

IN PRAISE OF O-SOTO-GARI

Following are some thoughts on O-soto-gari which used to be my main throw. I usually combined it with ko-soto-gari, okuri-ashi, uchi-mata, and o-uchi-gari and often turned it into o-soto-gake, osoto-otoshi, o-guruma and ashi-guruma. Because many of my opponents were expecting me to do the throw I scored more often than not with the other techniques. Old names for this common throw were gyaku-gama (reverse sickle), kaeri-nage (return throw) and ke-kaeshi (kick back). It even features in old English wrestling as the Cross-hock throw.

What I found most satisfying about the throw was its sheer impetus when done precisely. I always aimed to catch the opponent's right leg as he stepped forward and throw him so that both of his legs left the mat. A poor Osotogari for me was to sweep so that his left foot stayed on the mat until the final moments of the throw. When it was done precisely with correct timing it often knocked the wind out of the opponent or even dazed them. It is the perfect self-defence or combat technique much used by the Yoshin-ryu jujitsu school and in certain circumstances potentially lethal. One other jujitsu application of Osoto was to use the right heel to crack into the opponent's calf thus combining a dead leg technique and a throw.

One reason for its power was the fact that the opponent was not rotated over a hip or a shoulder but was dropped straight back to the mat with my right arm pushing him back and down all the way and my right leg hooking his right leg forward – both actions working together.

One other key point for me was to hold over the opponent's right arm with my left and grip his right side jacket close to his right armpit. Once when the great Yamashita was at my club we were talking about Osotogari and he asked me what I thought was the most important point of the throw and I said the left hand grip as described above. He nodded and said he agreed. He in fact also held the opponent's sleeve with his left hand but the reason was the same – the opponent could stop the throw with his right arm so it had to be controlled as above and for kuzushi reasons.

Another great judoman I ran into in Japan was the famous Masahiko Kimura. I was doing some training with the American heavy-weight champion Dick Walters and we had gone to Takushoku University dojo out of hours to do some work on a wooden post buried in the ground outside the dojo. This was how Kimura used to work on his Osoto which he was famous for. He quite unexpectedly turned up and gave us some tips. A wooden post does not yield to a human leg very much but in fact the entry moves of an Osoto only have to bend the opponent's backwards about three or four inches from the perpendicular to ensure success so practising on a post gets close to the real thing. One great drawback of the Osotogari is that the opponent can move his right leg back and out of immediate danger just as fast as you can step close to him with your left foot. So the initial step which closes the distance between both players has to be done as fast as possible. Working on a post is good for this.

Another point of contention is where to grip with the right hand. I aimed to grip the opponent's left lapel about collar bone height. Then to get maximum effect with the right hand I rotated my wrist so that the heel of my palm pressed directly into the

space between collar bone and neck. Sometimes I was able to throw straight away from this grip and at other times when fighting taller opponents I used the grip to push the opponent's chin up and back. I remember once doing some Osoto uchi-komi with Tokyo Champion Watanabe Kisaburo. After a few moves he said, 'Do it like this' and began pushing my chin and head up and back. So I did as told but after about twenty repetitions he seemed to forget what he had advised and got a bit annoyed with me for what was a rough method for him. So I diplomatically switched to something else!

When asked to show my Osoto in the club both the left and right hand grip positions provoked a certain amount of discussion. In theory a left hand grip on the sleeve should work well but my take on this was that the grip was not strong enough (unless you were as strong as Yamashita) and a little bit of resistance could stop it dead. One common habit with the right hand grip was to hold high on the collar so that after the initial step in the right arm would fold round the opponent's neck. This worked reasonably well for most students especially taller ones and was useful for any follow-on techniques such as the so-called Tenri style Osoto or a harai-maki-komi but as a straight osotogari I did not think it was strong enough. To illustrate the point I would say to the student push the dojo wall as hard as you can with your right hand. Invariably they would use the palm of the hand and the heel of it to push. This point was much better illustrated when done on a post.

Perhaps the biggest flaw of Osotogari is that it can be countered especially by another Osotogari man but this is balanced by the wide range of throws it can combine with in renzoku-waza. As I said at the start of the article I aimed to catch the right leg of the opponent as he stepped forward. This often meant 'basing' myself with my left foot forward more or less in front of the opponent's right foot so as to cut out one unnecessary step forward. When the throw worked well it had a sort of rock and roll swing to it with the initial step in, left and right arm movements and then the big reaping movement combined with my head dipping down to the mat. If it didn't work too cleanly and I was stopped I found that my right hip could be effectively used to push into the opponent's hip and break up his posture sideways and then carry on with the throw.

The kuzushi direction for Osotogari is mostly to tilt the opponent to his right back corner but the many combinations used with Osoto mean that kuzushi directions will often have to change halfway through the throw. One very effective initial kuzushi direction is directly to the opponent's *left* side. As the opponent resists that he can then be swung round and off balance to his right rear corner. Kotani 10th Dan says that if the initial step in with the left foot is made with the foot pointing somewhat inwards to the opponent it is much more difficult to counter. Another common uchi-komi practice is to tuck something under the chin and practice moving in and out with the object held in place. This is to prevent the common weakness of those who move into position with the chin up which can easily be used to make a counter. I also found it quite a useful training method to practise the right leg reaping movement in a swimming pool

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