

TACTICS AND STRATEGIES

Definitions

When talking about tactics and strategy the first problem we run into is the one of definitions – the two are usually lumped together. Is there a difference between the two and does it matter?

According to my dictionary *tactics* can be (a) a skilful device (b) the plans and means adopted in carrying out a scheme or achieving some end (c) or adroitly planned moves.

Strategy can mean (a) the art of war (b) the management of an army in a campaign. (c) the art of moving troops, ships or aircraft into favourable positions. (d) plan of action or policy in business or politics.

Strategy, clearly has military, business or political dimensions to it whereas tactics is probably more applicable to judo.

Common threads in the definitions are:- Achieving a favourable outcome via planning, positioning and deception. Deception is perhaps the key element as far as judo is concerned. If the opponent does not know what you can do or are about to do he can be beaten by the unexpected.

In so far as everything that is done in a judo match is an attempt at obtaining a win then judo is wholly tactical because it is planned and involves a certain amount of deception.

In an earlier lecture I quoted Napoleon who said, “Beginners talk of tactics whereas professionals talk of logistics. He obviously thought of the two as opposites to a degree. What are the logistics of judo? If Napoleon had known of judo he might have said beginners talk of technique and the professionals talk of fitness and strength!

Personally I have always thought that tactics are the smaller moves and strategies are the larger longer term plans. From a judo point of view I have found it useful to divide such moves into **tricks – tactics – strategies** depending on the length of time that one would need to work on them to make them effective.

Tricks, tactics and strategies

My judo teacher defined a trick as a move that would not work more than once on the same opponent and added that it is usually a simple move that requires little training. For example there is a sumo move called *neko-damashi* (deceiving the cat) which could work in judo. As the two combatants close with each other one abruptly claps his hands together just in front of his opponent’s face without touching it and then when the opponent reacts in surprise he makes his attack. Other tricks might include pointing down to the mat as if trying to draw the referee’s attention to a faulty mat and then attacking when the opponent looks down as well. Some might call these sneaky tricks.

Tricks and tactics merge to a degree. Think of the various meanings of the word *trick*. In some usages a trick is simply a technique as in, 'He showed me a couple of tricks'. But in the sentence, 'He tricked me.' one can see deception and low level deception at that.

The strategies of judo might include the choices you make early on in your career such as the techniques you build up to form an attacking arsenal, your choice of right or left side attacks or your style of judo.

However beware - the opponent is a thinking human being and is quite likely to perceive your tactics and adapt accordingly, so they have a limited life. Also beware of the fact that there is a fine line between being tricky and tactical. Some referees may not like someone overtly 'tricky'.

Generally speaking there are many tactics in everyday judo and fewer tricks or strategies according to my definitions.

Tricks

Trick 1. Play the moment – look expectantly at the ref when your opponent stumbles accidentally or when you partially throw him and combine it with a kiai shout as you fall with him. Inform the ref in so many gestures that it was you who did that!

Trick 2. Pretend to notice something on the mat then attack when opponent glances down. Pointing at something will work in the same way but referee may not like it.

Trick 3. Learn to make your trickery very casual – it is not as easy as it seems. Never make it obvious.

Trick 4. When the opponent crashes to the ground look for a groundwork opening but be active. Grab the belt or jacket and pull the opponent around quite a bit in order to convince the refereeing team. Contrast this activity with the man who simply sinks down on top of his opponent and works at his neck with one hand. The stand-up call will come much sooner for the second one.

Trick 5. *Neko-damashi*. The hand clap is the easy part. It's how you instantly use the opponent's reaction that is difficult. Some sumo-like moves such as kata-sukashi could be usefully employed. There are a couple of stranglers (ie kata-eri-jime) that could be used as well.

Trick 6. The flying O-uchi. Run and leap at your opponent, wrap your right arm around his neck and do an o-uchigari with your right leg - all in one big-move. Can succeed quite spectacularly!

Trick 7. If taller than your opponent casually reach forward with both hands as if aiming to take a standard sleeve and collar grip but at the very last moment slap down hard with both hands on the opponent's shoulders and slip in a quick ko-uchi-gari at the same time. Do not catch hold.

Trick 8. At some point in a match catch hold of the opponent's jacket by the elbows on *both* sides and try suddenly twisting him off his feet (Hiji-otoshi) or swing him round and off his feet. I have seen tall judoka pull this off.

Trick 9. We are not allowed to touch the face in judo and this is defined as the area from the line of the jaws up to and across the eye brows however the rules do not expressly forbid slaps. So maybe a surprise slap to the forehead, side, top or rear of the head could be allowed. Double check the Rules on this one preferably with an international referee. Having made a slap an attack must instantly follow.

Tactics

Tactic 1. Brutally crush your opponents attacks in such a way that he feels you are impregnable. This means stiffening your body and arms very *abruptly* so that the opponent's attack is brought to a sudden stop. Contrast this with the man who just rides a throw or moves slightly out of its way.

Tactic 2. Distinguish first between grip-fighting and grip-breaking. Grip fighting is when you are fighting for a favourable grip for your throw whereas grip breaking is to gain freedom of movement. Always combine gripping with foot movements. It is pointless to break a grip without movement because the opponent will immediately replace his grip ad infinitum. So grip-break and move or move and grip-break. Keep changing your grip till the opponent gives up.

Tactic 3. Disrupt the opponent's attack pattern by throwing in destabilizing small leg attacks (ashi-barai, tsurikomi-ashi etc). Many competitors have to wind themselves up to make an attack. Break this pattern and you can maintain control for a while and expose opponent to passivity warnings.

Tactic 4. Waste time on the ground, if in the last quarter of a match especially if ahead. Preferably fight top-down not bottom-up and look active. Do no more than one straight tomoe or one yoko-tomoe in this end period. Referees tend to regard tomoe-nage as a time-wasting move at this point.

Tactic 5. In the early or middle stage of the match try a two footed tomoe-nage either by dropping straight into it with both legs up or by lifting one leg first and then the other. This is rarely a smooth move but even if it breaks down into two stages keep going because it is possible to get a waza-ari off a slow disjointed attack. It is in the rules.

Tactic 6. Play-safe moves. If you (a right-hander) want to keep your attack rate up but play safe do tai-otoshi on opponent's near left leg not far right leg – you can make it look genuine and you may get a score off it. Similarly do a spin turn uchimata. Uchimata is difficult to stop or counter if the leg is inserted between opp's two legs first and the spin-turn entry is the safest way to do it. Also a mix of tsurikomi ashi & kosotogari are useful and safe attacking moves. Other play-safe moves are virtually all moves where the attacker is standing on his own two feet such as Seoinage, Ogoshi and Tsurikomigoshi BUT be careful about turning fully round in the attack – you can be countered backwards. Turn only sideways on. Sumo has a number of interesting half turn moves such as uwate and shitate nage. More play-safe moves are yoko

sutemi-waza, pure hand throws, waki-otoshi, maki-komi, seoi-otoshi, soto-muso, o-guruma, koshi-guruma

Tactic 7. Disruptive movement against an extreme right-sided opponent is to circle constantly in clockwise direction around his forward right foot and combine this with Ko-uchi-gari attacks. Also the straight back-scuttle is good for digging out a reluctant mover. Move vigorously backwards dragging opponent with you but constantly break his grips and change your own. Aim to end up with a Seoi or Ko-uchi gari.

Tactic 8. A snap-down is a useful wrestling move against a deeply crouching opponent. The judo rules say that you cannot drag an opponent down to groundwork but it is possible to combine a sudden pull down with a bit of a twist to make it like a throw. See also slap-downs above. A block-down (crumple) is another wrestling move which crushes the opponent down to the ground just as he *begins to turn* in for the attack.

Tactic 8. The sprawl. In response to a morote gari when the opponent dives for your legs spread and throw your legs back fast and bear down with your chest on his upper back. This is not a scoring move – it is simply an instant response to a double leg grab. Similarly when the opponent attacks with a leg grab instantly sprawl and circle one way or another. Do not get sucked into moving backwards off it.

Tactic 9. When an opponent goes for an inside leg grab (ie. from a cross grip) use your legs to do a scissor lock on his arm. That is to say sharply twist your body and your legs to one side to apply pressure on his arm. It can also be done when kneeling.

Tactics 10. Grape-vining. Kawazu-gake is a grape-vine type move combined with o-uchi-gari which is expressly prohibited in the Rules but grape-vining can often be effectively combined with o-soto-gari and uchi-mata. Douillet of France often scored with it.

Tactics 11. Standing armlocks. These are good tactical moves because judo people are mostly used to attacks to their legs or mid sections. A sudden switch to a standing armlock can catch the opponent completely by surprise.

Tactic 12. Playing the edge when facing out. If you try to push an opponent directly backwards he may stop you or the ref may penalize you so try an oblique push over the edge. Try to encircle one arm and push the opponent so that he moves obliquely out of bounds on the opposite side to the arm encirclement.

Tactic 13. Attack instantly after losing a score/or if either party get hurt. Think of the attack as a rebound! It seems to happen fairly often in contest but it may be solely because one competitor is stung into action. So copy it.

Tactic 14. Wrestling Arm-drag. As the opponent comes towards you with arms outstretched to catch hold grab his right wrist/forearm with your left hand and use your right hand to catch around his right triceps area. From this position pull his right arm completely across the front of your body and seek to twist the opponent around. As he turns move round behind him and wrap your left arm round his waist. From this position try various sutemi type moves or pick-ups such as te-guruma.

Strategy.

Strategy 1. Contest time management. A five minute contest can be usefully divided up into quarters or thirds. Apart from getting an Ippon the best situation to be in in a five minute contest is to go into the final third of the match comfortably ahead on scores. The pressure will then be on opponent to recover those scores and he /she may make mistakes giving you a chance to make further scores. Probably the first quarter or third of the match will be when you cautiously test the opponent. The middle is when you pile on the attacks and go hunting for a good score. The final one will be as described above.

Strategy 2. Passivity. It is essential to train to avoid passivity warnings. With a certain amount of training your body can be trained to explode into action at regular intervals. So train specifically in your dojo to attack every 20 seconds or every 15 seconds. This would need some kind of signal in the dojo to sound at those intervals. In addition incorporate similar signals in your off-mat training. So for example if you are running round a track make a couple of big explosive moves such as two heavy dumbbell cleans at those intervals. So a five minute contest would require a number of heavy cleans not to mention all the other judo movements you might be doing in the match. It will be hard!

Strategy 3. Left sided players tend to win more than right sided ones so make left side your main side from early on. Take my word for it – it can be done.

Strategy 4. Have a good counter-throw for everything. During training sessions regularly run through a repertoire of counters for all the Gokyo techniques.

Strategy 5. Time management of a contest means that at certain stages of a match you will need to change *style* of judo depending on whether you are ahead or not – lurking – countering – counter attacking – hard attacking etc. Coach and competitor should work out what each entails.

Strategy 6. Know the rules inside out. A number of the tricks and tactics described above take advantage of loosely worded rules. Try to work on the referees at an event by asking their definitions and asking awkward questions. With a bit of luck one might end up refereeing your match.

Strategy 7. Learn to throw directly from behind – whenever the opponent has turned his back on you or is walking away. This will need to be done quickly before the referee has time to call matte.

Strategy 8. Learn to use the belt for throws. I once fought a very awkward opponent who held my belt on both sides with a lot of my jacket which he pulled forward totally controlling my lower back. From there he did a very powerful hip throw. Also try a belt and trouser grip (one up-one down).

Strategy 9. Train regularly in sports similar to judo such as wrestling and sumo.

Strategy 10.. Think of Not-Losing.

Strategy 11. Acquire a comprehensive combat vocabulary. Study other sports especially American ones. Certain concise phrases may summarize key phases of a contest.

Strategy 12. A mat-side coach must be able to communicate with his player – but signals of some kind are required because certain languages are well understood by many foreign players and coaches.

I have not included in the strategy section above how to build up an arsenal of attacking moves either as straight throws or in combination. Most judo books cover these. Basically you must do the unexpected such as a throw to the rear when the opponent is expecting a front throw and be able to throw in most directions. I have also not covered some of the psychological tactical aspects of traditional judo as in my book Judo Strategies. Space is limited.

Finally a word of warning. As I mentioned above referees may not like ‘tricky/tactical’ competitors. So make the core of your judo the solid scoring throws such as uchi-mata or seoinage. **Against a good man the tricks and tactics may have little effect. He/she will ignore or shrug them off. That is when you must depend on your iron inner core of technique.**

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