



To the Death

Judo is a death martial art / sport. Let us begin with acceptance of this next idea. All sport is a symbolic sublimation of warfare. Outside of human “sport”, think of animals playing at battle. Bear cubs do it and they are very cute.

Judo is the only hand-to-hand combat sport that came fully and directly from the world of battles to the death. “Directly” is the critical word. *Judo* founder Kano studied and became very proficient at two *jujutsu* (spell it as you like) styles. This was the *jujutsu* that was the hand to hand combat fighting domain of the samurai. The samurai fought to the death, and proudly so.

The next critical word is “fully”. *Judo* provides a comprehensive death contest. Striking style sports hit, and that’s all (judo has *atemi waza*– striking skills, but not in modern practice, although *randori no kata* has strike defense). Grappling sports take down and grapple. That’s all. BJJ mostly came from *judo*, as did Russian Sambo. Sambo comes close in the martial “kill” ranks, but is not a direct descendent of anything, and it is an amalgamation of wrestling styles, judo being the preeminent one.

Have you ever asked yourself, “Why do we put on these odd outfits and battle in them, throwing and holding and choking and almost dislocating arms? Because it’s fun? Lots of activities are fun. Why judo?

The answer: It is primal. Go for more synonyms. Primordial, Primitive. Primeval. We are the bear cubs, preparing for the real battles ahead. There are two thousand years of modern humans and six million years estimated of ancestors to them. What we know as modern “civilization” is not a departure from militarism, just a more comfortable life created and provided by it. Within us all dwells a primitive creature of a million or more years of survival. So, when we put on a *judogi* we indulge in a civilized survival-based engagement of the primitive kind.

A *judo* ippon throw, as originally determined, signifies the opponent is dead. A hold down that allows enough time for the person applying it to draw a short sword and finish the battle means death. (Originally, the contest time for *osaekomi* was proposed by many samurai minded *judoka* to be two seconds, the time it would take to do exactly that.) A choke or a dislocated joint meant death for the disabled.

In *randori*, the loser is the bear cub who was bested. In *shiai*, the loser is dead. In *randori*, the victor can say, “I could have killed you.” In *shiai*, the victor says, “You’re dead”.

Here is a surprisingly unconsidered *judo* fact. In *randori no kata*, this battle is always in play. The noise of *shiai* and *randori* is eliminated so that mastery of finite details can occur. The *go no sen* battle for

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domination underlies every move, every step, every grasp. Those who do not understand the vitality and essence of the *randori no kata*, especially *nage*, are missing a great inner secret of *judo*.

The question comes to us, can we have fun and frolic while practicing a deadly martial art? Of course we can, we do, and must. It's the only way to train and not lose participants. No single hand-to-hand sport / martial art other than *judo* provides such a comprehensive syllabus for it. The fun is in the learning and the *randori* and the *kata*. Ultimately, the *shiai*.

This is a major reason why Kano's second principle of *judo* is *jita kyoei*, Mutual Benefit and Well Being. If it is not practiced in the dojo while training, we lose people due to injury or even death. The Kodokan essay on this principle is mostly about its use outside the dojo, but read it carefully and you will see the essentials as they apply to dojo practice. Here are Kano Shihan's thoughts. <http://kodokanjudoinstitute.org/en/doctrine/word/jita-kyoei/> In his own writings, he talks about the necessity for it in the dojo practice. The *jujutsu* practices of



Shrike on a Dead Branch,
by Miyamoto Musashi

Kano's time were notoriously dangerous.

All of this is not to say one must practice some sort of evil killer *judo*. No. That would be too much like the old *jujutsu* that Kano had eliminated from Kodokan Judo. It is important to understand *judo*'s lineage, its story, so as to practice it with the correct vigor and precision.

It is also valuable to know what, aside from the battle aspect, the samurai brought us. The samurai appreciated art. Theirs was a bestial and bloody world. Even their training practice was potentially deadly and often crippling. They aspired to the contrast. When the most famous of all their swordsmen, *ronin* Miyamoto Musashi (the "sword saint") retired after a claimed 60-plus battles, he went to live in a cave. He wrote *The Book of Five Rings*. He mastered and created calligraphy, poetry, sculpture and painting, applying his consummate insight and resourcefulness. Samurai appreciated these things because they contrasted to their grisly lifestyles.

Judo provides the opportunity for both ends of this spectrum. A throw intended to symbolize the opponent's death can also be elegant in its application, subtle in its rendezvous and beautifully effortless as it seemingly defies the laws of physics. One wonders if Musashi devastated his opponents with thundering elegance.

Sadly, I believe, *judo* contest is no longer as good a representation of *judo*'s primal lineage as it once was. From "rolling ippons" to winning by shido, to allowing the grip fighting to be so pervasive, the sport has moved far from its early days' rules and applications of skills. This causes damage to the practice of *judo* itself, when the objective of training is to win contests, based upon rules which no longer totally represent the origin and intent of *judo*. Perhaps turning back the rules clock and

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encouraging more primal definitions of behavior and methods of attaining victory would change this.

Even so, if you bring your samurai brain to shiai you may possibly win more contests.

Two things separate judo from all other hand-to-hand sports and martial arts.

1. It is a comprehensive and direct representation of primal martial lineage.
2. It has fundamental principles upon which it is founded. (Moreover, these principles have direct value to living ones life outside the dojo.)

The next time you put on your *judogi* and cinch your *obi*, remember your own primal heritage, then go play nice with others.



Judo Compass is published by Tom Crone. If you wish to be removed from the list, simply respond with Remove Me in the subject.
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