

THE IMPORTANCE OF JU NO KATA IN JUDO TRAINING

Judo Canada has incorporated the use of the Ju no Kata into its Mudansha syllabus and suggests that the first set of this kata be a requirement for Ikkyu candidates.

Ju no Kata is commonly referred to as the 'Forms of Gentleness', and has for many years been seen as a kata that is usually performed by female judoka . Many judo enthusiasts feel that it has no basis or usefulness in modern judo practice.

Our attempt here will be to explain why this kata can be a very important part of any judoka's training and we will start with the following three quotes which are attributed to one of Judo's finest interpreters and authors of kata & Judo in general, Mr. **Donn F. Draeger**.

"The ju no kata is an exercise making use of the practical interpretation of "gentleness" -- not its idealistic, absolute, and impractical meaning which most westerners attribute to it. As a kata, it is really not "gentle" at all. In the absolute sense. As a properly performed exercise, it is a smooth, efficient application of mental and physical strengths, a harmony of movement combining hardness and softness in economic balance, making the kata completely functional. In this kata there are moments of yielding and resisting in both roles of tori and uke; never is there a yielding action solely. "

"This fact provides an interesting test to its effect on Judoists who think it a useless exercise. If any well-conditioned Judoist will perform this kata correctly with a master performer, first as uke then as tori, he will find that no matter how well conditioned he may be, this kata will cause him to be covered with perspiration; his body muscles will "scream" in protest under the contractions and extensions imposed on them. To permit him to take each situation correctly, he would experience the actual moments of "softness" and "hardness" and the necessity for flexibility, both mental and physical. He would come away from this experience with a new and deep respect for ju no kata."

"When properly performed, ju no kata gives a balanced exercise for the whole body. Constant use of this kata over an extended time period results in a harmoniously developed, flexible, and strong body, as well as giving the user the fundamental mechanics for sport and self defense Judo applications."

Mr. Draeger was very adamant in his thinking, that modern demonstrations of Ju no Kata were not what Kano shihan had intended this kata to be.

Further to Mr. Draeger's comments we will include three quotes from **Ms. Keiko Fukuda** probably the world's leading authority of this kata, which also very aptly describe the meaning of this form.

"Simply it is the ways of offence and defense expressed by the principles of Judo"

"The principle of Judo is to adopt the attacker's movement or strength and use it against them."

“Because of the slow movement, it expresses the principle of Judo simply and logically in advancing and retreating movements, specific body movements, and the use of strength in offensive and defensive movement”.

One of the assets in practicing this kata or portions thereof are the physical skills that are attained which coincide with the four major portions of a throw. Those being: **Kuzushi** (disturbing balance) **Tsukuri** (fitting) **Kake** (point of no return) **Zanshin** or **Kime** (finish)

A large percentage of judo practice time is given to performing uchikomi's which help judoka with the Kuzushi & Tsukuri portions of a technique but do little to teach the Kake element of a throw, and add nothing to the training of Zanshin or Kime. Doing a lot of Uchikomi may also tend to produce very defensive uke's, whom in turn may become shy of actually being thrown. This could lead to injury for both partners.

Ju no Kata trains all elements of a throw including the Zanshin or Kime even though uke is not actually thrown. It requires concentrated control on both partner's behalf to insure that they do not pull or push each other off balance to the point that they themselves are rendered off balance. Both partners are required to remain in control at all times in order to protect not only their partner but themselves.

The Kake portion of a judo technique is one of the skill points that is taught through the practice of the Ju no Kata. The point of no return is usually considered to be left entirely in tori's hands but having an uke who learns where that point is, will add an element of skill which could allow uke to turn safely out of a throw (this may not be one of the objectives of the kata but could be a bonus for the competitive judoka) or more importantly cause them to prepare for the landing that is about to happen.

There are five techniques in the Ju no Kata that entail inverted high rise's on behalf of uke. This skill set is very dependent on uke & tori being in complete sync with each other. Too hard a pull by Tori, or too fast a rate of rise by Uke, will likely result in a failed attempt and, or a crash landing. These five techniques dispersed throughout the kata are very noticeable and synonymous with this form and as much as they are difficult to perform correctly, their basic movements can be used to assist in balance, strength & flexibility training that are relevant to most throwing techniques.

Other portions of this kata assist in training spatial awareness, gripping, overall control, concentration & that very important element of breathing.

Coaches: Why not try adding some Ju no Kata to your training sessions?