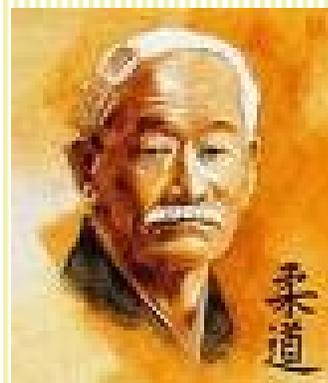




The Judo Compass

October, November, December 2012



Give a Grip to Get a Grip – Use Judo

Many years ago at a judo clinic, a highly respected U. S. competitor and eventual high level coach said, “If you lose the grip fight, you lose the match.” About that time in judo worldwide, a new sport was born. GRIP FIGHTING. It became “Get your grip and go!” if you wanted to win. Gain the superior grip and don’t give the opponent a chance to survive it.

The result, in this judoka / author’s never humble opinion, is that hence began the most inelegant period in judo history; and a totally non-judo, bastard idea ruled the kingdom. “Bastard” in the purest form of the word, as something illegitimately conceived. Illegitimate in that it was not born of judo, *per se*.

In prior times, the mantra was, “Control kuzushi, win the match.” Then, the evolution to grip fighting came along and players played patty-cake, got a grip, and attacked; not necessarily with a good throw, but at least it was an attack. Inevitably, the rules against false attacks were invoked, since that was the “rules player’s” next haven for beating the opponent by beating the rules.

Judo is about attaining optimum timing and kuzushi, then applying good technique to the moment of chance. It is not about getting a grip and bull-rushing into an attack. Of course, since higher scores were awarded for lesser skill, the result of a “grip and go” endeavor could often bring high reward.

No argument, certain grips avail better results for certain throws. To obtain the best grip is an optimum objective. At the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, U. S. Rene Capo’s first opponent took a semi-high collar grip (nothing to worry about) and tried harai goshi. It failed. He took the same grip, stealthily moved it up two inches, tried again, almost got it. Next time, the grip snuck up another three inches, and Rene went over for ippon.

What do you do if somebody gets a dominant grip on you, and you can’t somehow tear it off? According to the coach first mentioned, you might as well submit, just tap out. You lost the grip fight; you’ve lost the match. Not so. Or, you could tear it off and start the patty-cake battle anew.

Before going farther, consider please how all of the above stacks up in the “Judo is a way of life” concept. “Grip and go” might be the “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread” if it is done without creating all the necessary prerequisites for opportunity becoming successful application. “Lose the grip, lose the fight” is just plain giving up in the face of a significant and daunting challenge.



← Here is a grip that is obviously dominated by the judoka on the left’s pocket grip. Judoka on the right has no grip at all. But the judoka on the right has caught the opponent sliding his feet together as he takes the grip, and applies a foot sweep.



The judoka on the right, Larry Fukahara also creates inverted leverage against Robert Mita’s gripping arm, and the resultant okuri ashi barai for ippon put Fukahara on the U.S. national team for the Pan Am Games and the 1967 World Championships. I snapped this photo using Bill Paul’s camera because I’d seen Mita take the sliding steps prior to getting his grip on two previous occasions. Apparently, Fukahara sensed it, too. He certainly didn’t worry about winning the grip fight.

The ultimate judoka decides to give the grip to get a grip. Fear no grip. Practice a response to any grip you encounter and learn to thwart it as it is being taken, and / or after it is secured. Seriously inclined judoka will make a chart of the grips they encounter, figure out and practice attacks against the grips, as well as counters against the throws those grips advantages provide the opponent. If you cannot come up with the list, your breadth of judo knowledge could use expansion, and perhaps this exercise will provide it.

Practice until the skin comes off your fingers, then fear no grip. In fact, invite the opponents’ grips so you can dominate them. (Is this not the underlying premise in the first action of every throw in nage no kata? Uke attacks, and tori absorbs the force and responds.)

Judo in life... Apply the advice in the previous two paragraphs.



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