

### Judo Technician (Part 3): “Demonstration Quality Skills” by Mark Lonsdale

This article follows previous articles in *Growing Judo's* October and November 2012 issues.

There are three terms that I find myself routinely using in judo coaching clinics: competency, professionalism, and demonstration quality skills. The first two are somewhat self-explanatory in that a judo coach or instructor should have a measureable level of competency in judo, commensurate with his or her rank; and should be running a club or team in a professional manner. This does not mean professional in the sense of being highly paid; but professional in terms of style, manner, dress, communications, contact with the students, and general program management. “Demonstration quality skills,” however, is worth exploring in more detail.

In observing the participants in various judo coaching clinics it is apparent that more than a few are less than comfortable demonstrating even the most basic judo techniques in front of the class. Other high-grade clinicians have shared similar observations in their classes, so we will first define exactly what “demonstration quality” means and then look at some of the related issues.

Using *tachi-waza* as a starting point, every judo instructor should be able to teach all the techniques up to his or her rank. But in reality, at the dojo level, instructors spend more time teaching the techniques found in the lower level promotion syllabus than any others. Because of club turnover, the yellow, orange, and green belt techniques become the bread and butter of most club sensei and assistant instructors. So just as important as being able to demonstrate a perfect forward rolling breakfall (*zenpo-kaiten ukemi*), an instructor should also be able to demonstrate all the techniques in the *kyu-grade* syllabus.

To take this a step further, it is not sufficient to merely identify which technique is which, or the difference between an *osoto-gari* and an *osoto-otoshi*. The instructor should be able to demonstrate the classic forms of these throws in a smooth, controlled, and balance manner. *Tokui-waza* and competition variations come much later. In addition to simply demonstrating a particular throw, the instructor should also be able to explain the basic bio-mechanics and elements of *kuzushi*, *tsukuri* and *kake* accompanying each technique.

This ability also ties into one of the fundamental principles of teaching and an important Law of Learning called “**primacy**.” Primacy states that students tend to remember skills just as they were first taught, seen, or experienced. This places critical importance on the instructor to teach techniques correctly the first time. But as many of our coach candidates quickly discover in the coaching development clinics, they have allowed their technical skills to deteriorate, or they were not taught correctly the first time by their instructors. In addition, they had failed to practice the required techniques before coming to the coaching clinic, and evidently neglected the fact that it is necessary to train a good Uke if they want the demonstrations to be perfect. Without practice and a competent Uke, the demonstrations lack many of the essential components of a good technique. The evidence of this is Tori, all too often, losing his balance or falling over the prostrate Uke.

So why do you think these skill-sets were never developed, or permitted to deteriorate over time?

In discussing this with several respected coaching clinicians, the conclusion is that the loss of technical skills can be attributed to one primary factor – lack of formal testing for promotion.

Back in the “good old days,” to move up in rank a judoka had to test before a promotion board. This was before points and time in grade (TIG) were given precedence over competition experience and technical ability. With the current system, a promotion committee may review several hundred requests for promotion but never actually see or test the applicants. The end result is that there is no motivation for *dan-grade* judoka to gain or maintain demonstration

quality technical proficiency. Others have also allowed their physical condition to deteriorate to the point that they physically cannot execute nice throws (a discussion for another article).

In other countries, a promotion board is convened two or three times a year, and applicants for promotion are given ample time to review the grading syllabus and come up to standard. Quite often there was also a training camp the previous weekend where the applicants could train under the high-grade members of the promotion board, and learn exactly what they were looking for in each demonstration. This is not unlike the way referees are currently trained and assessed, in that they attend a training clinic one day and are reviewed on the mat the next.

The pre-promotion clinics were intense and highly beneficial since most of us were more focused on competition training than learning techniques that would not work in *shiai*. (See November's article, "From Competitor to Judo Technician"). More importantly, these clinics forced us to become better judoka and more well-rounded instructors. It was in these clinics that we learned to demonstrate techniques in true Kodokan form, and not just the bastardized variations we often used in competition.

But since training and testing is often-times (sadly) no longer the practice for promotion, it was suggested that we run "technical clinics," prior to the coaching clinics, to bring everyone up to speed on the requirements for the appropriate level of coach certification. Unfortunately, coach certification does not carry the same weight as promotion, so candidates will probably lack the motivation to attend the extra day of technical training. To be effective, the responsibility rests with the promotion committees to push for more rigorous standards and technical development.

But there is some light at the end of the tunnel. First, venerable Sensei Hal Sharp, 9<sup>th</sup> Dan, has proposed that applicants for higher grade submit a video or DVD of themselves demonstrating and teaching a variety of judo techniques. In this manner the promotion committee will have some tangible evidence of an individual's technical ability.

Second, since the first two levels of the USJA coaching certification program are focused on club level instruction, not competition coaching, then the goal will be to spend more time in these courses working on "demonstration quality skills." Without these skills, a dojo instructor lacks the foundation to grow as a judo coach, and is not able to meet the requirement of "primacy" – teaching and demonstrating skills correctly the first time.

That said, the real responsibility is not on the promotion committee or coach clinician, but on the individual. Every judo instructor and coach should take personal pride and satisfaction in their judo skills. This means actually practicing all the techniques they are required to teach at the *kyu-grade* levels, and not just their personal *tokui-waza* and favorite competition variations. Quite often, an individual's favorite technique is a modified version or variation of a fundamental technique, but probably not suitable for teaching at the lower *kyu-grade* levels.

Finally, it is worthwhile for every instructor to emphasize to his or her students the importance of developing their own demonstration quality techniques, particularly for *kyu-grade* promotion exams. A rank examiner does not want to see a spinning, drop-knee *seoi-otoshi* if he or she asks to see a basic *morote-seoinage* or *tai-otoshi*. While coaching methods and competition techniques change with time, the fundamental Kodokan techniques do not change. A well executed throw should look just like it appears in the original **Kodokan Judo** by Jigoro Kano or the more modern **Judo Unleashed** by Neil Ohlenkamp. Tori should be in control, demonstrating good *kuzushi* and *tsukuri*, while maintaining balance and good form throughout the execution (*kake*.)

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