

PROFESSOR KANO ON COMPETITION & RANDORI IN JUDO

JIGORO KANO ON COMPETITION & RANDORI

By Mark Lonsdale, *Judo Training Development*

Contrary to popular belief, Kodokan Judo was not introduced to the world as a sport in 1882 at Eishoji temple. Eishoji was in fact the first of several sites of Professor Kano's academic preparatory school (Kano Juku) and judo, which was mandatory for all students, was better known at that time as Kano ryu jujutsu. At age 22, and even after being entrusted with the transmission scrolls (*densho*) for Tenjin Shinyo ryu jutusu after the death of Master Fukuda in 1879, Kano felt that due to "his youth and inexperience" he lacked the knowledge to be a true jujutsu master.

Even after formulating the most basic concepts for judo, Kano continued to take instruction in Kito ryu jujutsu from Master Tsunetoshi Iikubo until 1886, and in the process honed his understanding of kuzushi. He also studied sumo, grappling techniques, western wrestling, and even boxing to improve his knowledge of fighting skills.

In these early days, Kano felt that Kodokan Judo should be a "way" and not merely a sport, and that narrowly defining judo as a competitive sport would defeat his purpose of creating an **all-encompassing way of life**, form of physical education, martial art, and self defense.

As Kodokan Judo grew and evolved in the mid to late 1880s, Kano wrote about how the competitive aspects of judo had adversely affected judo randori as he had envisioned it. He agreed that it was through winning competitions, and accepting all challenges from jujutsu schools, that the reputation of Kodokan Judo had grown, but he was still concerned about the effects of sporting competition on good judo. But at the same time he continued to encourage his students to participate in the monthly tournaments and biannual Red and White (kohaku) team competitions.

In his own writings, Kano observed how judoka bent forward and used stiff arms and strength in competition; and how new judoka, who had not been trained by him personally or his senior instructors, tended to follow this example in randori. He

attributed this problem to the rapid increase in the number of students, but lacking in a correspondingly sufficient number of qualified instructors. A problem we also have today.

Kano wrote how fighting bent over, in what he termed the “western wrestling-style,” exhibited poor posture and balance and was vulnerable to attack. He also noted how stiff arms and the use of strength slowed a judoka’s reactions and ability to move quickly. All of these were contrary to his belief in maximum efficiency and minimum use of energy.

Kano wanted judoka to stand upright, in the style of a “western boxer,” and to remain relaxed so that they could move more fluidly in attack and defense. This coincides with what every boxer and athlete knows today, that a stiff muscle is a slow muscle and a relaxed muscle offers faster action and reaction. To this end, Kano encouraged new students to “take note of the high-grade skilled judo men they see practicing in the dojo and endeavor to do all they can in future to instill in themselves the correct methods.”

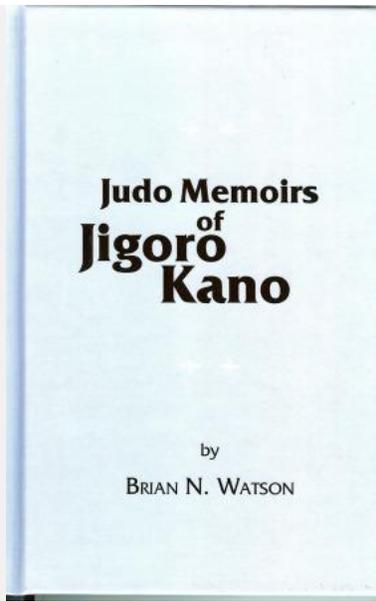
Kano went on to address issues of gripping, stating that while everyone learned the basic lapel and sleeve grip, it was not mandatory that they maintain that grip at all times. But he did encourage a light grip so that one would be capable of, “instant, totally free and quick reaction.”

To conclude, on numerous occasions Professor Kano has emphasized the importance of doing randori correctly and not allowing it to deteriorate into competition style fighting. The whole purpose of randori is free practice and to have the opportunity to practice the full range of your techniques, with less concern about who wins and who loses. In fact, if both players turn randori into an all out battle to the death, both are losers since neither has the opportunity to perfect their techniques and timing.

So take a lesson from the founder of judo – try to stand upright, do not use stiff arms or strength, grip lightly, and try to remove ego from the equation. By doing this you set a good example for your students and the next generation of judoka.

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For further reading on Jigoro Kano’s thoughts and writings on judo, randori, and competition, read “Judo Memoirs of Jigoro Kano” by Brian N. Watson.



A “must read” for all judoka and sensei