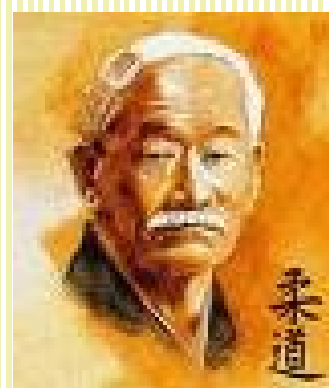




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Judo in the USA.... Or...Popularity Isn't Everything

In a time when popularity seems to be everything, when 'going viral', amassing Facebook Friends, posting every video possible and texting to the point of thumb numbness, it might be worthwhile to look at the popularity of judo in the USA.

Since the early days of this writer's judo, the ongoing question has been, "What do we have to do to make judo more popular?" Perhaps that question turns the compass in the wrong direction, puts North where South should be.

People who try judo for the 'wrong' reasons soon discover that judo doesn't make one a tough guy, doesn't provide instant self-defense, won't bring fame and popularity among ones peers, and offers none of the bragging rights of the 'popular' martial arts. One can claim to do karate, taekwon-do, MMA, 'jujitsu', mui-tai, etc., and people say, "Hey, that's cool." Claim to do judo, and people say, "What's that?" This is irritating for us, and we say, "Why isn't judo more popular?" After all, we love it, and can't understand how others don't, too, or at least know what it is.

Many try judo, but few remain. Are we doing something wrong? No.

There was a time in the USA when the martial arts were "The Secrets of the Orient". They were exotic, and being a member of that select group, martial artists, was special. The karate / taekwon-do explosion blew the doors off of that. Everybody became a martial artist, and black belts were given out for dollars. But not in judo. Along came MMA and Gracie Jujitsu, and falling skills and competent throwing skills were not required. But not in judo.

Judoka often grumbled, "What do these martial arts have that we don't have? Maybe we can learn something from them and become more popular." In what may be the final analysis, the thing we can learn from this is that if one wants to have a successful commercial judo dojo, outside of an already culturally judo geographic area, it's a good idea to have a popular martial art in there, too, so the rent gets paid. Judo is not culturally USA.

Regardless, judo seems to attract a certain sort of person. Many judoka will say that it was the feeling of independence, singularity, individuality and uniqueness that prompted them to think, "This is for me. I will do this not because it is what everybody else does, nor because it is popular, nor for the sake of easy victories and public acclaim, but because judo is somehow special, different and worthwhile beyond these common things."

Judo is often said to be the most highly popular individual participant sport in the world; and we can say that means it is also the least well marketed sport in the USA. What if we sat back and said, "That's okay." Let's enjoy our independence. Let's allow water to seek its own level. If more exposure brought more people in the door, that might also mean time wasted on a large percentage who would soon become drop outs, because judo won't give them what the USA culture wants from the martial arts. Let's find a way, if growth is the goal, to attract "keepers", people who will by their very nature be drawn to judo.

Casting aside Crone's Law of Ironic Opposites, that as soon as you ignore something it starts to show up in larger numbers, we might be better off to say that judo isn't for everybody, that we don't want masses pounding on the dojo door, that we prefer our obscurity and apartness from the crowd. Think: Why did you start judo? What are the character traits of your very best judo associates and students? Speaking only from this author's point of view, these are the people I want in my dojo, that I want to mingle with at judo events, and whose friendship I will cherish for a lifetime.

Let judo be a lantern that glows dimly in the distance in the night, becoming brighter as we move along the path to reach it; this, rather than emulating a garish spotlight blinding us with promises of things sought by wanna-bes and pretenders.



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