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Uke's Role In Judo

In our first installment to the Judo Sask. Kata web page we asked the question:

Just how important is an Uke (practice partner) to your judo development?

It's always been interesting to hear someone say, "Oh your going for grading, who's your kata partner?" or "Make sure you get so & so to be your kata partner, they're the best".

Yes, having a knowledgably, talented kata partner can certainly assist you during your thirty minutes in front of the grading board every five years or so, but what about the other 100, 200 or 300 hours of practice that your putting in on the mats every year? Is it not an asset to have a good uke or training partner during that time?

And for that matter, does your uke not deserve a talented partner for their practice time?

How do you shape up as an Uke?

Two of the areas of basic judo instruction often overlooked by instructors are that of basic body positioning relevant to judo (both standing & on the ground), and break fall skills. Teaching your athletes how to move and fall will add years to their judo carriers and will make each individual a functioning partner for anyone that they work with.

Participating as an uke in kata requires an individual that is able to be in just the right place at the right time. This doesn't mean that the uke will be jumping for their tori. Nor should they be getting hammered into the ground, choked out or injured in locking processes by overzealous techniques. Uke skills that are taught and used in the formal kata are skills that are easily transferred to instructional and randori sessions.

A properly trained uke will not only be an asset to their partner but will also be more capable of taking care of themselves should something go wrong during a technique. All judoka should be properly trained uke's

For this submission to the kata page we will offer some thoughts re: break fall training.

BREAK FALL TIPS

As instructors we have a responsibility to insure that all of our students are receiving quality break fall practice on a regular basis.

One of the things that I see happening and was certainly guilty of myself for years, was having students line up and perform rolling or combinations of different break falls down

the length of the mats. This usually entailed two or three lines that inevitably spent more effort attempting to see which group could get to the other end first than they did on their technical skills. In a large club there would be a lot of people standing around waiting for their turn to practice, and usually this method leads to the judoka coming up to a standing position. Possibly this particular process may not be the best use of your student's time.

As a start to producing better break falls for everyone, think about ways in which you can have your students practice without having the pressure of someone pushing them along or the fear of being landed on from behind.

One of the methods that you can use is to have two lines facing each other with adequate spacing between the individuals both beside & across from them. They then practice rolling break falls into the middle of the floor with the intent of staying down, not coming up to their feet. This way each individual can practice their movements at their own pace and they will complete more techniques, which will allow you the instructor a greater opportunity to perform checks & corrections.

Using the lines that are created when mats butt up against each other can be a useful learning tool as well. This allows students the opportunity to check on their landing positions, which are a very important part of formal kata training. Have them roll down the line and see if they can end up landing on the line. Again, insure that they are staying down and not rolling up.

Another tip re: rolling break falls. If your student is performing a right rolling break fall (rolling over their right arm & shoulder) they should be leading and pushing off of their right foot. When switching to the left side it is left arm lead & left foot push.

Making sure that your judoka have proper leg positioning when they land is also one of your tasks. If they're landing on their left side the left leg should be straight and the right knee should be bent with the sole of the right foot touching the floor. The right leg does not cross over the left one.

We've used the forward rolling break fall as a practice example here as the majority of judo techniques tend to send uke into a state of inversion (feet over head), but don't forget to practice those standing side and backward falls which are equally important to an judoka's training & safety.

Above all; correct your student's errors and do not allow them to perform or continue practicing poor break fall techniques.

Happy landings.

Pat & Blair

