

Anatoly Rakhlin
The Record of the 5th Lecture
“Judo and Me”

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 Kasumigaseki Building 33rd floor



Mr. Rakhlin

Hello, everyone. Before starting, please let me thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Japan-Russia Youth Exchange Center, instructors at Tokai University, and those from Solidarity of International Judo Education, as all of them have worked so hard to realize our visit to Japan.

Judo has now spread all over the world, and it is well known to be the second most popular Olympic sport, after soccer. Judo is practiced in around 200 countries. However, today's Judo is becoming more like freestyle and professional wrestling. The traditional Japanese Judo promoted by Master Jigoro Kano is currently changing shape. How did this happen?

Russian Judo Federation Vice President Sergey Solovychik and International Judo Federation President Marius Vizer have been changing the rules of Judo in order to beat the Japanese Judo athletes. As a consequence, we are witnessing the phenomenon where Japanese athletes are struggling to win and are unable to demonstrate their skills fully. European athletes are winning tournaments with their ugly Judo. Such a shift in

rules and fighting tactics cannot be the right development for Judo.

I had an opportunity to talk with Mr. Yasuhiro Yamashita at the World Judo Championship in Brazil about a year ago. We agreed that we both wanted to return to the strong and beautiful Judo, as well as let an increasing number of people participate in Judo. The reason why young Russian coaches came to Japan was to learn directly from Japanese Judo, where it originally started. The original is always superior to the copy.

Judo is not just a sport, but also a life philosophy in itself. Our former President, Vladimir Putin, is a religious man, and maybe Judo might have been something he could relate to because of that. Judo's philosophy includes the essence of many religious beliefs such as Christianity and Buddhism...for a man to be a man, respect one's elders and honor everyone as a person, and always to be good. This is why Mr. Putin has said, "Learning Judo makes it possible to communicate correctly with the people of the world."

By learning Judo in Japan and taking what was learned back to Russia, we want to return to the original Judo presented by Master Jigoro Kano along with all of you in Japan. There is a great political power working here. Having seen the video clip, you must become confident that our friendship has further deepened.

No matter how hard you train yourself, if your opponent is weaker than you are, it is impossible for you to improve your skills and techniques. A Judoka is always aspiring to practice and fight with somebody stronger than himself.

We also think we should consider our opponents not as our enemies but as partners. On the tatami mats, we give everything we have for the fight, but when the match is over, victory or defeat does not have a significant meaning. What is important is the friendship born from there, and that is why we have visited Japan numerous times in the past.

Learning Judo in Japan is always enjoyable, and we are very happy to see that Japanese teachers are coaching in Russia. To encourage the emergence of the right kind of Judo, back in the mainstream, your continued support will be greatly appreciated.

Moderator

Thank you very much. That was such a thought-provoking talk. For Japanese people, who tend to focus too much on the results of the fights, it shed light on the essence of Judo.

Now, in order to deepen our understanding of the topic, let us open the floor for the questions and answers session. Those of you with questions, please go ahead.

Mr. A

Thank you very much for the fascinating talk on the essential spirit of Judo.

I think that Judo nowadays can be divided into two types – educational Judo and competitive Judo. With regard to competitive Judo, especially when it comes to a tournament like the Olympics, where victory is very important, we see that the style has collapsed into something resembling wrestling. However, I am hoping that educational Judo will keep the original authentic style. For this purpose, I believe it is important to promote educational Judo to the world separately from competitive Judo.

Mr. Rakhlin

I think it is important for coaches to not only teach techniques, but also be educators who will develop children. You have to make a man first to make champions. In order to do so, healthy strong bodies are essential.

In Russia, we have a song named “You can love a woman no matter how old you are.” Similarly, the great thing about Judo is that you can practice it according to who you are, regardless of your age.

Mr. A

In Japan, we have a Judo song that goes “do not think you will win, if you have that thought you will lose, you have nothing to lose, what is important is what you hoard in your heart.” I believe the essence of Judo is to keep practicing, learn respect, and develop an honorable personality for society.

Mr. Rakhlin

I often tell my students not to think when on the tatami mats, instead, think hard before getting there. When Hemingway met the world boxing champion in Spain, he asked, “How did you win your last match?” and the champion said, “My opponent was smart, so he ended up thinking too much. I beat him while he was still thinking.”

Moderator

Thank you very much. Next question, please.

Mr. Kobayashi

My name is Kobayashi. It is a pleasure to be here.

I have heard that when Mr. Yeltsin was the president, tennis was quite popular because of his influence. What is your thought on the influence Mr. Putin had as the president in terms of increasing the number of Judo participants in Russia?

Mr. Rakhlin

Tennis is a rich person’s sport, but Judo can be practiced by anybody. In fact, I believe the percentage of the wealthy population among the Judo participants is probably not that big.

Behind the rise of tennis as a popular sport, there were coaches who appreciated and promoted the sport. Unfortunately, Judo was not blessed with that kind of talent. President Putin was a wonderful person, but probably the leaders of Russia’s Judo community back then did not have great talent. To be honest, Russia is currently trying to solve the problems related to Judo with money.

Mr. Kobayashi

Three years ago, Mr. Rakhlin said in answer to my question that it was too early to evaluate Mr. Putin as a president, since judging a leader requires a certain amount of time. Now, how do you evaluate Mr. Putin’s work of the past eight years?

Mr. Rakhlin

I have visited many different parts of the vast Russia. When a country is this big, it is very difficult to enrich the lives of all the citizens. Russia is made of not only

Moscow and Petersburg, it also has Sakhalin, Leningrad, and Caucasia, and the lives differ according to where you live. However, everywhere I go, people tell me to send a message to the President that they are praying for his health and success. This is same with Christians and Muslims. I am sure there are some unsatisfied people in Russia, but this is the answer.

Now Russia does not have any military forces stationed in Afghanistan or Iraq. The ones in Chechen are there to do good things. I have been to Caucasia (including Chechen), which is a very dangerous region in Russia, but I could take a walk as I do in Tokyo. I think that is also an answer to your question.

Moderator

Thank you very much. Next question, please.

Mr. B

I would like you to tell us what made you start practicing Judo. Was it not a minor sport in the Soviet Republic?

Mr. Rakhlin

About 55 years ago, I was a player of the Russian national sport called Sambo. I was even a coach once. I met Judo through my very close friend Mr. Bogulubovs. He was the bronze medalist at the 1964 Tokyo Summer Olympics.

I have come to choose Judo over Sambo, after becoming enchanted by the numerous advanced skills exhibited freely on the tatami mats. When I started Judo, people played Judo where one earned victory by beautiful “ippon,” and those techniques for getting “koka” did not even exist.

I remember Mr. Yasuhiro Yamashita had a fight in T’bilisi in 1978. He won the first round by nage-waza (throwing), then kansetsu-waza (attacks against the joints or joint-locks), followed by osaekomi-waza (holding technique) and shime-waza (strangleholds). Seeing his Judo further confirmed my commitment to follow the path of Judo.

Moderator

Thank you very much. Next question, please.

Mr. Mukai

My name is Mukai and I am with Kodokan.

At Kodokan, until around a decade ago, we had tried to teach children the right Judo by forbidding their participation in external fights, but since I joined, we changed the policy and decided to allow it.

As discussed earlier, it is a fact that we currently have two types of Judo: competitive Judo and educational Judo. However, as an instructor, I believe it is very difficult to teach Judo in this divided way. At Kodokan, we teach the basics in the initial lessons, followed by lessons in “hard” Judo at the second stage so that students can win fights.

You have seen the boys’ division practice at Kodokan yesterday. What kind of impression did you have after seeing the actual lessons?

Mr. Rakhlin

Just as the foundation is important when building a house, the basics are important in Judo training. Learning basics in the first half of the lesson, followed by practical techniques such as “randori” in the latter half. Even though it was only for a short time, I watched the lessons with great interest.

Compared to the beautiful Japanese Judo, Russian Judo is inadequate. Maybe it is the difference in the quality of coaches. Our agenda is “education of educators.” We have athletes with high capabilities. Novikov and Solodukhin are such athletes and they managed to become winners of the World Judo Championships and Olympic games. What we need is an educational system, and the purpose of our visit lies there, too. If Japan was to lose its educational system, that would be a tragedy for the future of Judo.

There was something I noticed which made me a little bit worried in the Kodokan cup. Neither men nor women had any “ne-waza” (groundwork) at all. What happened to Master Kashiwazaki? For example, I could not help noticing techniques that looked like sliding shoulder wheel. It is a wrong trend to value that kind of dirty trick, and it is entirely unnecessary. That is my thought and I want to keep working together along these lines.

Moderator

Well, it is about time to close the session, so I would like to invite Mr. Yasuhiro Yamashita to ask some questions to end the program.

Mr. Yasuhiro Yamashita

Well, first, I would like to ask you to tell us in detail about what kind of athlete President Putin was when he started Judo. I have heard that President Putin is very interested in Japanese culture as a Judoka. Is it not true that he must have received significant influence from his coach, Mr. Rakhlin?

Mr. Rakhlin

When he first showed up at the Dojo, he was no different from other children and did not particularly attract my attention. I believe I can speak for the other coaches as well. However, once the lesson began, it turned out he was such a hard worker who enjoyed training, and progressed quicker than anyone else did. I remember him patiently practicing without any breaks. In skills and technique, he was good at throwing his opponents both left and right in the same way, and his response when under attack was quite good as well.

He has told me that those qualities in Judo had helped him significantly in serving as President. I believe Mr. Yamashita and President Putin must have many things in common when it comes to these qualities. What I can say might not be quite enough, so why not ask Mr. Yamashita to talk a little bit about his impression of President Putin?

Mr. Yasuhiro Yamashita

I would like to talk about it in detail at the networking meeting, but I believe President Putin not only likes Judo, but he also has a great understanding of the spirit of Judo and uses it in his daily life as well as in official affairs. What kind of potential did Coach Rakhlin see in President Putin, and what kind of mental training have you had with him?

Mr. Rakhlin

I have educated Mr. Putin not as a president, but as a man and as a Judoka. "How to bring up a president" is

too difficult of a question for me, just like the question "how to raise a child." What is important is to be a role model yourself. As long as a coach is sincere and responsible, students must follow his suit. Now that I think about it, maybe I should have taught President Bush instead, though. However, when it comes to drinking, I have told President Putin not to drink or follow my example, and in regards to smoking, I have told him that I would smoke for him instead.

Coaches should show a good path. He can have lessons on bad things from his own life. When it comes to Judo, it is important to choose the authentic path and gain experience every day.

Moderator

Thank you very much. It was such a useful discussion that it made me think that maybe the Japanese prime minister should have learned Judo as well.

Now, we are moving on to the networking session in the program, so please use this opportunity to deepen your friendship with the coaches from Russia, including Coach Rakhlin. In addition, the membership fee we received from you today will be used by Solidarity of International Judo Education to promote Judo abroad.

My name is Hashimoto, of Tokai University, and I was your moderator for today. I am also Deputy Director of the non-profit organization, Solidarity of International Judo Education. Thank you very much for being here with us today.