

REASONS FOR LOSING

(A lecture given by Syd Hoare 8th Dan to the EJU Foundation Degree course at Bath University on July 2006)

The title of this lecture was set me by Dr Callan of Bath University. I think this was because I mentioned to him a long time ago that I had more feedback from one small section of my Teach Yourself Judo than anything else I had ever written about judo. In fact I had less to say on the subject than I thought and added on to the lecture a talk about Judo Etiquette.

The section I referred to in Teach Yourself Judo was one paragraph where I wrote about the three main traditional reasons for losing. I often wondered why people found this bit in the book interesting. Maybe it was the sense that these were real gold nuggets of oriental wisdom. I even went so far as to write a whole book (Judo Strategies) on the same theme (oriental judo wisdom).

The three traditional reasons for losing are:-

1. Insufficient training (*futanren*)
2. Seeing and crumbling (*mi-kuzure*)
3. Hearing and trembling (*kiki-oji*)

Seeing and crumbling means being defeated by the look of an opponent and hearing and trembling means being defeated by the reputation of an opponent. I later added a fourth reason of my own and that was No-planning.

Leaving aside the three traditional reasons for losing for a moment lets list the obvious reasons that people lose:

1. Not strong enough
2. Not enough stamina
3. Poor technique
4. Limited repertoire
5. Too stiff
6. Injured
7. Poor understanding of judo technique etc etc

In fact the whole range of human physical weaknesses. Provided that the trainee is physically capable most of the above can be remedied by the coach. These are mostly physical or technical reasons for losing but for those aiming high it is more likely that the competitor will lose for psychological reasons. So let's get back to our three main causes for defeat.

Insufficient training is self-explanatory but what is sufficient training? The great Kimura who won the All Japan Championships several times always aimed to train twice as much as anybody else. So if the average trainee around him was doing two and a half hours a day mat-work then Kimura did five hours. One early Japanese champion I read about aimed to do 10,000 randori per year. He achieved slightly less than that but that represented 27 randori for every single day of the year. Just recently

I read about somebody who came up with the theory that most people who had achieved top results in sport (and music etc) had put in at least 10,000 hours of training. I'll leave it to you to work out how many hours a day and how many days a week/year that represented! But how does one ever know beforehand if what one has done is sufficient? It is probably only hindsight that will answer that. Unfortunately there is not a nice little training-sufficiency gage you can wear on your wrist.

The next reason for losing is also self-explanatory. You can lose because of your reaction to the looks of an opponent - see and crumble. He may be heavily muscled or may look like a refugee from a horror movie or he may be weird. No matter how they look one should just shrug and get on with the business in hand. I have often found well-built opponents to be weaker than I first thought and conversely slight looking opponents have often been surprisingly strong. Looks tell you nothing.

Similarly with the third reason for losing - hear and tremble - one should regard champions or those with a reputation as a challenge. So what if they have won a gold medal - lets see if you cannot take them down. The champion might be past it or wearing his or her robes of honour and feel that he needs to be treated with some respect and the strong looking one might be a paper dragon. It is only when you wade in that you find out.

With the above three reasons simply knowing of them is the first big step to controlling them. After that experience of beating such people reinforces the fact that they are often paper tigers.

No-Planning

Planning is important and it is useful to have a coach who can help with it. Your time needs to be used wisely and directed towards some major targets. You need to ask yourself how old you are, are you on a rising path or a descending path or on a kind of plateau then work out what sort of time you have available. Then look at the forthcoming major championships over the time you have available and set yourself some targets within that time. Probably the period around 25-30 yrs old will be the one where you will achieve your best results with lightweights peaking earlier than heavyweights. It might be that the four year Olympic gap does not fit too well with your timings and that a particular in-between World Championship gives you a more realistic target to aim for. Some championships such as a Europeans coming close before a world championships used to be noticeably easier. Many nations often sent their B teams to the former. This of course depends on the national and Olympic qualification process.

Aside from the four reasons above for losing what else is there?

Think of not-losing

This seems to contradict the much touted advice in sport which is Think of Winning! In most traditional Japanese martial arts there is a sort of negative advice where they say do not think of winning - think of not-losing (makenai yo ni) This is repeated frequently enough to make one think there is something in this advice. Why is this?

Possibly the opposite advice - to think of winning - may encourage a range of risky moves. Whereas to think of not-losing places restrictions on what you do. Being

Careful rather than chancing something could work better in the long run. It reminds me of the methodical German soccer team approach to world championship where they seem to play to a safe formula where risks are reduced as much as possible. It comes at the problem from a different angle. Apart from being careful with what he/she does the judoka only has to think about putting in sufficient attacks to avoid penalty warnings but all the time looking for a main chance to score.

Modern sports advice which promotes the notion of self-belief, focussing and winning (at all costs) may not be based on the reality of the competitor's actual ability. What this may do, however, is create a kind of fake emotion such as anger which lifts the competitor's game but which may crumble when the competitor starts to experience small setbacks.

Catch up

When you go into contest you train hard beforehand, you study the opposition, you work on technique and tactics but no matter how good you are and what you have won in the past you are not a god. The game of catch-up is always going on. The opposition will be doing exactly the same as you so the deciding factor may be what is in your own mind. Your greatest enemy might not be who you face across the mat but yourself. Because of this you cannot rely on your old self but must constantly re-invent yourself so to speak. You sit on your laurels at your peril.

Delusion

The four traditional illnesses of judo are said to be Surprise, Fear, Doubt & Delusion. Obviously if something suddenly surprises you then you can be beaten in an instant. If you are fearful or timid that will cramp your performance - but there are ways to conquer fear such as doing white water rafting, parachuting, rock climbing or confronting your fears every time you step on the mat by fighting the roughest and toughest there.

Doubt of course will also lead to defeat. Instead of doubting whether you can take that gold remind yourself of the many outsiders who have come from nowhere to take a gold medal in a major tournament. Prepare well, train hard and step on to that mat thinking this is your day.

More recently I have come to believe that Delusion is a major cause of defeat. I have called it Delusion but perhaps self-deception might be better. The trouble with many judoka is not so much what they know as what they know that just ain't so. Recent UK television programmes such as The Apprentice and some of the big talent contests expose many people who think they have got all the necessary talents for winning but which we the viewers can plainly see they just don't have.

An athlete needs to know himself very well and to do that he or she needs to train frequently to his or her mental and physical limits. When this is done they can experience 'coolness and warmth towards themselves' which is to say they know who they are and what they can do. There is a modern tendency to talk oneself up – 'I am the greatest, I will win that Olympic gold medal, I can beat him easily, I am super-fit' etc. This is all very well when talking to the media but if you start to believe your own hype you are in deep trouble.

With such deluded people I suppose there is little you can do other than to let them get on with it or alternatively plunge them into a training routine that will take them to their limits (with no escape). The cold dawn of reality will rise for them at some point or perhaps not. They may stay deluded.

When you push yourself to the limits you are moving into a danger zone where you can get damaged mentally and physically but unless you train to your limits you will never really know what you are capable of or not capable of. Self-protection kicks in to keep you in that comfort zone. This is where self-delusion operates

Tell it as it is

The Japanese judo people always seemed to me to be great realists. If they discussed competitors on the mat or on TV or in magazines they were usually pretty down to earth - so and so had weak spirit, so and so was lazy and didn't train hard enough and so and so had poor technique. They were not backwards in airing these views and were not afraid of hurting anybody's feelings. There is a much used phrase in the Japanese martial arts and that is *Shobu no sekai wa kibishii* (the world of combat is tough) - so do not beat around the bush. Don't be frightened to tell your students the truth even if they may go looking for another coach.

On a different level one can also lose because of gaps or chinks in ones defence – known as *suki* in Japanese. *Suki* can be translated as 'blind-side, Achilles heel, unguarded point and if you take advantage of these in your opponent you would be catching them napping or going under their guard. In judo there are 'gaps' in the mind when you can be momentarily thinking of something else or paradoxically concentrating too hard on what you think might be the opponent's major throw for example. There are gaps in stance where you might be standing or holding wrongly for the person you are fighting and finally gaps in your movement where you move too freely or with too narrow or too wide a base. These chinks can be various.

Avoid infections

Another way of losing is by becoming infected but I am not talking about medical infections! In other words you can be mentally influenced by events and people around you and it needs a pretty strong mind to either walk away or stay focussed and undisturbed by them. For example if you were surrounded by a lot of people yawning. It might not be long before you were yawning too. If your mates liked going out binge drinking once a week you might feel you ought to go out with them and if you were surrounded by a bunch of losers you might end up a loser yourself. Young judo competitors should especially beware of timewasters – people who get through life doing nothing very much at all but who are rather good at dragging others along with them in a pleasant sort of way.

Probably for these reasons we have the mind training method of Zen Buddhism associated with judo. When the samurai went into battle there was a good chance they might die. So they trained to control their minds in battle. Imagine participating in a major judo contest knowing you might die. The Japanese for competition is *shiai* but the old way of writing it was with the characters *to meet* and *death*.

You can of course infect yourself. Let us say you feel lousy for no particular reason. The last thing you should admit to yourself is just that. Until you start fighting you cannot tell how you will do and even if you are weak from illness you can still win.

Prioritise

One reason for losing is because of the failure to decide what aspect of ones training is most important and concentrating on it even if it means neglecting other aspects. The alternative is to cover everything in training but not very well. One thing I always felt when I was a competitor was that there was just too much to do such as *randori*, weight training, stamina work, suppleness training, agility training (trampoline etc), working on specific techniques, watching videos of self or others etc. I sometimes felt that I needed stamina for all the various types of training not for just competition. So maybe one has to prioritise which may mean concentrating on fewer training aspects.

However referring back to Teach Yourself Judo I notice that I did include one positive piece of traditional advice and that was the samurai formula for victory in battle which was *Ichi-gan, Ni-soku, San-tan & Shi-riki*. Translated this means First – eyes, second - legs, third – courage and fourth – strength. In battle they had to be alert at all times (eyes), alert for ambushes, attacks from the rear and so on. Secondly they had to be able to fight for as long as it took hence the need for stamina (legs). Thirdly they needed courage and finally strength (*in that order*). The samurai formula above is not that appropriate for modern judo but if prioritising is necessary for your judo what would your priorities be?

In my time I tried many types of training. The most surprising result I got was when I regularly went running twice a week in the Japanese mountains. The run took about ninety minutes and was very exhausting to start with but once I got use to it I began giving a lot more strong people a hard time on the mat. At the time I did not put two and two together and eventually stopped doing it because it interfered with the *randori* training which my Japanese coach said was most important. I also once chopped down a small pine forest because I read that axe-work was good for the arms and I dug huge holes in the ground and then filled them in again! Both were hard work but I cannot say they effected my judo that much.

JUDO ETIQUETTE

One of the distinctive features of judo is its etiquette. In the West we express politeness by shaking hands, by our attitude and by the words we use. In certain circumstances we also bow and curtsy (for example to the Queen) to express respect and deference. When shaking hands we make physical contact with the other person and it is highly symbolic that we use the right hand which is the chief weapon holding hand to show that we are not holding a weapon. At the same time we believe that one can learn something about the other person in the way they make the handshake.

On the other hand when we bow in the Japanese way we express politeness often at a physical distance and with no skin contact but it is noteworthy how in competition most non-Japanese competitors feel the need to make direct physical contact via a handshake immediately after the final bow and many Japanese competitors now do too.

In modern Japanese *Rei* as in *Sensei ni rei* (bow to the sensei) means *three* things namely (1) a salute or a bow (2) etiquette/politeness and (3) thanks or gratitude. It springs from the Chinese word *Li* which is one of the Five Cardinal Virtues of Confucianism.

The Five Cardinal Virtues of Confucianism with their Japanese pronunciations are:-

	Benevolence	Nin	Justice
Gi	Wisdom	Chi	
	Fidelity	Shin	
	Etiquette	Rei	

These are the inner virtues which the Chinese 'gentleman/lord' should possess but the exact translation of these terms into English is often disputed. Fortunately *Rei/Li* is more straightforward and translates as etiquette, rites, decorum, respect, ritual deference, manners etc plus the three meanings in modern Japanese.

The Chinese Confucians regarded the outward expression of the above *Rei* qualities as very important and believed that by frequent use of the bow or ritual form it took, the inner man would become civilized as well. In the East these outward expressions of respect etc tended to become ritualized. A good example of this perhaps is the *Nage no Kata*. It is meant to be a training tool but at judo events its demonstration often takes on the form of a ritual. Somebody once said that the Japanese are very good at creating instant rituals for just about everything and somehow make them seem quite ancient.

The average non-Japanese judoka may wonder what Chinese Confucianism has to do with judo but the answer is quite a lot. Confucianism has influenced Japan and most of Asia for many millennia and still continues to do so. Jigoro Kano the founder of judo was well versed in the Chinese (Confucian) classics and we can see many Confucian influences in his judo. Confucianism is very ancient and like Buddhism or Christianity it has many forms with a very complex philosophy which would take a lot of space to describe here. It is not a really religion but is more a practical political and moral philosophy which has survived the test of thousands of years.

In the martial arts Rei is physically expressed by bowing but there are many different ways of doing it depending upon the martial art. In Sumo for example you squat upright on your toes with knees wide and hands on the knees (*sonkyo*). In some jujitsu schools you kneel and put one hand to the floor and keep the other on your upper thigh (*orishiki*). Other jujitsu schools require the toes to be always curled and ready to rise (for example like the toe positions in the judo Katame no Kata). In some schools you always keep your eyes on the opponent and in other schools you must not expose the back of your neck.

In modern business Japan the depth to which you bow expresses the equality or otherwise of the two bowers. If you are lower in status than the other you bow lower and longer and so on. The degree of bend and the length of time in the bow are usually understood by both parties. (Note that the earliest Chinese dynastic accounts of Japan, written about 2000 yrs ago, describe the Japanese as a polite, courteous people who bowed in the *sonkyo* style or by prostrating themselves on the ground (*dogeza*).

In the martial arts Rei can be seen as a civilizing influence between two combatants for otherwise what they do might turn into a nasty brawl. There is a saying in the martial arts that Budo begins and ends with REI. (*Budo wa Rei ni hajimaru, Rei ni owaru*). Now this can mean that you simply start with a bow and end with a bow or that the martial art is a total expression of politeness.

In the West we still have bowing as an expression of respect and deference. We bow or courtesy to our monarch and others in authority such as judges. We also salute as in the military and we also shake hands. So the Japanese style standing bow is not so foreign to us and the underlying idea of being polite, showing respect and deference is not strange to us either.

There are four main judo situations when we bow. Usually we bow when we enter and leave the dojo, when all line up in grade order to start or finish the session, before and after each randori or contest and also when addressing the sensei in the dojo. The bows may be standing or kneeling bows. The time for bowing in most of these situations is clear but it is not usually necessary to make repeated bows to a sensei if you are asking for technical advice. Just bow at the beginning and end of the encounter.

Some Westerners ask who or what are we are bowing to when we enter the dojo. The answer to that can vary. Some Japanese say to the God of Military Arts (*Bushin*) who is enshrined in the dojo, others to the place of honour called *joseki*, *kamiza* or *shomen* which in a Japanese dojo will be physically obvious since it may be marked by a raised dais of some sort with a photo of Kano or some framed calligraphy of a judo motto. In some dojos it is customary at the start and end of each session to bow three times. The first bow is to the martial god of the dojo or as an expression of thanks. The second bow is to the teachers and the third bow is to each other. Usually the left side of the dojo facing the place of honour is the teachers' side with perhaps a teachers entrance there as well and the other (right) side is for the students.

Personally I like to bow to the dojo in thanks since it is rather a special place. When I bow I often think of it as an old friend. It is somewhere where you will spend a lot of time training your body and mind and adding to its reputation. It is a place where others have spent time in the past and raised its reputation and it will be a place that others will come to in the future. It is the place where you might cry in training but which prepares you for the joy of receiving the gold medal on the podium. So it is an important place. It will leave its mark on us and we each should leave our mark on it. So we need to keep it clean and tidy and quiet.

It is said by traditionalists that you can always estimate the strength of a dojo by the way the shoes and bags are neatly or otherwise stacked up outside the dojo entrance. Dojo etiquette is fairly simple, keep it quiet, clean and tidy and do not lark about in it. In the words of Gunji Koizumi, “the dojo is a shrine wherein cleanliness and quiet should prevail”. He was strict with anybody who broke that rule. The word dojo actually comes from Buddhism. It was where the monks meditated and trained. It even has an ancient Sanskrit equivalent.

As a coach I find the group bow at the start and end of the session a good way to start and finish the session. It encourages people to come on time and leave on time which is a test of a student’s sincerity of purpose. As I have mentioned there are differing bowing procedures from martial art to martial art and from dojo to dojo and a lot depends on the physical layout of the dojo. For example a square dojo can have the place of honour on any side but for a rectangular one it would be better to have it at one end but wherever it is, it needs to be opposite the dojo entrance. If you go to a Japanese dojo observe how they do it and copy.

There are various commands such as *Sensei ni Rei* (bow to the teachers), *Tagai ni Rei* (bow to each other) and *Kamiza/Joseki/shomen ni Rei* (bow to the place of honour). The *kamiza/joseki/shomen* will usually be opposite the dojo entrance and when students line up they will be facing it with the sensei facing the students (and their backs to *joseki*). However at some point the sensei will swivel round towards *joseki* and all will bow in the same direction. Usually the call to make the group bow will be *Seiza!* (kneel correctly) & *Ki o tsuke* (pay attention) followed by the first of the bowing commands. In some dojos such as the Kodokan the start and finish of the session is marked by the beating of a drum. Remember the ritual aspect of bowing. Be tidy and clean, do all that is required every time you attend the dojo, do not come late or leave early or miss any part of the ritual. If you are the last one in or out of the dojo or if it is empty (in other words if you are there alone) still follow the etiquette.

As a teacher I always found the group bow satisfying. Announcements could be made and for those of a competitive nature who felt somewhat low in the scheme of things this could be an incentive to move up the grade hierarchy.

There is a certain amount of confusion with regard to bowing etiquette since it varies from dojo to dojo. One confusion is how to bow when you get an outside group visiting the dojo. Sometimes *all* the students and teachers separate out in grade order as in normal dojo practice or the visiting group lines up to one side of the host sensei and students. In the Kodokan it was customary to make a kneeling bow side by side when on with a fellow student but face to face when on with a teacher or senior rank.

Also in many traditional dojos the group bow will be preceded by a short period of meditation on the command *Mokuso*. This will be ended by the command *Yame*.

Finally I think politeness and manners enhance our sport. Parents of children who come to the dojo are usually very appreciative of it since they might not be drilled in it anywhere else. It is up to each of us to set an example and correct those who are somewhat negligent of it. It adds value to our sport I believe.

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PS

I have just recently read a report on the 2009 Paris Tournament 100k+ Final between Riner of France and Mikhaylin of Russia. Apparently the bout started with the players entering through a curtain of smoke(!) and shortly after getting into the bout the referee had to appeal to them for calm following an exchange of slaps during the grip fighting. Eventually the Frenchman scored an ippon whereupon he stood over the prostrate Russian and screamed at him. The Russian then went back to his mark but stood two metres in front of it. Riner did exactly the same leaving both players eyeballing one another for some time until the Frenchman broke the situation by nodding.

What were the referee and judges doing throughout all this I wonder. This behaviour is clearly against the spirit of judo and the bowing rules. One or both of them should have been disqualified. As for the smoke etc I suppose we can now look forward to our judo players breaking chairs over each other and fighting among the audience.

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