroughness in learning, failure to do the right thing when told, lack of strength to overcome faults; these are my sorrows.”

Confucius, (551-479 BC), Book Viiⁱⁱ

Combat strategies and tactics are traditionally learned and first experimented within the dojo, and then, they are applied at the competitive venues. Following the acquisition of his fundamental and technical bases through learning and practicing the techniques contained in the Gokyo syllabus, the judoka will embark upon the further study of dynamic exercises enclosed in the Randori training. In this special judo form of physical and mental education, the judoka must first learn to read the intentions of the opponent by looking at him and by observing his demeanor.

All the senses and the entire body must be trained and employed to detect, react naturally, manage and control the conflicting conditions. One must be able to perceive, to feel and to detect early signs of a potential aggression by the opponent. Both the opponent's intention and physical preparation to take the initiative must set off early warning signals to be managed by the judoka and acted upon promptly in order to make greater use of the opponent's energy on the way to secure the victory.

In all genres of judo competition and confrontation, notwithstanding the personal efforts made by the judoka to be alert, to maintain both his composure and proper balance, he must:

1. Be able to maneuver with ease in the combat zone regardless of the obstacles put forward by the opponent.
2. Be able to entice the opponent to unify his moves with the rhythm imposed for the effective use of his Tokui Waza.
3. Be able to learn and distinguish the opportunities and the right timing for action.

“Being able to beat someone is an immediate goal for many, but becoming able to outsmart someone at a future time is real judo savvy.” Jigoro Kano

While confined by time and space, the judoka must still try to assume control over the events and the opponent and take command of subsequent actions by:

1. Trying to gain a zone of freedom for placing his Tokui-Waza.
2. Finding the right opportunity to place the Kuzushi.
3. Moving with speed, creating confusion and surprise.
4. Attacking the weakest points.
5. Trying to anticipate and seeking the best opportunity to launch the initiative.

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Transferring knowledge into practical events

We too often take a glimpse of current World champions and from a five or seven minute's performance, make them our model. What is seen in those fleeting moments hide years of training and tactical preparation? To gain a better picture of what judo excellence is all about, there is a need to take a step back and get an overview of the origin and application of its principles. Historical judo books and seminars by elders normally provide good reference material.

To learn more about combat philosophy, sometimes, it is opportune to seek various role models outside our milieu and which can relate to the study of judo-like combat approaches. To that effect, we may learn from our own Canadian history and discover how our ancestors described the famous Iroquois War tactics and the reasons of their perceived invincibility in combat. Their tactics were summarized in the following description: *"Approach the enemy like a fox, attack like a lion and flee like a bird."* ⁱⁱⁱ

Preparing for the Shiai with constant Randori-type practices will reinforce the judoka capabilities to deal with crisis as they occur. Being alert yet detached during smaller encounters will increase the self confidence needed to tackle greater issues. Lessons learned must be outlined and studied after each encounter in order to be used in the future. Guided by the opponent movement who is attempting to take the initiative, one has to perfect his response by estimating distances and directions, altering his reactions and changing tactics in order to deceive and lure the opponent with various baits into his own net where a surprised attack is imminent.

When seeking innovative ways to avoid direct confrontation of strength versus strength, it may be beneficial to read the epics of Chinese history. One will note that the great Chinese strategist that was General Sun Tzu often recommended concealing one's strength until the last moment. In his book on the ART of War^{iv}, he recommended:

"When able to attack, we must seem unable. When using our forces, we must seem inactive. When we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away. When far away, we must make him think we are near." "When the enemy has made a plan to attack us, we must anticipate him by delivering our own attack first"

Similar circumstances prevail in judo contests. Each contestant faces off from a standing posture and soon the situation develops into a close combat for the control and superiority of the grip. It is therefore important for the judoka to plan, practice and adapt various initiatives during Randori training and expose them only when needed in true competitions. A compendium made of direct and indirect attacks must be developed and modified as needed to respond to changing milieus and circumstances. The variety of technical ensembles will give rise to endless series of technical solutions and possibilities thus covering all angles. When becoming mentally and physically agile, the judoka substantially increases his chance of victory.

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“All human freedom is limited by the laws of nature and of the mind”^{vi}

Plato, The Republic

A skillful judoka is said to master the offensive moments when the opponent cannot detect nor differentiate neither the moment nor the angle of the attack. In a defensive posture, the same judoka appears to manage the situation when his position does not reveal severe faults or deficiencies, thus denying all opportunities to the opponent.

“The soft overcome the hard and the weak the strong”^{vi}

Lao-Tzu

The judo principle of intelligent use of energy is visually present when the judoka is employing the trio combination of Kuzushi, Tsukuri and Kake. These three components are essentials to identify the right opportunity, to maximize on the opponent's weaker stance and unable the placement of the designated technique with minimum power and greater efficiency. Sensei Ichiro Abe 10th Dan of the Kodokan has always preached that the better use of strength is when the judoka is able to employ the opponent's energy to add to his own. In his book of “Judo” in 1967, he remarked:

“ Pour Tsukuri, placer l'adversaire dans la position la plus appropriée à l'exécution d'une projection et dans les conditions telles qu'il ne puisse se défendre...(Tori) se déplace dans la position la plus favorable lui permettant le maximum d'efficacité. »^{vii}

The above statement highlights the need to place the opponent into a vulnerable position and manage his reactions in order to place a Kuzushi action before attempting to throw. It reinforces the need for the judoka to impose a rhythm and manage his actions by proportionally pushing, pulling and guiding the opponent's energy into his or her designated entrapment. Of course not all judoka will react with the same portfolio of techniques nor decide when it is the most appropriate time to execute his savoir faire. Success will come to those who are prepared.

Let us bring to a close this reminder about the need to understand the judo principle of *intelligent use of energy* and its application in competition settings with the words of three French judo coaches who declared:

“S'entraîner à la tactique, c'est considérer son approche comme stratégiquement pertinente. Appréhender son articulation de façon pratique dans le processus d'entraînement c'est connaître son efficacité en compétition...ce qui n'est plus à démontrer. »^{viii}

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Conclusion

It is my hope that when you are engaged into a Randori or a Shiai, you will be able to identify, and reveal by your actions, how close you have remained true to the judo principles. When you witness a match involving others, you will be able to identify tactics and strategies that are aligned with and reveal a sincere and beautiful JUDO. If winning a bout or a match for the sake of gathering a medal appears to be the principal goal, then I think that such participation has diminished the true values of JUDO and seriously impeded the ways the contestants may excel in the future.

SEEK OUT the occasions to grow with a true JUDO and thus help others.

Have a good training session.

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References

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ⁱⁱ Leonard Lyall, *Saying of Confucius*, Longmans Green Ltd, Gutenberg E Book project, 2007

ⁱⁱⁱ Garneau François Xavier, *Histoire du Canada*, 1600-1610, page 206

^{iv} Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, page 123-125

^v Plato, *The Republic*, Gutenberg E Book Project, page 183

^{vi} Lao Tzu, *The Tao Teh King*, Gutenberg E book project, translated by James Legge, page 42

^{vii} Abe Ichiro, *Judo*, Presses Universitaires Bruxelles, Edition Chiron, 1967, page 27-29

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