

“Wrestling around the World”
A training exercise for the students, at their club @ Uni of Bath.
25.3.23.



Background: I coach the Uni club judo on Saturday evenings. My goal is to get them up to speed in the quickest & most efficient manner I can. All these students (sts) started last October. They’ve done 3 comps over the year so far between them and come away with a medal haul equalling; 2 golds, 5 silvers and 3 bronzes. I think the plan is working (There’s a BUCS report on this page for details on that).

So, this is a picture of last night’s session, one in a series of four I’ve done with them, to date. With such ‘young’ judo players, by which I mean their judo age. There is a lot that needs addressing. Physicality, body management and very importantly, control of space, between & around each other, tactics and the consequent need of faints, false attacks and the like.

My plan with this block was to focus on limitation. Cutting down on what they could do, in order to focus on a specific aspect of skill/movement demanding an improvement through that very limitation. Judo, as you might not be aware, is in fact a style of wrestling in its broadest definition. I think it is safe to say, the best/most advanced (am I being biased?). The reason it’s better than the other styles is they have less clothing and are therefore less efficient in the management of movement and the opponent’s body.

To the sessions. I have introduced several styles of wrestling over the past weeks: Westmoreland & Cumberland (unfortunately I incorrectly remembered as a belt style. However, its the skill development which I’m really interested in, so apologies but never mind), here it’s only the belt that can be held. I put the sts on crash mats to limit foot movement to a minimum. Mongolian, where only the sleeves can be held, normal judo, tatami mats are used. Georgian, where only the body of the jacket & belt can be held- no sleeves, on the less ‘spongy’ mats to limit foot movement but not as much as the belt variant.

Belt only – is to get the sts to understand space & strength. In a brutally immediate style. As they hold the belts they can’t ‘charge’ about. Space between them is pretty much set, by the fact they’re holding each other close. This necessitates the use of that limited

movement to get a reaction from the opponent, then to utilise strength to tip them over. Posture is also very important, because without it, reactions can't be overcome and strength can't be deployed. (I do this with the school clubs as well!).

Mongolian, with only the sleeves it's fast but also limited. Trips with the feet and a larger focus on closing and opening spaces between them is important. This corresponds to attack & defence. The closing of the space between needs to be controlled in order for a successful attack, the opening leads to a better chance of defence. Not always, but as a general rule. I leave that here for the moment, perhaps more in a future article? There are similarities to contemporary judo here. The speed of movement necessitates an equal speed in thinking and reaction time, plus flexibility of body.

Georgian, without sleeves, it's a half-way between the two. Still very focus on strength and the ability to overpower the other. Look at the judo players from Georgia and their control of the other, particularly in 'confined' spaces. The space between the two is more open than the belt but not as much as Mongolian or judo. Demanding yet a different type of thinking. A challenge to dominate and control. Foot movement also restricted by a softer mat, emphasising power more than Mongolian and judo.

All the above very much transferable to their judo. But by isolating each element, the hope is a much improved performance. The session pictured was the culmination, where we had each area sectioned off. Nearest right is the belt, furthest left is Georgian, centre – judo and out on the right (no one actually doing it in the photo) would be the Mongolian. They moved round doing each style. The plan being they can take something from one to the other, ending up at judo and becoming more efficient at that, as that's really the goal! They fought hard and long at this. I was very impressed and pleased with their efforts, so much so, I have decided to feature this in the first real "Thoughts & Ideas" article on the new website. They managed some fantastic throws! The strength they put in, you could tell, was huge by how tired they were at the end! A great job guys!!

The sts' abilities in controlling space, developing strength, using reactions to dominate, has all come on greatly with this training block. Personally as a trainee, I have never experienced any such training attitude, sessions run round a tour of wrestling styles to gain judo skills. To be able to move is critical in judo to my way of thinking. It's a skill that is left out of much judo training. The Japanese do it, as much of their judo almost unintentionally. Certainly in many English judo environments, movement is barely considered in my experience (the big exception being the High Performance Programme @ Bath). [I have another idea here on an article for my web page – the background of the coach and how this affects their teaching...? Thinking of coaches I know, myself!].

I can't say for certain but I would like to think the success my sts have had over their first year (not quite completed) is down to the focus on movement over technique (which one is more important, well, I was always taught, if there's an either or, it's both). I consider movement particularly in the early stages of judo, far more important than technique, (perhaps another article? Almost certainly a hot topic!). My main focus during any of the school based course I do, always focuses on movement and on the whole, competitive success is fairly consistent. I'm thinking of the private schools I've worked with, the senior especially, were very potent. The state schools have little opportunity for competition.

Other elements I have featured in this series of training sessions; "games". In pairs, one leading. The leader controls and scores. The 'follower' has to maintain the space/gap between the two, as per a normal randori situation – about an arms length. The leader, moves to control the other (again, this is also done in school clubs). Scoring can be

achieved by touching head, shoulder, or feet. Movement control makes scoring easier or more efficient depending how well it is done. A move towards tactics, planning and as always control.

With all this focus on moving, a definite glut in technical input is very evident! So, to address this, I got the sts to do a traditional *kata*, the *Nage no kata* of old man Kano. The first two sets, three throws per set, each done left & right. Here the objective is to use the *kata* as an exercise in cooperative precision. "Precision" very much being the watch word! Every step, every body position has to be exact! Each sts has to make sure they are 100% correct in their movements. Any feeling of competition isn't inappropriate for this exercise. It's also a good excuse/off shoot to increasing their knowledge of judo throwing techniques (obviously, *kata guruma* is a mute point but lets not get bogged down in details!). To focus totally on their position, posture, and all other elements of the *kata* is very much the balance to the total focus on movement taking up the rest of the session.

I think the scheme of work done with the uni sts over the past four weeks has worked well, with I hope positives for their development and increased efficiency. I have covered movement, control & tactics in this block. Every element important to advanced judo, I would say. I have seen absolutely, improvements in the sts performance, I hope they themselves think so too. I want them to be physically stronger as well as their skill and tactical talents developed! This achieves my ultimate goal of quick and efficient progress.

Well, this is a brief, article. I wanted to get one out and this seemed an easy and immediate example I could write and post. Last evening's session was a joy. I wanted to share it with you. I could go further and deeper into it all but for now I think this is enough. It sets the scene for what I hope will be more in the future. I am working on others, as I have said but some of those need a little more research and therefore time. I want to do the subjects justice, and make the articles more informative. This one is more of a monologue on a training session. The pros & cons of drills, following on from this line of work, is in the pipe line. Specifically in reference to the use of the *kata* I've just described. Many more ideas, but there are other time pressures. I'll keep you informed as it all develops.

Anyway, as always, I'll be happy to hear your thoughts or reactions to this or anything else I've put on the website! Thanks for reading.

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