

UCHI KOMI

A topic of some debate at times in the judo fraternity.
A Gleeson family perspective.

On occasions, over the years, I have been contacted with the hope that I may be able to expound my father's thoughts and attitudes on this subject. At these times I have done my best to answer for him. Not easy. This has led me to think perhaps I ought to put down a few thoughts on the subject, in regard to what my father's opinion on and attitude towards uchi komi. I will try and explain as best I'm able as to why I think he had the opinion he did, plus put a little of my own thoughts too, right at the end.

So, Uchi Komi, what is it? Well, to my understanding, it is a drill of the entry part of a throwing action. Repeated at speed for a number of reps. by one then the other of a pair of judo players. It's use or benefit has provoked quite some discussion over the years. Whether it is truly a positive aid to training and performance development or not. Many have stated a belief that it is essential, others most notably my father (GRG+), think quite the opposite.

I am happy to say that on the whole I had a good relationship with my father and we talked a lot about many things. Judo very much being one of them! The vast majority of my attitudes towards judo and its teaching, has come from these talks with my father, needless to say really. The mechanics of judo teaching, coaching and performance, were gone into in some depth. Uchi komi was touched upon, although only briefly, mainly because there wasn't much to be said. Quite simply, his attitude towards uchi komi was that it only deals with one small part, the entry of the throwing action and that alone! Therefore how can such a small part improve the greater whole in isolation? Impossible!* Succinctly that's it in a nutshell.

GRG, put a lot of thought into what a throw was, and how to deconstruct it, for more efficient coaching and performer performance (please see his work in "Better Judo", where he breaks down the throws of the go-gyo into his own categories, to be used for training development. Please read his book for more on this, its too much for me to tackle here). So, for uchi komi to be so glibly put forward as the all pervading answer, would hardly be warmly embraced by GRG. As National Coach for GB judo (1960-72 c.). He wrote his first book on judo in the early 60s, "Judo for the West" first published 1964. In it, he set out his thoughts as to how to structure judo training in a Euro-centred way. Not, just taking Japanese method on face value! GRG, was not one to bash the Japanese, far from it but he considered it foolish to use their methodology without adjustment for the UK, or anywhere outside Japan for that matter. (One chat we had was about the run up to the 1964 Olympics, which he was not much involved in, due to politics, the whole GB squad was taken out to Japan, to Tenri University, where the coach selected for the Olympics had been training and had only just recently returned from. He ran the preparation for the event in a very Japanese way, quite alien to the squad members, affecting morale. GRG, thought this took a lot away from the groups performance, bring about a poorer than, he, expected result! Don't just do what the Japanese do, yet another example in his opinion).

For further historic reference to perhaps help the younger judo people understand better the attitudes of all involved. Judo was introduced into the UK by Japanese judo men from Japan, just after the turn of the last century. Kano visited several times over the 1920s & 30s, bringing many of his favourite students with him. Therefore the Japanese and their thinking were very prominent in British judo from these early days. I'm not sure when uchi komi became a thing in judo training, I imagine at some point in the 60s or 70s, although I am taking a blind guess here, it could have been earlier? Taking it that it was at this time, my father would have seen it as example of a thoughtless adoption of Japanese judo method. Thoughtless, as there being no analysis of it's impact on the coach or athlete's performance!

Uchi komi, was an example of this '*Japofile*' attitude! Something the Japanese did, and therefore something we must do, to be as good as them. "Rubbish!" he would say, (and said so often in his early days as National Coach, someone gave him a stamp, with that on it, as a joke I think the stamp is still in the family house) with, I think as you can start to see, some justification, or certainly considering the work he was doing in order to move away from this attitude.

Uchi komi, like the kata are all drills. Repeated moves, from which learning is glimmered, but never explained! (GRG, tries to put meaning into the Kata in his book, "Anatomy of Judo" we still have a few copies of our republished paper back available). Something the Japanese really revel in. I think I can safely say, it is fundamental to their whole existence. With the script they have, rote learning is the only practical way literacy can be taught in schools. This then extends into sport, and therefore into judo. Kano, expounded that three things were necessary for improvement in judo: Kata, Randori and Shiai, in other words, drills, free practise and competition. Think about that for a second. Uchi komi, as I have said is a drill. It therefore fits neatly into the Japanese psyche and training method. Putting it at odds with the work GRG was doing to develop a method independent of the Japanese influence. Again, as I've said not as a stand against the Japanese but as a position of independence. Using methods that fitted into our culture and learning expectations was his objective, uchi komi was diametrically opposed to that.

At this point I feel I have probably said enough, about my father's opinion as perhaps the reasons behind his position. Having said all that, he did see a positive use for uchi komi. Yes, ever a man of contradiction, as we all should be! He considered it very useful for stamina development, but that was it. Perhaps, after injury.

If I may now at this point, put in my own thoughts on the subject? Taking from my pragmatic experience of teaching judo full-time to beginners over the past decade or so on a professionally basis, I have come to see an extra value for uchi komi, certainly for the beginner level.

As I have said the influence of my father's ideology is profound. Coaching a throwing skill needs a lot of work. Many issues need to be considered; the individual, speed, movement, space etc. As indicated thus far, uchi komi, can only deal with a very small element of all that. However, I have found in the early stages of judo learning, the control and understanding of space is extremely difficult for the beginner. Here, is where Uchi komi drilling can be very useful. In the drilling of space closing at the beginning of the attack, the beginner can start to understand and deal with the need to quickly and accurately close the space for throwing efficiency! Cardio, is a useful added extra for the beginner. So two very useful aspects of uchi komi, but I am not so tangled in the Japanese/traditions of GB judo as my father was, along with not needing to make a stance against it.

To sum up the Gleeson's view of uchi komi, is that it is a drill for a small part of a greater whole of a throwing skill, and that it can only affect that singular small part. Any claim it does more must be considered as poorly considered. However, for the purpose stated, it has a positive impact. The spinoff is physical/cardio stamina. To properly address throwing skill development, a wider view must be taken.

I hope you have found this Gleeson's view of uchi komi of interest? The dialect of history certainly makes itself felt I feel in the two attitudes. Please use the contact link in the website to pass on any thoughts or questions you may have. My only aim here is to fill, historical and method gaps in the knowledge of our wonderful sport, I hope I've gone a little way to achieve this? Thanks very much for doing me the honour of reading to the end.

FPG Nov. 23.

†for anyone who is unaware, my father's name was Geoffrey Robert Gleeson, hence the initials GRG, just for clarity.

*I think it might be important to remember that in GRG book "Judo for the West" the 'whole part whole' theories of Gestalt psychology featured strongly in his thinking. Uchi komi, would seem to be a part but there is no whole to accompany it, not in the immediate training scenario. Therefore again, a damning position in the eyes of GRG and his developing methodology.