



# The Judo Compass

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## Mat Prowess via Yielding

**T**he essence of effective ne-waza is the epitome of yielding, and the concept of maximum efficiency via optimum use of effort. By contrast, on the more novice level, when a hold down is secured in randori or shiai, the tendency for tori to “turn to stone”, or to “Squeeze, squeeze!”, can be effective. After all, when a powerful person clamps down like a python, most victims are finished. This early “success” can lead to habitual non-judo on the mat and in life.

The most effective hold down applications are the least encumbering. A small piece of uke is controlled, and if uke begins to disrupt that, then an adaptation is made. The small piece controlled is enough, and if too much more is taken, then tori creates greater counter jeopardy. When Yamashita used his favorite hold, Yokoshiho Gatame, to first defeat DelColumbo, and then the massive Rashawan for 1984 Olympic gold in the Open division, he put pressure on the section of each opponent that needed control as the opponent’s resistance dictated. He did not climb up high on either opponent, and demonstrated why the name of the hold is “side” hold. The red arrow in the Rashawan picture shows shoulder pressure to abate efforts to turn in and make space. The yellow arrow shows the area of actual pressure. Casual observation might give the impression that the pressure is chest against chest. After the “osaekomi” was called, in each instance, Yamashita did not turn to stone. That would have allowed escape, and in the case of Rashawan, a turn over. Yamashita flowed with the resistance and defeated escape attempts by controlling pieces of Rashawan, as needed. All holds have this successful application in common.



Another way to maintain a hold down is to seamlessly move into another hold down, never relinquishing control during the process. Uke’s resistance will then resemble struggling in quagmire. Each move is responded to with a new trap. “Struggle here, okay. I will let you. It will only get you in deeper trouble.” Hence, the escape of the arm during Kesa Gatame puts uke into Kata Gatame. A rolling away against Kata Gatame can be met with Tate Shiho. Beginners who try too hard to secure a current hold by sheer force, find themselves being rolled over. The “uphill” roll to defeat Kesa Gatame can be thwarted by uke’s simple arm extension, but tori’s rigid neck control arm is often trapped and the roll succeeds.

The concept is, “If you want to



A good method of practicing matwork is to move fluidly from hold down to hold down, with the uke nearly escaping, trying to find opportunities as the transitions take place. Then, adjust to optimum placement of pressure or move to an entirely different hold. Be loose and fluid. Flow more like a giant amoeba, rather than becoming a rock.

1. Do ne-waza randori beginning from a small point knock down. Then go for the hold. Full point and strong waza-ari throws make securing the hold too easy. If nothing productive happens in ten seconds, stand up and go again (perhaps taking turns).
2. Practice making space or somehow messing up tori’s attempt at the initial moment of the hold down, taking away the chance for tori to clamp down on the ‘perfect’ hold. Do this in conjunction with number 1.
3. Start with a soft hold down. Then, at 50 to 75 % effort from both, give your uke chances to escape and make adaptive moves to new holds (including chokes and arm bars. Alternate tori and uke start-ups.
4. If either partner is winning predominantly because of strength or size, newaza partners are not accomplishing their goals, which are craftiness, cunning, application of the laws of physics via judo.

How easy it is in life to become set in our ways, to turn to stone, squeeze harder. Life’s Katame Waza rigidity is more compelling and insidious, and consequently more difficult to re-tool, than physical judo’s. Knowing where to put the pressure, how to use the minimum amount of pressure, apply the crafty application; this is the province of champions. To some extent, all humans are “set in their ways”, “rigid”, “stubborn”, and it is difficult to know when this is for good reason or simply based on responses learned in desperation – from fear, anxiety, harassment, or because it once worked best and became a reflex.

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