

## GOLD MEDAL MECHANICS

A lecture given by Syd Hoare 8<sup>th</sup> Dan to the European Judo Union Foundation Degree Course at Bath University July 2005 formerly entitled Implementing and Evaluating a Performance Training Programme.

### Introduction

My first reaction to the title of this lecture (Implementing and Evaluating a Performance Programme) which was set me by Bath University was to scratch my head. What 'performance' were we talking about? Eventually I thought that it must be about winning gold medals and that this was the jargon for it. So that is how I interpreted the title and nobody has since corrected me on it. Gold Medal Mechanics is a revision of the lecture.

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Curiously enough, judo has a number of Confucian influences in it. One of them is called *seimei* which means correct naming. The Confucians believe that if something is incorrectly named chaos will result. This accounts for the fussy Japanese naming of techniques in the Kata, Gokyo and in the Kodokan Shitei-waza (designated techniques). So jargon is out.

Champions may be born with superior or innate qualities (which is a separate article) or are made in the dojo. In addition to that national or regional judo organizations may influence things which gets complicated because judo politics can intrude.

It would seem that the closer a fighter gets to winning major medals the more people want to tell him/her what to do such as where he should train, when he should compete and under which coach despite the fact that it might be the case that a fighter has done very well with his present coach and training set up.

Napoleon once said "Beginners talk of tactics – professionals talk of logistics". So what are the tactics and logistics of judo in this context? The logistics of judo are the background requirements that set the scene and the tactics are the specific techniques that score. The beginner says I'll catch my opponent with my Ko-uchi (tactic) but the professional asks are you fit, fast and accurate enough (logistics)? We need to look at both the wider logistical picture which may highlight problems which are difficult, time-consuming and expensive to change (eg. falling judo numbers) and also at the narrower technical and tactical picture.

The *evaluation* of a programme is relatively easy. It is medals actually won at a high level that tell us whether our programme is working or not. Medals won in lesser championships for example may mark the progress of a future star but what one really wants to see is that *actual* medal and if that medal is won at senior continental or world championships level so much the better. This evaluation must ignore those competitors and their coaches who are good at convincing others that they just missed a medal because they were injured or the referees were incompetent etc etc etc. Certainly the government bodies that fund sport expect to see results at that level. Creating medal *potential* means little. I served for two years as the judo rep on the British National Olympic Committee (NOC) and this last point was brought home

quite forcibly. If you win good medals you get government funding but if you only create medal potential you may not because you are competing for funding with all the other sports that have not won good medals and who are busy telling the British Olympic Association (BOA) what 'fantastic potential' they have.

## **PART I**

### In the dojo

Producing a gold medal performance in any sport is a difficult business and staying at the top is even more difficult as any Premier League soccer manager will tell you. Yet in some respects it is very simple:- Find a good coach with a proven track record. Have faith in him. Study judo in all its complexity, do more judo, increase your judo skills, get faster, get more durable, get stronger, enter as many competitions as possible, study the tactics and strategies of judo and study your opponents. These are the tasks of both the competitor and the coach. Both have difficult tasks. The coach must know a lot if he is training up more than one competitor and the trainee has to do all the grinding work.

Judo does not work like clockwork. It is never a case of push here and pull there and they will fall over. Coaches may or may not really know their stuff and students may or may not understand what they are told. Results can be slow in coming through and both the coach and the student can have a tough time navigating their way to the gold medal.

To start with it is all very simple:- The coach gathers young people around him and teaches them correctly from the beginning. He then introduces them to competition at an early stage to give them a taste for it and then builds up to four or five strong free-fighting sessions a week in his dojo. Thereafter he/she may add in endurance and strength training in the gym or on the track and sharpen or add to their technical repertoires. The coach must make sure they learn from the contests and tries to foster the group spirit both on and off the mat and inspire them making them part of an experience that hopefully they will never forget. It will take a few years even with the most talented. There is a lot for the coach to do and for the students to learn. Judo is technically very complicated.

#### Gather a group around you.

This sounds easy but I am reminded of an initiative with the local Council that I organised at my London club. A large group of local youths turned up for the first (free) session but by lesson two they were all asking when the kicking and punching was going to start. (They thought judo and kick-boxing were the same!) I said to them this is judo – we don't do kicks and punches. 'Yere', they said, 'When can we kick and punch?' Another local judo teacher who was part of the same Council initiative discovered that he could hang on to his students longer if he got them to do simple wrestling take-downs to the mat and then some pins. Judo it seems was not that popular. So what will hook them?

### Introduce them to competition

Some years ago I began teaching judo at two secondary schools in my part of south London. After a few months I organized a match between the two. That soon meant a rematch and thereafter I played one school off against the other. For example if I was showing some moves I would mention to School B that School A was much better at them which would always get school B worked up and vice versa. Then when eventually both schools competed in the national schools championships the rivalry between both got very strong and they were hooked. Some of them later got into the national team.

A club coach has to recognize that to do his job properly he will probably end up having to travel to competitions with his team up and down the country on a regular basis. This is very time consuming but has to be done. However in the early days the coach can organize matches with other local clubs or even organize his own local championships. It is not that difficult to give them a taste for competing and even get some early successes at it. Club-based recreational judo does not seem to grab the kids particularly which is not to say that under an inspiring coach it cannot be done.

### Teach them well from the very beginning.

By this I mean teach the essential components of the top scoring throws etc. It is not good enough to show them something that bears a passing resemblance to grading theory illustrations. Check out what statistics you can find on the top scoring techniques or do the research and establish your own statistics. The attention span of many kids these TV days is quite short so a coach who stands in the middle of the mat and pontificates about the seven essential points of Osotogari is not going to hold their attention for long. Instruction should be short and pithy and needs to be presented as an answer or key to the opponents' movement, non-movement or posture. In other words present realistic, relevant coaching that works. For example they should know how to do their throws against right-handers, left-handers or on square-on crouching attackers and what to do when the opponent spreads his legs wide, or circles or retreats and how to handle a taller person or shorter person and so on.

Over the years I have spent quite a lot of time doing judo randori and during that time learned to bring off quite a large number of ippon with different techniques both in randori and occasionally in contest. This was often unplanned. One day a new technique half-worked unexpectedly and thereafter I worked on it and made it mine. As consequence I felt confident that I could teach those techniques. I knew what worked for me and often for others. I grew my own **technique tree** so to speak and I became a **technique-thief** which is to say I stole the techniques of others.

Tai-otoshi and Osotogari were my first techniques to get results. Then Ko-uchi and O-uchi-gari joined the club. After that my Uchi-mata got stronger and stronger and I added it and other similar throws such as O-guruma and Ashi-guruma to the repertoire. Next Kosotogari, De-ashi-barai and Okuri-ashi joined the arsenal of throws followed by Osoto-gari and Tomoe-nage (straight or side). I ended up being able to do a very powerful Osotogari and because people were wary of it took many wins with my other throws as they reacted to my opening moves. In addition I learned how to make the spin-turn (mawarikomi) with the Uchimata and the Oguruma. I was always mindful of the need to win on the ground and learned to move slickly into it from standing. Towards the end of my competition life I added on tricks such as

standing armlocks, wrestling arm-drags, hikkomi-gaeshi, various sumo moves and various counter throws such as ude-guruma. Many of the above combined with each other. This process is not particularly unusual. Any judoka will experience the same path however *the coach has to learn a lot more*. On the negative side my Seoinage was useless and I had little success in throwing with Osotogari to the left. I also had little in the way of hip-throws although Uchi-mata and O-guruma got close to them.

#### Get a good training partner.

Part of the process requires a good training partner. This means that the coach has to spend a certain amount of time showing the partner (*uke*) how to be a good one especially when working on technique. Many *ukes* can be either too obstructive or too helpful, without realizing it. The coach and the students have to believe that good technique is the ultimate answer. Some act as if they do not. They teach a crude version of a throw, maybe increase their trainees' strength and endurance and this plus a modest amount of randori manages to get some results. It all depends on how high they are aiming. This is not good enough if they want the best medals.

#### Train harder than everybody else.

At this point one has to acknowledge that many famous past champions put in tremendous amounts of mat (randori) time. Although it is not scientific advice I think it is necessary to say to one's judo students 'Work harder and learn more judo than everybody else and you will get those medals!' The aspiring champion can also do a lot on his own - he does not have to have a coach - but why do it the hard way if you know somebody who can help you!

#### Run four or five strong randori sessions a week.

Once the young student gets the judo bug the amount of quality work he/she does in judo should increase naturally. The coach must constantly emphasize the link between realistic coaching, active mat time and competition success. It takes a long time to get good at judo and the coach has to be careful how he handles his students. It is easy for them to go wrong or get bored. So keep it upbeat and on a roll and enter them for plenty of competitions.

#### Extra off-mat training?

After a couple of years judo life can get difficult for two related reasons. Firstly training time gets **crowded** because there are too many things to work on (such as techniques, strength, power, and endurance, suppleness, agility, fast feet etc) and secondly because **exhaustion** interferes – it takes a few days at least to recover from very hard training and a few weeks to recover from a top competition. Balancing one against the other gets difficult. Prioritising raises its head.

Many competitors feel the need to do weight-training. This maybe springs from a feeling of weakness when fighting a good competitor. Our competitor says to himself I am not strong enough, I must do weights. But he is not to know how his opponent got so strong – he/she may never have touched weights at all. Many top Japanese coaches don't believe in weight-training and many of their students go on to be world champions. It may become necessary to choose the most effective form of training. The choice often boils down to randori v. weights (resistance training). Randori can make you stronger and a better technician but all weights can do is make you stronger or correct any physical weaknesses you have.

### Train for the event

Whether competitors go on to weight-train or do more randori they must always make sure that they are training specifically for the event. If a championship day consists of a number of 5-minute bouts at a near maximum level of physical output, fitness-training for it should mimic that with similar amounts of rest in between bouts.

One way to check the intensity is to check the pulse rates of your trainees during a hard match or training session. This will be the pulse rate to aim at in circuit training or randori. Obviously this is not for the really young ones but from about the age of sixteen they can start to do more randori, weight-training and/or circuits on a local track or in the gym. Off-mat training is more applicable when there are not a lot of practising bodies on the mat. If there are a lot of bodies, randori takes priority.

Whatever form of off-mat training is done the actual exercises must try to mirror the movements you do on the mat. **Get real!** For example the standard bench-press pushing a bar up from the chest with a wide grip is not a movement you would make on the mat if you were trying to push your opponent away. It is much more likely that you would keep your elbows in to your side. In which case using heavy dumbbells in that position would be more beneficial. Working with dumbbells means that the arms will have to work separately without a stronger arm compensating for the weaker one. Using dumbbells also means you can vary the hand positions. Small tweaks in the way you do any exercise can be very useful for judo. Look to see whether there are not some exercises which will give you the edge. For example make your grip stronger and almost unbreakable. Make your deltoids (shoulder muscles) strong so that you can lift your elbows up as you turn in for a throw. Build a strong neck for bridging out of hold-downs and as a defence against strangles and so on. Make your legs very springy by doing the sort of jumping training that high-jumpers do.

As mentioned above the coach runs up against one related big problem which is that it takes time to recover from a really tough workout whether with weights or randori. Many top body-builders say that it takes about five days to recover fully from a blitz workout on any part of the body. Doctors who have assisted squad competition training have told me that it may take up to three weeks for competitors to recover from major international competition fatigue and stress as shown by an analysis of their blood.

Track or gym training can be done at any time but randori has to happen at fixed times when the club/squad members gather. Let us say that Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday are your Randori days how do you fit in the off-mat training? Well of course you still have Tuesday and Thursday so you could do weights or circuits on the two weekdays and a long run on the Sunday but you might like to take one day a week off from training to recover a bit. However you distribute the workouts there is no easy answer. Training when exhausted is probably a waste of time.

Another way to sugar the pill is to do a split programme working on the lower body one day and on the upper-body on another day. This would only make the trainee partially exhausted. Programmes of different sorts can also be concentrated on at different times of the training year. For example a six week strength and power

programme could be followed in January and then in mid-summer with less attention given to the other forms of judo training but the gains made from this training would have to be preserved in a maintenance programme in between times. Use it or lose it - says it all!

### Study exercise physiology.

Get interested in exercise physiology and try to apply it to the judo training whenever you can. However, choose your physiology books wisely – some can be over-complicated. From what I read of exercise physiology the first step was to define what sort of sport I did in exercise-physiology terms. What sort of demands were made on my body in judo competition? I went on to define judo as a **muscular (or strength)-endurance sport** with frequent **power** peaks for throwing. In judo terms this means being able to work against constant high resistance, especially in the arms and upper body plus explosive attempts at throwing in between. The explosive work required strong legs and a strong lower back as in doing a Snatch lift. So if I was working out with the weights in the gym for muscular endurance I would do a high reps and high sets workout of about 20 reps per set (of 4) with a timed and strictly limited amount of rest between each set.

However many top Japanese coaches do not feel the need for extra strength or endurance training since **judo itself is a form of strength and endurance training already. Manhandling the opponent's weight and your own body-weight is hard work. This can increase the trainee's strength and endurance albeit in a random way.** However technique is worked on at the same time. The coach has to make sure that the competitor does not use weights as a substitute for mat technique.

By ignoring this type of off-mat weights based strength-training the coach/student simplifies the training choices he has to make. However, the individual competitor may feel that he has to push weights etc in which case the coach must be able to help him with good routines. In a way we are very lucky in judo to have randori. We can vary its intensity all the way up from a gentle pull around on the mat to the severity of an Olympic final.

### Cardio-vascular endurance

Do not confuse cardio-vascular (heart and lungs) endurance with muscular endurance. You will only be able to work against high resistance for a short time, as in weight-lifting but will be able to work against much lighter resistance for a much longer time, as in the marathon. For cardio-vascular endurance I always found it beneficial to do runs of an hour or more. In practice this meant one or two runs per week. I always felt that this was **training for training** not directly training for medals but very useful nevertheless. It made the randori easier to handle physically. At this stage the coach and competitor have to make important choices and judgements. Fitting it all in will be difficult but the absolute bottom line must be your commitment to 4-5 tough randori sessions per week since so much can be achieved at those times. If the numbers don't exist in your dojo go looking for them or compensate as best you can with weights, runs and circuit-training etc.

### Peaking

Not so long ago it was common for Japanese judoka to train hard right up to the day of the event. On the other hand many non-Japanese brought their training to a peak

about five or seven days before it and allowed themselves to recover fully which sounds like commonsense. Some interpret peaking to mean gradually increasing the severity of training in the weeks before the competition. In other words this was to bring their training to new heights. With many sports such as weightlifting or track and field events it makes sense to aim for personal bests most of the time but judo does not easily slot into this group unless training includes strength training and running. A judo athlete and his or her coach should have a good idea of how much rest is required for full recuperation.

#### Create an innovative repertoire..

There is a lot to learn in judo but there is still scope for improvisation and new techniques. The responsibility for learning about judo lies equally with the competitor and the coach. The coach should use the dojo blackboard to write up what the competitor must be working on long term. Every competition requires a post mortem not only of the individual club competitors but of the competition as a whole. Look for new techniques and trends and try them out. Look to other similar sports such as wrestling for useful moves. They may suit you.

#### Train as a group, compete as a group, experience success as a group.

If you do manage to get a group of youngsters into serious training that will create a group spirit all of its own. Others will seek to become part of that and join the group. In a long established club you may have a whole spectrum of current school champions, national junior champions, national senior champions and internationals of both sexes. The chemistry between young and old will be amazing. These people will become your support group and they are very very important. Most importantly the competitors and the club will require a good ORGANISER. The coach has his specific coaching role and the organiser organises. Make sure that you find someone in your club who can help with the tedious business of entering contests and chaperoning your club members to different parts of the country.

#### Luck and inspiration

As I write this I have been watching the soccer world cup in South Africa. Already a number of top teams have gone down to under-rated teams. They shouldn't have but they did. All sorts of variables affect a match but luck or chance plays a part in all this and it is wise to recognize it. So who are the judo medal winners? I looked at my international (Olympic/World/Continental) judo competition results data base that covers a fourteen year period to get a picture of the results of international players (I record places 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>). What surprised me was that *half* of the people recorded managed only one result which could be anywhere from the gold to 7<sup>th</sup> place. In other words half of all international 1-7<sup>th</sup> place winners rise once like shooting stars then fall to earth never to be seen again at that level. This is not a criticism.

However this interesting statistic may give encouragement. What is it about this statistic and what does it tell us? Maybe it indicates that half of all medals/places are susceptible to an **inspired** performance. Sometimes we see an unknown competitor who comes through to the final of a major event such as the World championships or Olympics and one gets an impression of peak fitness, freshness, and strength which he/she may find impossible to repeat later. Similarly we know that performing in front of a home crowd nearly always lifts performance and that the draw can be a wild card too (although the introduction of a ranking/seeding system can limit this

opportunity). Whatever the reason it happens, so aim to step on the mat feeling super-fit and knowing that you can take a good medal (because the statistics show it is possible). When you do step on the mat have faith in the fact that you have trained harder than most of your opponents or better still harder than all of them.

It is as well to recognize that competition coaches do not have a free hand to create medallists. As coaches we like to think that we created a champion, that so and so is one of mine but in reality it doesn't work that way. First they have their own minds and learn from their own experiences (sometimes wrongly), secondly they are influenced by other competitors and coaches and finally some competitors don't want a coach at all - they want to do it all by themselves. At most one can say that one has helped a successful competitor.

So to summarize so far:- the student must get in at least four strong randori sessions a week each one lasting up to at least two hours. Keep going the whole time. If you schmooze you lose. When the coach calls out 'Change Partners' quickly bow then turn away and grab the nearest person who you have not fought already that session. Without being too intrusive the coach must observe his students carefully and offer advice not necessarily all the time but at key moments. To start with, the student must work on these skills with not such strong people (every dojo needs them). He/she must genuinely experience success here (not somebody who is being kind). The job of the coach is to study judo and learn absolutely everything he can about it.

Apply your self to your training. Very little happens overnight. It may take a few months for an adjustment to your throw to start paying off and even longer for a completely new throw. I remember recommending to Neil Adams, who came to train at the Budokwai as a teenager, that he should develop an Uchi-mata. He had a sharp low Tai-otoshi but its success seemed to rely on his very low entry. I thought that it would not be that difficult to stop it having experienced it a few times. I reasoned that he needed to stay higher and lift up with his leg as in Uchimata. He began working on it spending a couple of hours doing uchi-komi in the afternoons and then trying to bring it off in the main evening sessions. It took about one year before he could rely on it against the other club black-belts. Eventually he could beat the best with it. His greatest moment with the two throws was when he fought in the Kano cup where he fought Nishida of Japan. Nishida was expecting the low drop and never saw the uchi-mata coming. After the throw the audience were stunned to silence. They did not see it coming either. This throw was said to be the best of the tournament.

## PART TWO

### Logistics

So having looked at medal winning training in the dojo the next thing to look at is the wider logistics of medal winning. So I ask myself what would I do if I had a completely free hand.

The main consideration has to be getting the fighters to where there are many bodies on a judo mat either by travelling to where they exist already (France/Japan) or by locating a national training centre where there is an existing judo population already and where others may be strongly enticed to visit such as London – not forgetting that

London is a major tourist destination in its own right. Countries with large judo populations have a huge advantage since they are able to create a kind of pyramid of dojos, competitions and training centres which feed into each other. Countries without large judo populations need to tap into those that do have the numbers - if the country concerned will allow it..

While it is not impossible to train up a champion with a handful of training partners (as in a professional boxing) the wide range of technique (both offensive & defensive) in judo demands a lot of time spent doing randori with as many different opponents as possible. So to start with the coach needs a good supply of randori partners of roughly the same size as his would-be champions and the best technical and fitness expertise available. Pulling all these requirements together will require organizational skills and money.

A word of warning - one hundred people on a mat can look very busy but what a light-weight fighter needs is a good supply of other *light-weights*. On a daily basis one would want one lightweight to work out with at least ten to fifteen similarly sized capable fighters. The more the merrier.

There is one other less obvious requirement and that is the need for a few *moderately capable* training partners on whom you can try new moves. If I say to a budding competitor that he needs a major throw on his opposite side (eg. left Osotogari) he can then try it out on the not so strong ones and not have to worry too much about being countered. This would increase his training pool to about twenty lightweights. With each randori taking say six minutes this would equal a hard 90-120 minutes worth of continuous daily work. But you would not want any old training partners. It would be a good idea to have both right and left-handers, those looking for groundwork wins, counter-throw wins, passivity wins or straight throws etc etc.

So the numbers required are substantial. *Obviously a small training centre could not provide those numbers for all weight categories but could perhaps do well by concentrating on a single weight category?* Probably players of a similar weight such as at the lighter and heavier ends of the scale could usefully be grouped together. Another factor to take into account is that many competitors do not like to train regularly with near rivals - once in a while maybe, but not all the time.

In the UK a central *national* dojo (with accommodation) in a large city such as London, for example, should be able to entice good mat numbers from both home and abroad but I think it a big mistake to locate it in one tranquil rural spot with not much to do outside of training hours (like Bisham Abbey). I have spoken to some competitors who say that life at Bisham can get very boring. Lively spirit has to be maintained.

In fact if I could roll the years back I think I would feel very tempted to take off to Japan again and train there for frequent periods of at least three months. This would of course be absolutely dependent on getting sufficient competition experience and being able to participate in those events that are part of the national and Olympic ranking and qualification process.

### Judo in Tokyo – A Case Study

To take a practical example how do Japanese university judo students aged from 18 – 22 yrs train in Tokyo, a city with probably the biggest concentration of judo trainees in the world (There are over fifty universities in Tokyo)? Firstly they train (mostly randori) each afternoon in their own university dojo where there might be about 40 students at any one session. The training will be mostly in the afternoon 3-5.30pm from Monday to Saturday. At other times they have to study their degree subject. This training will be *non-stop* and hard. During the year there will be special training camps known as *Gasshuku* when they will train in the country *twice* a day for one to two weeks. This will be even tougher.

The students will not always train in their own dojo. Often they will go to the Kodokan in the afternoon to train with other visiting university judo groups. The Kodokan afternoon practise will usually be as tough as the student groups visiting it. Often one university group will go and train in another university dojo and it is fairly usual for student groups to go to the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Instructors dojo which runs a session every morning 10-11.30. The policemen are older than the students but their groundwork is very strong. In order of toughness the university dojos come first followed by the Keishicho and then the Kodokan which varies a bit. As can be seen despite the large student numbers per dojo the format of the training varies considerably. *They do not train solely with each other..*

### Test and measurement

Whether for technique, strength or endurance the coach will set targets which means that quite a lot of measurement must go on to check that the targets are being met. Targets met or exceeded tell the coach that progress is being made. Targets that are not being met tell the coach he might have a lazy or deluded squad member.

For example the coach could set good target times for say the 100m sprint (10-12secs), 1500m (6mins) and 5000m (19-21mins) runs and set target lifts for the squat, snatch, clean and jerk, bent over rowing, bench press and so on. Body measurements or photos could also be taken to indicate the growing physical reaction to all the training the fighter is doing. Realism is needed here. An improving 1500m time for example may show diligence in training but has to be taken into account along with judo contest results. We are not in the business of producing runners or weight-lifters!

As for technical monitoring the individual trainee and his coaches need to record all contest results, what he/she is working on and keep videos and photographs of themselves and their main international rivals. Video work is very important. A coach and his trainee needs constant good feedback to be able to compare what he is doing in uchi-komi, nage-komi, randori and in competition. *Some competitors are not very self-aware.* You tell them to turn more, they nod but carry on doing what they were doing before. The video work should show this up.

It is quite interesting how often uchi-komi, nage-komi and the actual contest throw differ. Say to a trainee do ten uchi-komi on uchi-mata then finish it with the full throw. With the final switch to the throw you may often notice a grip change. Then compare videos of the man actually throwing someone cleanly with uchi-mata in contest and the nagekomi version. The relative stances of the two fighters will often

be different as will the footwork and grips. What the coach must try to do here is work with the trainee and merge perceptions of the throw and what makes it good or bad.

Getting fit for judo is a relatively straight forward business – the knowledge is there – but training for technical improvement is less so. The classic model for technical improvement is the Japanese one of hard randori for long spells. Aside from this there is uchi-komi but it cannot be relied on for technical training – it rarely matches the contest moves. World champion Sugai summed it up when he said, “Judo is all about skilful adaptation under stress” and this adaptation comes usually when the competitor has entered for the throw and is in the final *kake* stage of the throw.

However there is a big danger here and that is it becomes far too easy for a coach to rely on *randori* for training. That is precisely what every other coach in the world is doing but the coach has to go beyond that for the extra edge. Small percentage gains have to be looked for in all aspects of training.

### 10,000hrs

Just recently I read about somebody who came up with the theory that every successful performer (sport, music etc) has to put in at least 10,000 hours training to get to the top. This instantly reminded me of the Asian (Japanese, Chinese, Korean) attitude to training. Three hours training six days a week for one year would equal about one thousand hours and to reach that magic 10,000 would take about ten years! So start about 15 years old and become Olympic champion by 25 perhaps! One thing is for sure and that is a competitors' judo career will take about 10 years from start to finish. Those years between say 15 and 25 are the crucial years which must not be wasted.

There was one Japanese champion who set himself a target of 10,000 randori per year but he fell just short of that target. The great Kimura aimed to double what anybody else was doing. It does seem that those with the greatest hunger for training are the medal winners. One British international I knew got his best results when he combined working daily on building sites and judo in the evenings. Maybe the hours of hard physical work daily gave him a special kind of fitness and durability.

I once went to a blind Shiatsu masseuse who worked close to the Kodokan in Tokyo. During the treatment she said to me, ‘You’re not a labourer are you!’ This greatly surprised me because I thought that the judo training would build a well-muscled physique. ‘Why do you say that’, I asked her. She replied that my muscles were not that hard. Food for thought!

### Technical Training

It is a great advantage to have at hand people who are or were very good at their main techniques. I was known as an Osoto man. I often noticed that others who were pretty good at their main throw (Seoi or whatever) often seemed to miss the point when it came to teaching Osotogari (and they probably thought the same about my Seoi instruction!). So best if possible is to have the specialists around to teach their speciality, especially if they do one or more of the main scoring throws. Sometimes even minor adjustments can make a big difference.

### Competition statistics

One technical pointer is contest stats. Competition statistics can help identify what wins but they have to be accurate. Currently a lot depends on the skill of the people who record the winning techniques and who allot them a name as per the IJF lists. Identifying new successful competition techniques and trends is useful but many so called new techniques can already be found in other combat arts so I would take it a step further and make the squad regularly train in other wrestling styles under a good wrestling coach.

Judo analysis also needs to be much more thorough. We coaches need to know how many contests are won with combination techniques or straight attacks and how many attacks were done on the left or right.

Thirdly contest tactics and strategy seems to be a relatively undeveloped. For example the five minutes of a contest can usefully be divided into different sections with different rates of activity and different objectives. (see my articles on Tactics and Strategies)

As of now the coach has to rely on his own technical understanding of judo to a large extent which is not the case for judo fitness. There is a lot to work on and whoever does it first will have the edge.

### Uchikomi

Uchikomi has been in judo for some time (although there is very little reference to it in early judo books). The old word for it was Butsukari (slam into) which comes from sumo where slamming-in has an important use. In my view uchi-komi is mostly counter-productive. Mainly because judo is largely about skilful adaptation under stress. However its use persists and can be used to fulfil different functions. Coaches must be clear about why they do it:-

- (1) Warm-up uchikomi – good for warming up before a session
  - (2) Conditioning uchikomi – used to create a hard judo-like physical workouts (in circuit training for example)
  - (3) Learning uchikomi – practising new stuff in order to memorize it.
  - (4) Reminder uchikomi – going over a wide range of techniques to remind the students what is out there in the hope that some of it will stick
  - (5) Sharpening uchikomi – working on increasing speed, accuracy, position, timing, power under realistic conditions. This is the most important aspect of the lot but it needs to be kept absolutely *realistic* and it requires a good training partner. Otherwise it may be a waste of time.
  - (6) Pretty-uchikomi. This is highly stylized showy, exaggerated movements which do not much look like the real thing. Japanese are prone to this. An off-shoot of this is pretty randori which always gives me the impression that the players are playing at judo.
- (Nage-komi (actually throwing the training partner) is a much better alternative to uchi-komi but suffers from the fact that few like being thrown hard too many times and it takes longer to make each repetition).

### Analysis

Some very hard-headed analysis sessions should follow competitions with the player concerned told **bluntly** what the coaches (and maybe other players) think. No mutual

admiration sessions. Considering national organizations spend a lot of tax-payers money on competitors we need to be able to demand value for money. Poor results then out. This is may not be so harsh as it seems since a player can always prove his/her worth by entering some of the smaller World Cups dotted around Europe at his or her own expense.

Well much of this is pretty well known already. I am not saying anything new and I am aware that I have missed all sorts of things out such as weight loss, judo psychology, diet, rest and recovery, suppleness etc. More than anything I lean to anticipating results from good overall background systems and organization (logistics). Good numbers, strong clubs, intense rivalry, good competition structure including novice and club team championships and a more competitive membership are all vital.

One thing I did every session was to spend 20 minutes at the beginning calling out the names of the throws and they had to do them instantly and fast. Often it followed a theme such as hip throws only or variations on a single throw. I also used the dojo black board a lot to write up what throws our club squad had to work on long term. I remember the day when I wrote up on the black board Angelo Parisi –Left and right Osotogari and he later went on to win an Olympic gold (for France, after marrying a French girl)!

#### Cover all directions

One rule of thumb I worked to achieve when I was a competitor was to be able to throw my opponent in all directions. I got this idea off a Scottish international judoka who had a throw for whatever direction his opponent moved after they had come to grips. This worked well for him. I realized that as a right-handed judoist I did not have a power throw for my opponent's left back corner other than a right O-uchigari and Kosotogari. But a left Osotogari fitted the bill perfectly and it seemed that many people only had a weak defence for this direction. Luckily Angelo Parisi was able to throw left and right and he had many successes with his left Osoto. So include left and right Osoto in your repertoire and don't forget to change your grips..

#### The End Result

In my head I have an image of a successful competitor which I always try to create. They must be very fit, strong and *hard*, both physically and mentally and they should be able to breeze physically through any contest. They must have a good range of precise scoring techniques (Tachi-waza and Ne-waza), be canny in contest, meaning that they read a contest well and know what they are doing. Many of our foreign competitors come from countries where life is hard and sport is a way out of that. They are tough but we must be tougher than them.

I think a coach has to have a knack for identifying the mood of a training session. When they are truly knackered or flat reign back but when they are lively push the pedal to the metal and take them to the limit. Often the coach must become like an actor on the stage striding around and shouting and whacking them with his belt (so to speak) but always with a half smile on his face. Very important.

In the coach we need organizational ability, communication skills, toughness blended with humour, ruthlessness when needs be, a very wide knowledge of judo and its

training methods and an ability to think outside the box. It is the **mix** that the coach creates that is vitally important.

### **PART THREE** **Strategies**

In Part One of this lecture I looked at the basics of winning medals first in the dojo and in Part Two at some wider logistical considerations. Now I finish with a look at the longer range strategies of judo which the coach may not be able to do much about.

#### The Participation Base

If no one walked through the doors of our judo clubs we would have no raw material to work with. No doubt a country with a single dojo of forty fanatics could provide a national team and do very well but I suspect that they will not do as well as countries with many clubs and a large judo population such as France or Japan. So we have a duty as coaches/administrators to promote judo and increase the numbers as best we can. *The more members we have the greater the chance of discovering good performers.* We need to look carefully at our sport. Are we winning or losing as far as the membership numbers go? I have lived through long periods when the trend of individual British Judo Association memberships was plainly down and yet nobody ever mentioned it. It was like TV's Basil Fawlty in Fawlty Towers and his "Don't mention the war!" If a decline exists first acknowledge it and then do something about it in just the same way that a business would if sales were down.

Another indicator is the number of clubs in the geographical area one is in. Are the dojos increasing in number or are they declining? I can recall the days when there were well over one hundred clubs in London and now there are maybe thirty-five or less. Slowly the numbers declined but nobody in charge ever mentioned it. Perhaps they felt it was unpatriotic to do so.

Statistics as we know can be manipulated so care must be taken that like is contrasted with like, and that we are not comparing apples with pears. Phrases such as, 'Judo is Britain's fastest growing sport' need to be treated as meaningless. Similarly picking out one small flourishing section of the membership (eg. women/juniors) and saying the membership is up is also misleading. The point about statistics is to acknowledge whatever facts emerge and do something about it. Skewed statistics help nobody.

I was once asked to lecture on judo in Japan and as part of my preparation I contacted a number of foreign judo federations and asked them for some membership figures. They were mostly very helpful. However the Japanese reaction surprised me. Firstly there were no figures since individual membership of the All-Japan Judo Federation did not exist. I asked around among Japanese judo friends and one very senior coach asked me why I needed to know. I said to him, 'It is simple, I want to know if the judo movement is winning or losing'. He thought about that for a minute and nodded. Later on he asked me for details about the BJA membership scheme.

#### The product

If the numbers are down we have to look at our product – judo. Why do people do it? Who are our competitors? Do people confuse us with other martial arts? Do people get what they want when they join a judo class? What image does judo project? Why

do people stay in Judo? Or to take a different tack lets ask why do people do tennis or football or boxing etc and see if the answers throw any light on the judo situation.

After one lecture in Bath University I asked the students “Why do people do judo? There was quite a lot of hesitation and head scratching but eventually someone ventured the timid suggestion that they do judo for self defence reasons. The class sort of agreed with that so I said how many of your clubs offer self defence classes. None of them did so I suggested that meant they were not giving them what they wanted.”

What I was trying to highlight was the fact that we ought to try and find out why people join us and do our best to full fill their wishes. It might be pure chance that draws people to judo but even knowing that might help us to increase numbers. For some answers to these difficult questions the national associations may have to spend some money on *market research* but it needs to spend it very wisely. But beware - you may only learn from a market researchers what you have told them already.

Sometimes the sheer success of a competitor may pull many people behind him/her including the media. This can play quite a large role in the fortunes of any judo organization. But all such individuals eventually retire from competition and can leave us all high and dry if we are not careful.

#### Who are our competitors

In the absence of solid market research I assume that as a combat sport our competitors are other combat sports. So if somebody is thinking of doing a combat sport why should they come to us? In what way are we different from the rest? I suspect that the general public confuses us with all those martial arts that wear white (or coloured) cotton suits, wrap coloured belts around their middles, bow to each other, do it in bare feet and use oriental terminology.

When I was chairman of the BJA in the 1980s I organized some market research via a questionnaire which we sent to all the clubs. We asked judo people and we asked non-judo people their thoughts about various aspects. It turned out that very few members of the general public knew the difference between karate, aikido and judo and I suspect that things have not changed much since then. Judo is probably still a badly defined martial art. So those judo clubs that began to run other martial arts in their dojos may have unwittingly diverted many people away from judo.

#### What is Judo?

We could of course promote judo in the usual way as a fitness and character building Olympic combat sport but is that what people really want out there? I wonder what is the point of promoting judo as an Olympic sport if there are many other Olympic sports to choose from? Nowadays if people want fitness they join a health club and in my experience few start judo for self-defence reasons. So why do judo?

In the distant past Judo grew massively on the notion that it was the way a little man could beat a big man and it was done by using the big man's strength back on him. Later on, by extension, it was claimed that strength was not necessary to do judo. It is true of course that a small experienced judoist can beat a much bigger inexperienced opponent but was unlikely to do so if he was bigger and experienced.

In so far as judo grew very rapidly in the early days this must have been an amazingly effective advertising pitch! Just after the second world war, judo first flourished because it was virtually the *only* oriental martial art around. People queued up to get in. I can remember when beginner's classes at the Budokwai were always fully booked and there was a time in the early sixties when there were six full beginners classes running each week. Then along came Karate and Kung Fu etc and the judo numbers died away quite a bit.

Also around this time judo got in the Olympics and of course many countries started doing judo which increased the overall numbers of those doing judo in the world but this did not necessarily swell the membership numbers of those countries already doing judo such as France. In fact the UK saw a big leap in membership numbers around 1964 (the first judo Olympics) but thereafter they slowly fell back.

### Dojo judo versus Sport judo

At this stage we come up against what I regard as possibly one of the biggest logistical problems as far as implementing a 'performance training programme' goes and that is the apparent non-competitive nature of judo. In the BJA we have roughly thirty thousand registered members but probably less than a thousand junior and senior competitors which represents only 3.3% of that total. With many sports it is taken for granted that apart from learning it in the first place you then go on to compete in teams, leagues, championships or whatever. But in British judo there are few competitors and one must assume that judo in the UK is mainly recreational and based solely in the dojos.

I suspect that one of the main reasons for this lack of competitors may be the grading system. It has many advantages but perhaps it helps create a closed dojo environment. The judoka gets his black belt and stays in his club which probably keeps him happy. What need is there to compete? Many a time when somebody learns that I do judo they ask what belt I have. Then I say black belt and that answers their question. If I was a boxer or a runner they wouldn't ask that question they would say what have you won.

### HQ

Another strategic factor is the location of the national association's head office. There are many functions carried out in or near the head office such as AGMs, presentations, committee meetings, press conferences and so on and by virtue of the HQ being in a certain location there is a good chance that major judo events will also be held nearby and that association employees will also be drawn from the immediate area. Media access is important since sports journalists may not travel much outside the capital if they can help it. It also helps to be located near the offices of the national sport funding body as happened in the past. British judo lost a lot when its HQ moved to Leicester and stopped using Crystal Palace for its major championships. There is a strong case for a judo HQ with attached large dojo and dormitory accommodation to be located in London to cater for the national squad training. I know, I'm a Londoner and would say this wouldn't I, but I am fairly certain that a dojo in a major city such as London would also pull in a lot of foreign judoka and visiting teams who would be good training partners for our guys. In short we have to ask ourselves is the HQ in the best position.

### People Power

And we even have to ask if the structure of the national association is the best for producing the goods or does it just serve the needs of judo's political fraternity. In the case of the British Judo Association I have always thought that individuals rather than clubs should be the voting members of the Association and that they should have the right to propose people for the Board of Directors not the Area Associations.. One first step in that direction might be giving each club a vote according to the number of BJA members it has. This might also push up the BJA membership numbers. We need a system that brings competent people through whether competitors or administrators. In our quest for total excellence nothing should be sacred. (Check out the famous Leander Rowing club on the internet to see how they continue to produce Olympic gold medals for Britain).

One delicate organizational question that arises from the dearth of British Olympic judo results since 1992 is whether the BJA is best served by having a Chairman who is very active internationally (IJF/EJU) like Charles Palmer was in his heyday. In those days we basked in the fact that Charlie was the IJF president but did that fact win us any more medals on the mat? I don't think so. Charlie was not able to rewrite the rules to the UK's advantage. It would have been an abuse of his position and would have been stopped by the Congress.

Olympic medals are a very high profile aspect of judo. Once every four years the BJA is strenuously tested. Those directly employed for the Olympics in the BJA should have a clear job description, preferably on a two-year contract, and it should state who they are answerable to. Where failure or breakdown occurs the system should make sure that those responsible carry the can. Head office employees such as the CEO should do as they are contracted to do but keep the Olympics at arms length so that there is no blurring of responsibility. Judo politicians should have a similar system of identifying responsibility at that level so that when elections come around the incompetent are removed. Probably all Board members of the BJA should be elected or re-elected every four years to tie in with the Olympic results or lack of them.

In my opinion time spent in international judo politics is time lost for British Olympic medals. If the chairman is whizzing about all over the place who is in charge of the shop? The Board of Directors takes its lead from the chairman but if he is not available for Board Meetings (as often happens at the last minute I am told) it would seem that the CEO of the BJA is in charge. As far as I know he has no great knowledge of judo. Perhaps this (the break in the chain of command and responsibility) explains why no heads rolled after Britain's Beijing results. No doubt somebody could be appointed temporary Board vice-chairman for a meeting but I think the Olympics is too important for this make-do arrangement.

When I represented the BJA in the IJF and EJU congresses there was always a lot of hectic competition among the delegates to get on one of the Commissions or even head one. At that time it was reckoned that 60 or more days per year would need to be spent working in them. This would represent two months of each year not to mention time travelling or spent on preparation etc, etc. Obviously Commission places were the province of the rich or retired. However, I was much impressed by a Polish delegate who never sought a Commission place but was always ready to stand up and

speak at the Congress. Usually what he had to say had a lot of sense. He said what he thought and never had to worry about losing his political positions.

### Club Leagues

Bearing in mind the challenge we face from other martial arts I think Britain needs to create as competitive an environment as possible in the clubs and I think only way to do this is to create **club leagues** as they do in France and Germany. I know this has been tried a few times in the past in the UK and it always died away but the BJA has to decide if it is a good idea or not and go for it even though it might take years to settle in. One thing I noticed when attending competitions in Europe was the good 'sporty' feel of the events.

The grading system may not be the cause of the problem I have raised but the question remains why do so few people compete in British judo tournaments. Why has the BJA never got club leagues off the ground?

When I was chief instructor at the Budokwai our main London rival was the Renshuden. The rivalry between us was really strong and both clubs produced international competitors that filled the national team for many years. I am absolutely convinced we could and should produce that same rivalry with club leagues. I have a question for you – which is the strongest club in the UK right now? If you don't know, why don't you know? I raised this question at one of my Bath lectures and somebody said, 'lets not go into all that'. I sensed it was a taboo question but very instructive for me. If we asked that question in France I guess we would get a quick straight answer – Orlean/PSG/Racing Club or whichever club won the league. From our perspective as 'performance' coaches British judo has to be weaned off its recreational bias.

One immediate way to introduce more rivalry and competition would be to publish ranking lists of *clubs* according to how many people they have in the national squads. A quick glance at the present squads shows certain clubs predominate so why not turn that into a competition and regularly publish the list in the BJA magazine? I can imagine that some clubs would welcome this and some would not. Probably the ones that would not would be the ones still living on past glories.

Well in this Part Three I have dwelt on the strategic background to judo which will of course effect the production of international players. There may be little in the short term that the coach can do about some of the things mentioned *but* in the long term minds and policies can be changed. Coaches should get involved at all levels of judo.

PS

Three years after I first gave this lecture the British Judo team failed to win any medals in the 2008 Beijing Olympics. So come the start of the 2012 London Olympics that will represent a twenty year gap with no Olympic medals for the men and a sixteen year gap for the women! So what went wrong? Was it a hierarchical problem with nobody clearly in charge? Did anybody's head roll? If my memory serves me right we had a similar fiasco in the 2004 Olympics. Has the system been changed? Perhaps the authorities are counting on a medal surge in all sports because host nations usually do better on average. It seems a somewhat forlorn hope right now.

As I write this in July 2010 there is two years to go to the London Olympics. This is a useable length of time but at the same time it represents a last chance for Britain to do well in 2012. I believe that the current problem is hierarchical and it starts at the top. I think it needs the top person (in other words the chairman of the BJA Board of Directors) to take direct charge and under him it should be clear who answers to whom. Dabbling in international judo politics is all very well but it does not win us Olympic medals. At this last ditch stage all should be in fear of losing their well paid jobs or influential positions. The next two years will be the last chance to make GB an Olympic judo medal winning country again.

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