

Rusty Kanokogi

**The development and the issues of
Women Sports**

*- Reviewing to participate in the Olympic
Movement as female judo player –
May 8th, 2006*

Encounter of Judo

“First of all, I would like to thank President T. Mastumae and all the other people who gave me this opportunity today. And I also thank all of you students and faculty who are joining us today.

I began Judo in 1955; it is already 50 years ago, when there was no tournament for women. And the only people I had to practice with were men. Some of them were good Judo players and some of them were just physical, not really good technicians. And the fact that I was a young girl, I came from a part of New York. Named Brooklyn; you ever hear of Brooklyn before? Anyone hear of Brooklyn? Brooklyn is a very tough place and if you could not take care of yourself, all of the other kids would beat you up. You had to be strong and ready to defend yourself any time; that was the sport, fist-fighting in the street. I like sports, there just wasn't anything available for girls in any sport in Junior High School or High School, so basically my, I had to repress my urge to fight, I enjoyed fighting. But I didn't have any direction. If I had been in volleyball I could spike the ball and not fight, or in basketball or in softball, but there was nothing available. However I did finally find Judo. So when I found Judo it was really impressive because I thought I was strong and when one of my friends who is a male who was practicing

Judo picked me up like a feather I was very impressed by Judo immediately.

It was very difficult to find a dojo that would accept a female because females were not practicing Judo. I finally convinced a YMCA. A friend helped me convince this YMCA to allow me to practice, and there were 40 men in this dojo and me, and that was it. They didn't have any place, any locker room or for me to change into my Judo-gi so the only available thing was a broom closet. Before I could fit in the broom closet, maybe now I could not fit in a broom closet, but that was the extent of the availability for Judo practice and what they had available for females. I did practice with the 40 men. Some of the men resented the fact that a female was on the mat with them, but more than half were very helpful and they were encouraging me and maybe the ones that were resentful were always trying to throw me through the mat, so that only made me stronger and my desire to continue studying Judo. After my training for some time they allowed me to be on their team.

And our team from this particular YMCA was doing very well. There was the New York state championship, our team name was Brooklyn Central YMCA, our team made the finals. However I was not competing in any of the preliminary competitions. I was invited to compete at the final competition because they needed one more person, as one of the team was injured. And even though I was a female I fought. I had to kind of sneak in. My hair was very short and I had an ace bandage pulled around my chest to help flatten me out my chest, I went was on the team and they didn't know if I was a boy or a girl, I competed and I won. I won so my team won; they needed that point. The problem was someone told on me; that I was a female. So I had to give my medal

back or my whole team would be disqualified. I was very disappointed to give up that medal. It was the first one I ever earned. I know I trained hard and I thought I let my team down. But as long as I gave the medal back my team could win because our final score was better than our opponents.

It was that day. I decided that this would never, never happen to a woman ever again. I must do something for women like myself. There weren't that many interested in competition, but that was the beginning of my mission. Women's Judo had to excel. It had to grow. Girls should be able to study Judo, practice, compete with each other. Not against men necessarily.

That's when I made up my mind to do something about it. So we developed in the United States the first national competition for women in the 1970's. We developed a team and the highest level of competition for women at that time was the British Open. The first time the United States women competed in international competition only was 1976 and I was the coach. After the British Open we continued to compete in 1977, 78, 79 and I noticed the women's Judo was really improving and I said to myself that this level is not enough, just the British Open. We need more competition, international competition. So evolution started happening. The first Pacific Rim was in Hawaii in 1980. Prior to that I had heard of a man who was running for the position president of the International Judo Federation. I was wondering, 'Hmm, he's from Japan. The Japanese girls are practicing Judo, but are they ready for shiai? So I wasn't really sure of the level. The only level that I remembered was 1962 when I first came to Japan and trained at the Kodokan. I was in the women's division for a little while, then they recommended and put me in the main dojo and that's where I did all my

training; in the dojo in the Kodokan in 1962. So my image of the women was not that the Japanese women were ready for international competition

The first Women World Championships with Dr. Shigeyoshi Matsumae's strong support

We'll go to 1962. It was the first experience I had in Japan and the experience was to go and learn and become a Judo player. I started Judo in 1955 in New York. Even though I trained I knew there was more Judo in the world and I had to go to the best place in the world; in Japan. My image of the girls at Kodokan at that time was they were not strong. They weren't really thinking shiai. Basically light randorei and kata and even the exercises were strange to me, as I had been doing pushups and sit up for a long time. So I couldn't relate to Japanese girls even though I liked them, the Judo was different. I could relate better to Japanese boys because they were at that time really training hard because they were allowed to. The girls were not allowed to do makikomi techniques, newaza, or uchimata or they would get thrown out of the dojo. So I had the opportunity to practice. I learned quite a bit and of course went home and taught everything that I could possibly remember to my students. I was teaching at a very early rank because we didn't have many Judo instructors in New York. Japan, even though the men always excelled, the women were really held back in Judo.

It wasn't until the, actually, the first women's world Judo championships in 1980 that Japan participated and the youngest person to win a medal, a silver medal, was Ms. K. Yamaguchi representing Japan. That was amazing, I said OK Japan has changed,

they've turned to a better direction for women in Judo and that was a great beginning.

Now, the first women's world Judo championships happened because of Dr. Shigeyodhi Matsumae and our team, which consisted OF OUR STUDENTS, FAMILY AND FRIENDS, we had a very small team; Dr. Matsumae, myself, and the staff of Tokai. When we first met, as I mentioned, I had heard that he was running for the presidency of the International Judo Federation I was concerned. If he gets in, this was before I knew him, but I was worried, I said if he gets in will this help women's Judo or, because he's from Japan and women's Judo has not moved up so quickly, what will happen, I wasn't sure. But as we spoke to each other and we met each other, he showed immediately his indication that he was not only for, but he was going to be a part of it, to escalate women's Judo to the best level that we could get it. So the first women's World Judo Championship in New York was completely supported by Dr. Matsumae who became the president of the International Judo Federation, and his staff. He had confidence in me and my small organization. And I'd like to thank Mr. Hashimoto, who was witnessing everything as he was along in the delegation from Japan for the first women's Judo championship.

The International Olympic Committee made the rules, and in order to be considered Olympic, we had to have more than 25 countries participate at the first women's World Judo Championships. Well it wasn't easy, I was sweating every single day every time registration came in. I was praying, oh thank you, thank you, thank you. We hit the number of 27 countries, so that was the prerequisite for inclusion in the Olympics. If it was less than that we could not, we would still not be in the Olympics.

So Dr. Matsumae and myself were urging the other countries to participate because they had great program, they had won at different competitions. The French were there, of course Japan, and it was amazing. Unfortunately, the United States Judo organization did not support the first women's Judo world championship. They thought we were going to fail so they wanted to separate themselves from us. Not only didn't we fail, but we made the prerequisite for the Olympic Games.

Dr. Shigeyoshi Matsumae was my best ally, and not only did he help so much to help us women get to our dream, which was the Olympic Games, but I learned so much from him. Rather than just listen or read,

I watched him over the years. How he interacted with people, how he brought people together regardless of their position, regardless of their country, regardless of their faith. He brought people together to have them respect each other, and to care for each other. Of course, through Judo because that's my life. He became a role model to me, and I tried to teach this to my students.

Not only some Judo or techniques, but it's more important to be a good person and build your character. Because Judo you can only do for a certain amount of years, and then there's the rest of your life, what do you do with the rest of your life. How do you interact, how do you make peace in the world? How do you not hate somebody because you don't understand them? I think the opportunity that all you athletes, you have a great opportunity not just for Judo but for any sport where you can make sure when you go to competition try to meet somebody, to talk to somebody, to know some custom from their country.

I thought the dream of women's Judo inclusion in the Olympics was going to be for sure, however in

1984 at the Los Angeles games before the actual competition the IOC had a meeting and they decided that women's Judo would not be included. Well I handled the battle for Olympic inclusion my way and Dr. Matsumae handled it his way in order to get the job done.

I can't even express my emotion of what I felt that day. It was a terrible disappointment, but just like in sport we don't give up so easily, especially in Judo. So my direction was through legal maneuvers, law suits, the press, international law associations to file complaints against the international Olympic committee for discrimination against women in sports, specifically in Judo. They accepted marathon, but we were supposed to be accepted also but they said no. Dr. Matsumae with his ability went forward to do negotiation and the negotiation that finally, the combination of the IOC getting the message that they were going to land in court and be sued, we were going to sue them and our case was building and the press was supporting us and Dr. Matsumae negotiated with the International Judo Federation they had to give up a division in men's Judo which is the open division. And basically the open division even though it's wonderful and I would love to have it, it's almost redundant by giving a heavyweight another chance to win a medal for their country. That's wonderful, but it meant women's Judo not participating. So they finally compromised and the open division was cut from the Olympics and women's Judo saw its first inclusion in the 1988 Seoul Olympics.

The activity of World Women's Sports Foundation

Through judo and sport I have had the opportunity to belong to different organizations that help all

sportswomen. Women's Sports Foundation, headquarters in New York, we give grants to athletes from all over the world that apply and can show that they need support, financial support. We give honor, we recognize in our hall of fame athletes that should be recognized, either a team athlete, and individual athlete, or a pioneer. I was fortunate, I was elected to go into the Women's Sports International Hall of Fame several years ago, and that of course brought the Judo level up because Judo doesn't get a whole lot of recognition in the United States. The mission and goals of the Women's Sports Foundation is to advance the lives of girls and women through sports and physical activity. We want to be recognized as the foremost worldwide resource and advocate for girls and women in sports and fitness. So we're internationally big.

Our founder is Billie Jean King from tennis; I think some of you may have heard of her? In case any of you forgot, in the 80's she had a challenge by Bobbie Riggs. They had a worldwide tennis match and she competed in the tennis game, and she beat him. That helped women's tennis go all the way up, and began to get recognition for many sports that woman participated in. women's sports began to move forward, all because it showed she could compete with a man, and that was with a tennis racket. And the goal is not to compete against men. Unfortunately I had to and happily I survived.

However, for women it's basically equality just to have good training exactly as the men have a locker room so you don't have to change in a broom closet, and opportunities to grow and learn, the same opportunities that I would the women to have the exactly same opportunities.

As some of you may know, from this Thursday there is the International Women's Sports Conference

in Kumamoto and actually it's the 2006 World Conference on Women in Sports. The goal of the conference is to provide this kind of opportunity: one, to review the progress of women in sports since the last conference that was in 2002 in Montreal and sharing experiences and celebrating achievements. The second aim of the conference is strengthening international networks both in sports and outside agencies, to strengthen communications. And to foster inter-agency collaboration between international, regional, national and community levels. To strengthen and support the development of the Asian women and sport network. And to provide a vision for the continued development and program of the global women and sports movement from 2006 to 2010.

About International Women Championship in Fukuoka

And a quote from Ms. Valentina Tereshkova

I'm going to be rapping up soon to leave time for some questions. My husband is reminding me of something. The Fukuoka international women's championships were developed for international competition and to give the Japanese women, judoka, the opportunity to compete against foreign competitor's right on their own home soil. So Dr. Matsumae, Mr. Iuka of RKB Mainichi television and I worked on the plans to develop it. It was very successful for all these years. All the athletes that came out of that including YAWARA-CHAN now she's a Mama-san The first time I saw her in action she was only doing Judo demonstration at the Fukuoka competition. She was a young kid, but when I went home I said to my husband, I said," I saw this little girl who has tremendous Judo because she has a

snap in her throw." I don't SEE children doing that SO OFTEN and of course as life GOES on, she became the national hero for women's judo here in Japan and all over the world.

You've heard a lot about me, and I'd like to give you some information about Mr. Ryohei Kanokogi. It's very quiet over there. He's from Kumamoto, Japan. That's why he's going to the lecture, to the conference, because he's going home. In the good old days when he was competing and he was on the first string team for, Nihon University, the top competition in the late 50's and early 60's was two colleges were Nichidai and Meiji. When we go to Kumamoto one of the receptions that they're going to have will be in Kumamoto castle. I'm very proud to tell you that next time you have a chance to go to Kumamoto castle, please take a look at the first picture when you go in. It's a sketch of Mr. Kanokogi's great, great, great grandfather, who was the castellan from Kumamoto.

Finally, before questions I would like to finish with a quote from Valentina Tereshkova, who was the first woman in space, from Russia. She said, "Only when you are in high in space can you understand how small the differences are between us, and how huge are the similarities which unite us." Much was made of the fact that Tereshkova orbited the earth 48 times in 1963 and spent more time in orbit than all of the Mercury astronauts combined. So women have been doing things for a very long time, amazing things. A friend of mine, before I left the states, sent me an e-mail. She just inducted into the motor-sport hall of fame. Her name is Janet Guthrie. She was the first woman to compete in the Indianapolis Speedway race.

I would like to tell all the students of Tokai University that you're very fortunate to be students in a school and educational system that not only helps

you excel in sports, but also helps you excel in life, and also contributes so much, so very much, more than any university in the world, and to try to generate friendship and peace through education. You're very, very lucky. I wish I was a young kid like you all and this is exactly where I would be going to school.

That's my dream. Maybe my grandchildren will go to school here.

Thank you very much.