



# THE HISTORY OF JUDO



*Jigoro Kano 1860-1938*

## ***Introduction***

Judo is essentially a martial art so, in order to fully appreciate a history of judo, we shall look at a brief background on martial arts first.

The English term “martial arts” is derived from Latin for “arts of Mars” - Mars being the Roman God of war.

While the term “martial arts” today is normally associated with the Asian fighting arts, for centuries martial systems have also existed in western culture. We can date martial arts such as archery and wrestling back to ancient Greece, and in Mesopotamia there is evidence (such as paintings and poems depicting systematic fighting) that martial arts training dates back to Babylonian times (3000BC). In the far east, development of the Oriental martial arts is somewhat obscure. It is generally accepted that the Oriental martial arts developed in ancient China, during the Xia Dynasty more than 4000 years ago. This was among monks who used weaponless fighting techniques to protect themselves.

Rulers of the Orient attempted to keep unarmed combat techniques secret, but through commerce and migration, the martial arts spread from China throughout the east. Chronicles concerning martial arts dating back as far as 720 AD discuss Japanese wrestling and, since then, the martial arts have developed into a variety of systems that have led to the modern martial arts that we see today.

There are currently more than 1,000 different forms of martial arts scattered around the world. WIKIPEDIA lists 53 from Japan alone, which include: Aikido, Karate, Kendo, Ninjutsu, Sumo, Jujutsu, and *Judo*.

## ***Jujutsu***

Japan's Takenouchi-ryu system was founded by Nakatsukasa Hisamori in 1532. He was a warrior in the Sengoku period which was a time of social upheaval and near constant military conflict that lasted roughly from the middle of the 15th century to the beginning of the 17th century. The Takenouchi-ryu system is generally considered to be the beginnings of Japan's Jujutsu forms.

For hundreds of years, Japanese Samurai refined the martial arts through a lifetime study. Jujitsu was the only one of these martial arts that was based on *weaponless* self defence, and by the mid 1800's there had been more than 700 different forms of jujitsu developed.

With the restoration of Imperial Rule in 1868 the Samurai class declined, together with all Japanese martial arts, including jujitsu. It was never banned, but people were not encouraged to learn or practice any more. The glory of the Samaria faded and well established schools of jujitsu began to disappear.

## ***Jigoro Kano & The Origin of Judo***

Jigoro Kano was born in Mikage, Japan on October 28, 1860. He had an academic upbringing and, from the age of seven, he studied English, Japanese calligraphy and the Four Confucian Texts.

As a boy, Kano was undersized, physically weak and frequently ill. In 1871, Kano's family moved to Tokyo and when he was fourteen he began boarding school in Shiba (Tokyo). Bullying was rife at the school and, against the advice of his doctors, Kano decided to look for a Jujutsu dojo to improve his health and protect himself from the bullies.

It took Kano several years to find himself a jujutsu teacher, since the demise of the Samaria had caused a lack of interest in jujutsu for his generation and dojos were all closing down. Many of the masters were diverting their businesses to traditional osteopathy practices (Seikotsu-in). A friend of

his father's (Nakai Umenari) showed him some kata, but would not teach it to him. The caretaker of Kano's father's house also knew jujutsu, but would not teach it to him because he did not believe that it was of use any more. There were others too, including Imai Genshiro of the Kyūshin-ryū school of jujutsu, a frequent visitor to his father's house also refused to teach Kano.

When Kano was 18 years old he was referred to Fukuda Hachinosuke, teacher of the Tenjin Shinyō-ryū school of jujutsu. This was a small nine mat dojo with just five students. The Tenjin Shinyō-ryū form under Fukuda was a soft martial art that stressed harmony rather than combat, and played emphasis on technique. Following the death of Fukuda, Kano continued studying Tenjin Shinyō-ryū jujutsu at another school under teacher Iso Masatomo where he was entrusted in the teaching of the randori (free practice) aspect of the art. Following the death of Iso Masatomo, Kano began studying Kitō-ryū jujutsu under master Iikubo Tsunetoshi who put emphasis on randori, in particularly nage-waza (throwing techniques).

In February 1882, Jigoro Kano started up his own school with just nine students at the Eishō-ji Buddhist temple in the Shitaya ward of Tokyo.



*Eishō-ji Temple in Tokyo*

At 21 years old Kano began integrating what he considered to be the positive points of the two forms of jujutsu he had studied with his own ideas and inspirations. He revised techniques and transformed the traditional jujutsu principle of "defeating strength through flexibility" into a new principle of "maximum efficient use of physical and mental energy."

In other words, resisting a more powerful opponent will result in your defeat, whereas adjusting to and evading your opponent's attack will cause him to lose his balance, reducing his power, and you will defeat him. Based on this principle it possible for weaker opponents to defeat significantly stronger ones.

Kano felt that practical application of this principle, could positively contribute to human and social development and identified "mutual prosperity for self and others" as the proper goal of training.



*Right: "Seiryoku-zen'yo" - "maximum efficient use of energy"*

*Left: "Jita-kyoei" - "mutual prosperity for self and others"*

*written by Professor Kano*

Kano had created a new theoretical and technical system that embraced a set of principles for perfecting the self; and better matched the needs of modern people.

To reflect this, he replaced jutsu (technique) in the word "ju-jutsu" with the suffix do (path) to create a new name for his art: **judo** (the gentle way/path).  
He named his training hall "Ko-do-kan," or "place to teach the path".

The first two students at the Eisho-ji dojo were Tsunejiro Tomita and Shiro Saigo. After their first year of study they were both granted shodan (first rank) grades. This was the first grading that had ever been awarded in any martial art.

### ***The Growth of Kodokan Judo***

In 1886 The Tokyo Metropolitan Police hosted a tournament to determine which was the most effective martial art to use as a self defence. They pitted Jigoro Kano's Kodokan Judo against Totsuke Hikosuke's Yoshin-Ryu Jujutsu, which was at the time, considered to be the strongest jujutsu school in Japan. One of the bouts during this tournament (between Yokoyama Sakujiro - *judo* and Nakamura Hansuke - *jujitsu*) lasted a full 55 minutes and remains today as the longest ever recorded judo match. Of the tournament's fifteen matches the Kodokan judoka won thirteen and so gave sound reason for the Tokyo Metropolitan Police to adopt judo as its primary self defence system.

In 1895 the Gokyo no waza was laid down as the first five groups of instruction in Kodokan judo. Then in 1920 a second group, called shimmeisho no waza was added comprising a further seventeen techniques.

And the Kodokan itself kept expanding. From its humble beginnings as a 12 mat dojo in 1882 to 1,206 mats across five main dojos in Japan today.

However, the beginnings of Judo in Britain is arguably down to a Briton called Edward William Barton-Wright. He specialised in self defence training and physical therapy, and in 1899 he sponsored a team of Japanese judo experts on a visit to England. When the visit was over some stayed and, over the next ten years these Japanese showmen earned a living from performing various martial arts challenges and tricks, and publishing books on judo instruction.



*E.W. Barton-Wright*



*Gunji Koizumi*



*Yukio Tani*

One of the most famous of the Japanese visitors was Yukio Tani who remained in England long after his fellow judoka had returned home. He eventually landed himself the role of Chief Instructor at a relatively new dojo in London founded (1918) by Gunji Koizumi for the study of Samaria martial arts. The club was called The Budokwai. For many years it was the only authoritative source of Kodokan judo in Europe and soon became the most famous judo school outside Japan. In 1920 Yukio Tani was awarded his second degree black belt grade during Jigoro Kano's first visit to Britain.



*The Budokwai*

One of the Budokwai's earliest members was Sarah Mayer. She started her judo training there in the 1920s and although she eventually completed her study in Japan, she was the first ever non-Japanese woman to gain a Dan grade (black belt) in Judo.

Koizumi's Budokwai was central to the spread of Judo into Europe. Koizumi talked to the committee about the idea of a British national judo organisation and a European one too. In 1948 John Barnes, Chairman on the committee invited judo and jujitsu clubs from all over Europe to a conference at The Imperial College London. During this three hour conference the British Judo Association (BJA) was formed as the National representing body for judo. Four days later during a meeting Chaired by Trevor Leggett (the most senior non-Japanese judoka in the world) the European Judo Union (EJU) was formed as the representing body on the continent.

Three years later, in 1951, the International Judo Federation (IJF) was founded as an international controlling body of judo and is, nowadays, responsible for organising international competitions. Members of the IJF include several continental judo Unions, comprising some 184 countries and regions in total within.

Today the BJA is the largest judo association under the EJU and IJF. The British Judo Council (BJC) and the Amateur Judo Association (AJA) are both affiliated to the BJA. A number of smaller organisations exist, such as the All England Judo Federation and many independent judo clubs, such as the fantastic Blackwater Judo Club in Maldon.

### ***Judo In The Olympics***

Throughout his life, Jigoro Kano had become a leading educationalist, Vice President of the Imperial University of Japan, and a prominent figure in the Japanese Olympic movement. He helped found the Japan Amateur Sports Association, and in 1909 he became the first Japanese member of the International Olympic Committee, working tirelessly to spread judo around the world.

That said, Kano's desire was, in his words, to gather people together for a common cause with friendly feeling. Getting *judo* into the Olympics wasn't particularly an objective that he had set out to achieve. In fact, in a letter that he sent to Gunji Koizumi in 1936 Kano wrote:

*"I have been asked by people of various sections as to the wisdom and the possibility of Judo being introduced at the Olympic Games. My view on the matter, at present, is rather passive. If it be the desire of other member countries, I have no objection. But I do not feel inclined to take any initiative. For one thing, Judo in reality is not a mere sport or game. I regard it as a principle of life, art and science. In fact, it is a means for personal cultural attainment. Only one of the forms of Judo training, the so-called randori can be classed as a form of sport... [In addition, the] Olympic*

*Games are so strongly flavoured with nationalism that it is possible to be influenced by it and to develop Contest Judo as a retrograde form as Jujitsu was before the Kodokan was founded. Judo should be as free as art and science from external influences – political, national, racial, financial or any other organised interest. And all things connected with it should be directed to its ultimate object, the benefit of humanity”.*

However, he was Japan's official representative on several occasions on the Olympic Committee: Stockholm 1912, Antwerp 1920, Amsterdam 1928, Los Angeles 1932 and Berlin 1936.

Often referred to as the "Father of Japanese Sports", in 1935 he was awarded the Asahi prize for his outstanding contribution to the organising of sport in Japan. In the years leading up to his death in 1938 he was one of the leading spokesmen in Japan's bid for the 1940 Olympic games. None of the Olympics thus far had included judo as part of the games.



*Jigoro Kano at the Los Angeles Olympics 1932.  
(Before judo was an official Olympic event)*

In May 1938, Jigoro Kano died at sea, while returning from an Olympic congress in Cairo on board the NYK Line motor vessel MV Hikawa Maru. It was at this congress that Japan was selected to host the 1940 Olympic Games. Unfortunately the games were cancelled due to the outbreak of World War Two. The cause of death was officially listed as pneumonia.

The 18th Olympic Games were held in Tokyo October 1964 where men's judo was, for the first time, recognized as an official Olympic event. The judo events took place in the Japanese Military Arts Hall known as Nippon Budokan. The preliminary round matches lasted 10 minutes each and the finals were 15 minute matches.

The event was organised into matches according to various different weight divisions, plus an 'open' competition where any weight Judoka could prove his capabilities in the art. The open was in keeping with the original (Kano) idea emphasizing that *wins* in Judo were not due to being bigger but, fundamentally due to skills levels in technique. The Japanese took gold in all divisions but, surprisingly, not the open division, indicating that judo was becoming seriously established in countries beyond Japan. In 1988 in Seoul the 'open' event was dropped from the Olympic judo event.

Women's judo was demonstrated at the Seoul Olympics but didn't become an official event until the Barcelona Olympics in 1992. However, the *men's Paralympic judo* was officially introduced at Seoul.

The Paralympic event is for visually impaired competitors and has been modified by the International Blind Sports Association (IBSA). The major rule difference is that the 2 judoka start with a loose grip on each other's Judo Gi. If contact is broken "matte" is called and the competitors return to the centre of the mat to re-grip.

Women's Paralympic judo was introduced into the Olympics in 2004 at Athens.

Nowadays the IJF is heavily involved in the running the Olympic Judo events, which (in Britain) are entered by BJA judoka. The rules of competitive judo under the IJF have altered over the years and to some extent have drifted away from Kano's original Kodokan Judo.

### ***Closing Comment***

It is an interesting subject; the history of judo, and during the research for this essay I have spent many hours reading Judo connected subjects that are not included herein.

When one looks back to the possible beginnings of martial arts, it strikes home just how comparatively new judo is; its creator Jigoro Kano died in the same year that my father was born! – just 76 years ago ☺

It also makes me realise how quickly something that, even although it is a firmly established global phenomena, can be distorted due to external organisations making it suit themselves. For whatever reason, albeit safety, sporting entertainment, business needs etc., it would in my mind be a great shame if the essence of what Jigoro had set out in his first Kodokan was to fade. Therefore the importance of essays such as this being assigned to judoka by teachers and officials at currently operating judo clubs should not be overlooked.

Whether the emphasis be on kata, randori or shiai, judo has become a very popular occupation by people all over the world with different reasons for practising it. For some it may be for physical fitness, for others it may be for the sporting element and the spirit of the fight. For some it is simply the way... .."The Gentle Way".

## ***Significant Milestones in the History of Judo***

- 1532 Takenouchi-ryu Jujutsu system founded by Nakatsukasa Hisamori.
  
- 1861 Birth of Jigoro Kano
- 1868 Japanese Imperial Rule restored (Samurai Class in decline)
- 1882 Jigoro Kano founded the Kodokan institute at Eisho-ji, Tokyo
- 1886 Kodokan Judo wins tournament over Jujutsu & is adopted by Tokyo Metropolitan Police
- 1895 Gokyo no waza (first five groups of instruction) introduced to Kodokan judo
- 1899 Japanese judo experts visit England as part of Mr. Barton-Wright's project
  
- 1909 Kano took a seat on the International Olympic Committee
- 1918 Gunji Koizumi opened the Budokwai Japanese cultural centre and social club in London
- 1914 The Kodokan Judo Association founded
- 1920 Yukio Tani awarded second-degree black belt rank in judo at the Budokwai during Jigoro Kano's first visit to Britain.
- 1932 Kano became Minister of Physical Education in the Japanese government.
- 1935 Kano was awarded the Asahi prize
- 1936 Sarah Mayer became first non-Japanese woman to gain a Dan grade in Judo
- 1938 Death of Jigoro Kano
- 1948 BJA (British Judo Association) formed
- 1951 IJF (International Judo Federation) formed
- 1951 EJU (European Judo Union) formed
- 1964 Men's judo recognized as an official event at Tokyo Olympics.
- 1988 Women's judo introduced as a demonstration event at the Seoul Olympics  
"Open" division was dropped from the Olympic program.
- 1988 Men's *Paralympic* judo recognized as an official event at Seoul Paralympics.
- 1992 Women's judo recognized as an official event at Barcelona Olympics
- 1999 AEJF(All England Judo Federation) formed
  
- 2004 Women's *Paralympic* judo recognized as an official event at Athens Paralympics
- 2013 The Blackwater (independent) Judo Club formed in Maldon