

From Judo Competitor to Judo Technician

by Mark Lonsdale

The October issue of **Growing Judo** carried an article defining a “judo technician” in intentionally broad strokes. This month we will look at the correlation between the competition judoka, the post-competition coach and technician, and judo rank.

Since competition is a requirement for rank and promotion in a judoka’s formative years, it is worth reviewing the relationship between competition success and promotion, beginning at Shodan. A Shodan of competition age (under 30 years) should be routinely beating brown belts of the same weight category, have medaled in local tournaments, and be competing at the national level. A strong competitor will often earn Nidan within the next year or two, when he or she becomes an Under 20 or Senior National Champion, or at least medalist. On a technical level, these Shodan and Nidan will be heavily focused on their favorite, winning techniques – statistically not more than five or six *tachi-waza*. But they should still know all the techniques of *Nage-no-kata* (15 techniques, left & right handed) and the basic *Gokyo* (40 techniques).

From there, a competitor will routinely promote to Sandan when they become a regular member of the National Judo Team and competing internationally (early to mid 20s). Anyone under 30 years of age, and not active in national or international competition, would probably not warrant this grade. Next, from observation and past experience, most World Champions were promoted to Yodan (4th Dan), but as technicians they would still have a limited repertoire of competition judo techniques. It is rare that full-time competitors, in their physical prime, would make any serious effort to become well rounded judo technician. Their training sessions are usually 2 hours of *uchi-komi*, *nage-komi*, and hard *randori*, with little time for learning techniques that they would never use in competition. Competition training is, by design, hard and simplistic. Any technical appreciation is dedicated to competition tactics, grip fighting and competitive player analysis.

Since most Olympic and World champions are in their mid to late 20s (the average being 25.5 years), it is rare that any would be ranked higher than Yodan. But a competitor, who had won more than one World Championship, multiple All Japan Championships, or an Olympic Gold, could very well be promoted to Godan.

Again, from experience, a Godan is usually a recently retired international competitor who has moved on to become a National Coach. When I was competing internationally as a Nidan, most of my team captains were Yodan and the coaches were Godan and still formidable on the mat. But by this time these coaches were also becoming better, well rounded technicians and serious students of teaching and coaching good judo. In France, for example, this was also the time that they would begin preparing for the grueling and world respected Rokudan (6th Dan) test. Most of the National Head Coaches were Rokudan but had become a bit long in the tooth for serious hard *randori*. However, the demonstration quality of their techniques was excellent and their knowledge of counters and combinations extensive.

Now not everyone automatically promotes or even tests beyond Godan. Competitors who had become injured in competition or training (usually by blowing out their knees) would seldom if ever make Rokudan. Rokudan is the last grade where one is expected to actually test, so with bad knees or a back injury it is all but impossible to pass the grueling promotion requirements. As a result, it is not unusual to run into former European national champions with a terminal rank of Godan.

So it is obviously not competitive judo that produces good technicians but the period after competition. Once one retires from senior competition, or if one was never a serious competitor because of lack of physical ability or injuries, the next phase in a judoka's development should be to become a competent instructor and technician. This is also known as the "second life" in judo. No longer dedicated to the rigors of daily competitive training, the technician seeks to enhance his or her knowledge of judo, teaching ability, coaching, refereeing, or even kata and kata judging. All of these serve to round out a judoka's development.

The first step towards becoming a technician is to learn ALL the techniques of Kodokan Judo. The Gokyo, created in 1895, has five sets of 8 techniques, for a total of 40. The IJF recognizes 99 techniques. The Kodokan recognizes 67 throws with a total of 106 techniques. But this all gets a little confusing since in 1982 a group of 8 throws were recognized (taken out in 1920), and 17 newer techniques were then recognized as Kodokan throws (called the *Shinmeisho-no-waza*). In 1997 the Kodokan added the last 2 additional judo throws to the *Shinmeisho-no-waza*. (For a more comprehensive description, see Neil Ohlenkamp's book JUDO UNLEASHED)

Any Sandan or above who is no longer competing should know ALL of these techniques. But using the USJA promotion requirements as an example, the following is the number of techniques that a judoka is required to know for each Dan-grade. These include *tachi-waza*, *renraku-waza*, *kaeshi-waza*, *osaekomi-waza*, *shime-waza* and *kansetsu-waza*. A Shodan must know 61 techniques; Nidan 77; Sandan 90; Yodan 106; Godan 119; and Rokudan 119. The reason the totals exceed the number of Kodokan techniques is that many of the counters and combinations are duplicates and variations of the basic throwing techniques.

However, without regional promotion boards and formal Dan-grade testing, many US judoka have lost the incentive to actually learn all the required techniques. Formal rank testing, preceded by promotion related technical clinics, and annual high-grade conferences are just three of the critical components of judo technical development. Without these there is a noted deficiency in technical knowledge, demonstration quality skills, national quality control and quality assurance. But that's an article for another day.

The next step towards becoming a truly competent technician is to switch from thinking and learning in a linear fashion (the number of techniques), and begin studying each technique in depth, particularly the most common ones used routinely in *randori* and competition. This could also be seen as an emphasis on quality over quantity. In addition, to be a competent instructor or coach, it is necessary to not only be able to explain the bio-mechanics of each technique, but to also teach a dozen variations, setups, combinations and transitions for each technique. (See October's *Growing Judo* for an explanation of these terms).

Finally, keep in mind that being a good teacher or technician is not about dazzling (confusing) your students with the breadth of your knowledge, but in being able to explain and demonstrate individual techniques effectively. As Albert Einstein said, "If you can't explain it simply, you don't know it well enough."

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