

Judo, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu And the Evolution of Mixed Martial Arts

- Judo

14 years since the beginning of the Meiji era and the Japanese turn toward westernization, only 5 years since the outlawing of the wearing of the double swords. Other Jujitsu schools denigrated his system as being unrealistic and unproven. Challengers came and were met almost every day. "It seemed that the Kodokan had to take on the whole of Japan, and had to have a spirit of being ready for anything." wrote Kano in his own memoirs¹. Judo had to prove itself in the trials of challenge matches. This era came to its climax in 1883 when the police officers of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Station arranged a series of fights between the top fighters of Totsuka-ha Yoshinryu jujutsu and the Kodokans best which ended in a resounding victory for the Judo men².

Having with this great victory established itself as the premier martial arts school in Japan, when a young Jigoro Kano founded the Kodokan Judo institute in 1882, he had a formidable task ahead of him. Kano wanted to figure out how to spread the popularity of his new system in a country that was full of martial arts schools. Add to that the volatility of the country, it had only been Kano set his sights on the rest of the world. He made several trips abroad and sent some of his best students around the world to spread the popularity of Judo. They did this primarily by demonstration and by fighting the local champions of various western martial sports.

Among those who went to spread the gospel of Judo to the world was his chief assistant, Yamashita, who went to America in 1903. While he was there, President Theodore Roosevelt arranged a challenge match with a middleweight catch-as-catch-can wrestler named Joseph Grant, who was teaching President Roosevelt wrestling. In a letter to his son Kermit, Roosevelt described the outcome "Inside of a minute Yamashita had choked Grant, and inside of two minutes more he had got an elbow hold on him..." The President was impressed enough to take judo lessons from Yamashita and arranged for him to teach at the U.S. Naval Academy³.

Another student that went out was Mitsuyo Maeda who traveled to the United States, Europe, and Central and South America, eventually ending up in Brazil. He fought many challenge matches along the way and after arriving in Brazil was helped to raise a Japanese immigrant colony by a diplomat named Gastao Gracie. In return he taught

¹ P. 63, **Kano Jigoro Chosakushu**, by Kano Jigoro, Gogatsu Shobo, Tokyo, Japan. 1984.

² An excellent source on this climactic match is the article **Judo's Decisive Battle** by Wayne Muromoto. Copyright ©Tengu Press and Wayne Muromoto, Honolulu, Hawaii, 2002.

³ **Professor Yamashita Goes to Washington** by Joseph R. Svinth, *Aikido Journal*, 25:2 (1998). Copyright © 2000 Joseph R. Svinth.

Gastao's sons Judo/Jiu-Jitsu. This was in the 1920s and the two terms were both still being used for the system Kano was teaching⁴. After training with Maeda for a short time Gastao's oldest son Carlos opened his own school where he and his brothers, most notably the youngest brother Helio, started to teach and fight challenge matches as well⁵.

- **Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu**

Helio Gracie eventually arose as the family's champion. He began fighting challenge fights when he was 17 defeating a boxer named Antonio Portugal in only thirty seconds. Helio, at only 135lbs, reined as the no holds bared fighting champion of Brazil, until he was 47 years old. During this time he lost only twice, once to the twelve time open weight Judo champion of Japan Masahiko Kimura, and once in a three hour and forty minute battle to his former student Waldemar Santana, both of whom outweighed him by over eighty pounds.

Other members of the Gracie family carried the tradition of challenge matches forward and as they did, the techniques of their system were shaped by the demands of arena fighting.

In 1989 an article entitled *Bad*⁶ was published in Playboy Magazine That essentially told the world about the Gracie family history of fighting challenge matches and about Helio Gracie, his oldest son Rorion and how he had issued a challenge "to fight anyone in the United States, winner take all, for \$100,000". Rorion had made somewhat of a name for himself around the martial arts community by selling videotapes, titled *Gracies in Action*, of his family and some of their students fighting against practitioners of various other martial arts. Eventually Rorion teamed with a promoter and created the first "Ultimate Fighting Championship".

The idea behind the first few UFCs was to pit practitioners of various martial arts against each other, with as few rules as possible, in order to see which arts were the most effective. In an eight or sixteen-man field, and using a single elimination format, Rorion's younger brother Royce Gracie dominated every opponent he faced, winning three of the first four such tournaments and only failing to win once by becoming a heat casualty after winning his first fight.

- **Mixed Martial Arts**

Soon however the demands of being a television event started to force changes in the UFC. Royce fought a thirty six minute draw that went beyond the time slot for the broadcast. Because of this, the producers were forced to implement time limits to the fights. With time limits came the need to decide the winner if the time limit was reached, in other words Judges. Of course when you have judges, it significantly changes what

⁴ An example is the book **Complete Kano Jiu-Jitsu, Jiudo, the Official Jiu-Jitsu of the Japanese Government**, New York: G.P. Putnam's, 1925

⁵ **Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Theory and Techniques** by Renzo Gracie and Royler Gracie, Invisible Cities Press, Montpelier, VT, 2002

⁶ **Bad**, Playboy article, vol. 36, no. 9 - September 1989 By Pat Jordan

you have to do to win the fight. Now instead of winning outright, you can simply be doing a little better than your opponent when time runs out.

As time went on, more rules were implemented and changed for the same reasons rules are changed in any spectator sport, the safety of the fighters and crowd appeal. These changes in the rules began to have an effect on the fighting. For example, in the early shows fighters who punched with closed fists usually broke their hand. Fights, however are much more exciting when the fighters slug it out. Therefore, four-ounce gloves were required, not for the safety of the fighters, but because they make fighters more willing to throw closed fist punches. What evolved was modern Mixed Martial Arts.

Although the addition of more rules have decreased the value of Mixed Martial Arts fighting as a laboratory for combative technique, as long as we realize what the limitations are, we can still learn a lot about what will and will not work in real fights. There are no more pure Karate or Tae Kwon Do practitioners fighting in the UFC for only one reason, they can't really fight. The crucible of competition has shown that there are only a certain amount of ways to twist someone's arm behind their back, or take them off of their feet, or choke them unconscious that really work. As long as we remember that in a real fight people can also bite your nose off or poke your eye out or any number of tactics that are against the rules in MMA, we can still learn valuable lessons that in the absence of any sort of reality check on techniques, would simply be theory.