

GOOD JUDO MAKES GOOD JUDOKA: Training for Competition and Beyond

by Mark Lonsdale

The first question – what is Good Judo?

Good Judo is *Ippon* judo where throws are big, clean, and nicely executed. To be scored an *Ippon* in *randori* or *shiai*, a throw must have four components: control, force, speed, and the opponent lands largely on the back. If any one of these is missing it may be scored a *Waza-ari*.

Good Judo in competition is when the player is constantly attacking and going for the big terminal *Ippon*. When the player is successful, *Uke* soars through the air, crashes to the tatami, and the referee shoots his hand up to signal the *Ippon*. Good *Ippons* are easy to score and everyone remembers them.

Therefore, Negative Judo is when a player is non-combative or continually plays for the smallest of points, attempts to make his opponent draw *shido*, and spends too much time fighting over grips. A negative judo player will make a minor attack every 25-30 seconds to avoid being awarded a *shido*, and will drop to all-fours ("flop and drop") after an attack to avoid being countered. This is also known as making "low risk attacks," but it is ugly judo and not at all interesting to watch. Referees are also instructed to penalize players for negative judo.

So the problem for young competitors is that if they focus only on competition tactics, and adopt a low-risk style of fighting, they will never grow as judoka. Now don't get me wrong, I love competition judo as much as anyone. In fact I devoted a good part of my life to being a competitor, but I appreciate Good Judo even more, and I am not alone in this.

From an article in a 2005 *California Judo Magazine*, I read how former All Japan Champion, Yasuhiro Yamashita, valued good judo. The article described how Yamashita admitted to practicing kata on a regular basis. He felt that when he was having problems with technical aspects of his competition performance, that kata helped improve his techniques and made his throws more precise.

This is a radical concept for a competition fighter – voluntarily practicing kata, and not just for grading points. Here is a World Champion who regularly returns to good judo, in the form of kata, to hone his techniques for competition.

My story is one of being selected by Isao Inakuma, the Japanese National Coach at the time, to train with Nobuyuki Sato at the French National Sports Institute. For those of you not old enough to remember Sato, he too was one of Japan's great champions, so I knew I was in for a pounding. But Inakuma Sensei assured me that, "Sato would only use one technique, *tai-otoshi*."

This did not alleviate my concerns as *tai-otoshi* is a very fast, powerful body-drop, and I had seen how fast and how hard Sato had thrown other members of the French training squad. But since he was restricted to one technique, I felt confident I could come up with a suitable block, if not a counter. How wrong I was!!

Even though Sato only used one technique, he was able to enter this throw from eight different directions and with an equal number of feints. The result was that in a five minute *randori*, I was picking myself up off the mat for four of those minutes. But with pain comes gain, and I learned an important lesson that day.

A good judoka can select a favorite technique (*tokui-waza*) and then build a family of entries and combinations around that technique. Sato would use *tai-otoshi* in combination with *deashi-barai*,

sasae-tsurikomi-ashi, *ouchi-gari*, and even *uchi-mata*. Each of these was just a set-up to off-balance his opponent so that he could finish them with the body-drop – every throw a bone-jarring *Ippon*.

So for the club judoka who is aspiring to be a judo champion, it is important not to neglect practicing Good Judo. My personal training program called for doing good judo with lots of big attacks in club *randori* three nights a week. And then at national squad training, once or twice a week, I would work on competition tactics and grip fighting. I also taught juniors twice a week, which greatly helped in polishing my techniques, since each demonstration for the class had to be technically perfect. In addition, doing light *randori* with the juniors allowed me to work on my timing and footwork, while using absolutely no strength.

So, for the young judoka (and some not so young) who are reading this, don't be afraid to try for those big *Ippons* in club *randori*, even if you get countered. It is more important to develop confidence, technique, and timing than to worry about winning or losing in *randori*. In time, that focus on doing Good Judo will emerge in competition with beautiful and memorable wins by ***IPPON***.
