

BBC Nonsense

In July just before the Beijing Olympic Games I was watching a BBC TV programme called Olympic Dreams which was featuring some British judo people who would be competing in Beijing. The presenter said in his introduction, “**Judo is the only Olympic sport where breaking an opponent’s arm or strangling them until they’re unconscious is allowed.**”

I wrote off to the BBC to complain and said that the statement above was incorrect and dangerous. The BBC defended its presenter and insisted that he was correct. This led to a close examination of the IJF rules and surprisingly they were contradictory.

Article 20c of the IJF rules states that the referee will announce Ippon if a competitor taps twice or says Maitta as a result of a grappling technique, shime-waza or kansetsu waza. Article 20d says the referee shall announce an ippon when a contestant is *incapacitated* (my italics) by the effect of shime-waza or kansetsu-waza.

The Appendix to Article 20 clarifies this further by stating that for Olympic, world and continental championships rule 20c & d will apply as stated above but in lesser tournaments referees can award an Ippon if the effect of the technique is sufficiently *apparent*. [This I thought was always the case for all levels of competition].

So my reading of the above rules is that in the Olympics an Ippon for a strangle/armlock can only be given in two situations namely when (a) a contestant submits by tapping or says Maitta or (b) when his/her arm is actually broken or when he or she is actually unconscious – in other words *incapacitated*. It also states that the old rule allowing the referee to call an Ippon when the effect is *apparent* has somehow got relegated to minor competitions. When did this happen I wonder?

The official guide to the Beijing Olympics also says,

“Judo is the only Olympic sport where submission holds allow choking an opponent or breaking an arm”.

If I were a coach I might feel tempted to tell my students to put the opponent’s arm in a lock and then break it to make sure of the Ippon. Maybe one could also advise stamping on an arm in order to break it and to secure the Ippon?

However further inspection of the rules reveals Article 27d xxviii which states that any contestant who makes an action which may endanger or injure the opponent, especially the neck and spine, will be disqualified (hansoku-make). This same article says that anything that is done against the spirit of judo will merit disqualification. So somebody who breaks an arm or strangles somebody out should be disqualified because it contravenes 27d xxviii and more importantly because it goes against the spirit of judo. The big question is of course which rule takes priority.

The correspondence batted backwards and forwards between me and aunty BBC but they would not admit fault here despite the fact that I protested their programmes

cannot make bare statements, close to children's TV time, that judo is the only sport that *allows* the breaking of arms and strangling unconscious. The BBC should think about the many children already doing judo in the clubs.

Well obviously the rules have to be written in such a way that statements like this are avoided. However one small problem arose (July 2008) and that was I couldn't find the IJF rules on its website in order to check the above. And when I looked again today (Jun 2009) I still couldn't find the IJF rules. I have had to rely on my older copy of the IJF rules and some very helpful explanations on the USAjudo website. Well this is all very curious. Recently we have had major rule changes being announced by the IJF but no supporting rule documentation for it. What is going on? The IJF appears to have been a rule-free zone for some time. Maybe I am completely wrong on this. If so perhaps an IJF referee could enlighten me. I wonder how many other anomalies there are in the rules.

While still on the rules I always found it necessary to explain to beginners the four ways of winning in judo - throws, strangles, arm-locks, hold-downs, (plus disqualification/injury etc) and to state that no other techniques such as kicks and punches, other joint-locks, biting, eye-gouging or other pain-causing moves were allowed. In other words I felt it necessary to spell out both sides of the rules – what you must do to score and what you must not do. The prohibited acts section of the rules covers this to a degree but some acts it takes for granted and does not specifically ban them (eye-gouging or head-butting for example).

I think the IJF rules could usefully include this under a heading - What judo is not.

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