

A DIFFERENT WAY FORWARD: LONDON 2012 OLYMPICS, or HOW YOU CAN BE A LEADER, START YOUR OWN CLUB, AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN JUDO

by James S. Bregman, Olympic Bronze Medalist, 1964

On a sunny Tuesday afternoon, June 5, 2012, the USOC and BP sponsored a reception honoring and celebrating the London 2012 Olympic Games and the American Olympians and Paralympians who would be competing. Standing at the intersection of First Street and East Capitol Street looking west is the magnificent US Capitol Building, then turning east and walking by the majestic Supreme Court Building, two blocks, you arrive at the world famous Folger Shakespeare Library, the venue for the reception.

Speeches were given by Scott Blackmun, CEO USOC; David Nagel, Executive VP, BP; the Honorable Jonny Isakson, U. S. Senator, and the Honorable Dave Reichert, U. S. Representative, who are the Co-Chairs of the Congressional Olympic and Paralympic Caucus; the Honorable Mary Landrieu, U. S. Senator; Olympic Legend, Jackie Joyner Kersee; and, Paralympic Athlete, Tatyana McFadden. Olympians present were Bob Beamon, Nadia Comaneci, Bart Connor, Rowdy Gains, Terrence Jennings, Tim Morehouse, Arlene Limas, Jair Lynch and many others.

The refreshments were elegant, the speeches moving and inspirational, the conversations were varied and genuine, photo shoot lines were long and the people were patient, and the entire mood of the gathering was positive, upbeat, and anticipatory. The Folger Shakespeare Library and the London 2012 Olympics were a perfect match. The 2012 U. S. Olympic and Paralympic Teams were forming and preparing for the life altering moment of Olympic participation and competition.

The 2012 London Olympics promises to be yet another spectacular event. The U.S. Team has a highly experienced coach in Mr. Jimmy Pedro, Jr. and excellent world class athletes. Congratulations to our players and coach:

2012 U.S. Olympic Judo Team

Female

57 kg - Marti Malloy - San Jose State University Judo
78 kg - Kayla Harrison - Pedro's Judo

Male

73 kg - Nicholas Delpopolo - Jason Morris Judo Club
81 kg - Travis Stevens - Pedro's Judo
100 kg - Kyle Vashkulat - Jason Morris Judo Club

Coach

James (Jimmy) Pedro - Pedro's Judo

2012 U. S. Paralympians

Male

60 kg - Ron Hawthorn - OTC, Colorado Springs
90 kg - Dartanyon Crockett - OTC, Colorado Springs
100 kg - Myles Porter - OTC, Colorado Springs

Female

57 kg - Jordan Mouton - Diamondback Judo, Houston Texas/ OTC, Colorado Springs

70 kg - Christella Garcia - Sacramento Judo Club

+70 kg - Katie Davis - Team Sacramento

As the American Judo Community prepares for the 2012 London Olympics, it is an excellent time to think carefully about American Judo Development over the years and the future of American Judo. Mr. Hayward Nishioka has recently written a five-part essay series, *Inflection Points*, that analyzes American Judo. An inflection point is an event that changes the direction and complexity of a thought or an organization. We could perhaps view the upcoming Olympics as one such inflection point.

In this series, Nishioka quotes Neil Teechy, a great advisor to some of America's premier companies who points out that, "The mark of a true leader is not whether short term gains are made but how many future leaders are made."

By contrast, the American Judo Community (AJC) has had as their principle strategic objective a focus on "medal production." The good-faith intention behind this strategy was to expand Judo in the U.S. by increasing the amount of exemplary athletes and raising the profile of US Judo. It was hoped this would inspire young people to take up the sport. This strategy has been partially successful. The AJC has consistently been able to field world class Olympic teams and win medals over the last 20 years, but unfortunately, this did not achieve the desired effect; we have witnessed a decline in membership in American Judo organizations in the same time period.

Keeping in mind the two criteria of popularizing the sport and medal production, let's now turn to the question of American Judo Development.

What might we learn from looking at other martial arts whose ranks have grown in recent years? What are the Best Practices used to popularize sports and develop world-caliber athletes? Judo has been steadily expanding internationally since its inception, but how popular is it in the USA?

In the 50's, 60's and 70's, judo in the USA was a much more popular sport than it is today. In the early years, judo was unchallenged as the premier martial art. With the advent of increased competition from Karate, Taekwondo, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, Jujitsu, Tai Chi, and other forms; the number of participants in judo began to decline. There are indeed other factors involved in the declining numbers of practicing judoka, but these alternative martial arts had a substantial impact. The three judo organizations today have combined registered memberships totaling perhaps between 30 and 40 thousand members. In the 70's, the USJA alone recorded over 20 thousand members. Including the AAU and the USJF, the participating judo population was estimated at 50 to 60 thousand members.

In addition to outside competition from other Martial Arts, the AJC is seeing its numbers dwindle due to its own insularity. It is a sport that uses a foreign language, has very complex rules, presents itself as extremely formal (suits and ties) in competitive venues, has little or no spectator appeal, and is, even in its recreational form, extremely difficult and physically demanding. This is what the sport frequently looks like to the uninitiated. What's more, a feudal aristocratic value system that is averse to compensation for services has been imported into a modern commercial environment. Itinerant sensei can no longer survive by charity or inherited wealth.

Further, the AJC spends countless hours developing excellent referee training programs and conducting referee training seminars. Many additional hours are spent in developing and

administering elaborate rank promotion systems with promotion committees and examiners. Even more hours are consumed in developing timers, scorers, and expert tournament matching systems. This is all on top of the hours and hours on the mat teaching relatively small numbers of students the amazing complexities of this fine martial art. We are all spending more and more time and effort to administer an ever-shrinking population. Our organizations have become top-heavy.

Following China and India, the U.S. has the world's third largest population, 311 million people. What can the AJC do to attract a larger percentage of this population to the sport of judo? The USJA has 900 chartered club and approximately 9,500 members in round numbers which is an average of 10 members per club! Even adding the USJF and USA JUDO clubs and memberships, compared to the population and the participation in other martial arts, the AJC numbers are insignificant by comparison to other countries and to other martial arts in the U.S. In the state of New Jersey alone there are 800 to 1,000 martial arts studios, less than 50 of which teach judo. By contrast, one Karate studio in the state has 3,000 members in five locations.



Looking more closely at New Jersey, we find an interesting and useful case study for American Judo Development. Mr. Rick Herbster is the owner and head instructor of the Rising Sun Karate Academy. Mr. Jesse Goldstein (1980 Judo Olympian) and Mr. C. Scott Main have created the Jita Kyoei Judo Club within Mr. Herbster's Karate Academy. The "business" end of the endeavor as well as the karate program is managed by Mr. Herbster. The judo program is conducted by Mr. Goldstein and Mr. Main. What they have done is created a model for judo development which builds on the success of commercial martial arts programs by using the Best Practices in business with a high quality judo program which is designed for the recreational player primarily and the competitive athlete secondarily. Rick, Jesse, and Scott have developed a business arrangement which if replicated could grow the membership in the AJC. Perhaps the AJC can reach for the sky-high number of 200,000 participants by coupling with other successful martial arts business programs! The following is a clear and simple Judo Development Program:

HOW TO START YOUR OWN JUDO CLUB AND INCREASE JUDO MEMBERSHIP THROUGH OTHER MARTIAL ARTS

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

1. The judo instructor should be at least a Shodan and a USJA/JF/JI Certified Instructor.
2. Locate a successful large Martial Art School (MAS) in your area.
3. Contact the owner/director of the MAS through a friend, an acquaintance, or an intermediary belonging to the Association of the MAS to set up a meeting with the judo instructor and the owner/director of the MAS.
4. The judo instructor meets with the owner/director to discuss and set up a business plan for adding a judo program to the curriculum of the MAS. (advice and consultation on this step will be provided on request by Mr. Goldstein, jesse80moscow@gmail.com.)
5. Implement the judo program at the MAS. (further assistance on this step can also be provided by Mr. Goldstein, jesse80moscow@gmail.com.)

Partnering with highly successful Martial Arts Schools has several benefits, both for the MAS and for the individual Judo Instructor, specifically:

For the Martial Arts School:

- Increased revenue from new students attracted by expanded options for martial arts training.
- Decreased overhead using insurance coverage from judo organizations.

For the Judo Instructor:

- Provide proven business methods to recruit and retain new students. Depending on the MAS, these methods would include: advertising, dues collection, attendance keeping, facilities management, after school programs and transportation.
- Provides high quality facilities.
- Creates the potential to negotiate a business arrangement for compensation and/or employment.

The American Judo Community would also ultimately benefit from arrangement since all judo students would be enrolled in the USJA, USJF, or USJI and these fees would be covered by the enrollment fees and dues collected.

With hard work and smart development strategies, there is no reason that Judo in the U.S. cannot be as large as Karate, Taekwondo, or BJJ. Imagine judo growing to 200,000 members!

Imagine that these members are taught by top quality instructors, many of whom would be full time professionals. With a population of 200,000 members, American Judo organizations would have a combined revenue approaching \$10 million. With that revenue imagine what can happen: instructors can be mentored and trained, support staff could be compensated, facilities could be rented or purchased. Both the recreational practitioner and the aspiring international competitor



Jesse Goldstein demonstrates

will be able to find a home and flourish in such a community. The medals will take care of themselves.

Impossible? Henry Ford said, "If you think you can do a thing or think you can't do a thing, you're right." Remember: "The mark of a true leader is not whether short term gains are made but how many future leaders are made". Many Olympic and World Medalists were told they couldn't, but in fact, they did! Focus, Commitment, Patience and Hard Practice! The AJC can, if it wills it to be so!

The US has won 12 Olympic Medal and 25 World Championship Medals since 1956. Fifty six years and 37 medals! What does this tell us? Is that enough medal production? Not enough?

In my view, the emphasis on "medal production" and the laser focus on winning trophies and medals have distracted the AJC from recruiting and retaining members and developing a broad base of very skilled and talented judoka. This is not to detract from the hard work and accomplishments of our medalists and those who have supported them over the years. They are entirely deserving of our respect, admiration and continued support.

However, during those fifty-six years, many other unsung heroes of American judo went to practice regularly and got so much else from the sport we all love. The practice of judo provides physical fitness, mental discipline, respect, confidence, coordination, mental and physical agility, self defense, and lifelong friendships. For the few exceptional individuals of World and Olympic aspirations, medal production is fine. For the many, the substantial other benefits from the practice of judo are very worthwhile and should not be forgotten.

The purpose of this article is to stimulate thought and provide a way to move the number of judoka up to a tipping point. These ideas aren't new or original but have been dormant and largely unused in the AJC. The article is a result of discussions among Rick Herbster, Jesse Goldstein, Scott Main, Sid Kelly and Jim Bregman. Jita Kyoei Judo Club is expanding and will begin another program this month. They currently have forty seven members and expectations are great for increased participation. If we can learn from their example, American Judo has a chance to grow and prosper.



Nillo Bloomquist, Jesse Goldstein and Scott Main

Jim Bregman, 1964 Olympic Bronze Medalist and 1965 World Medalist, is a Founding Director and Past President of the United States Judo Association.