

## **The new IJF rules: the impending effects towards 2010**

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The Junior World Championships of 2009 appeared to be an indisputable display of the superiority of the conventional Japanese-style of judo and showed the obvious fact that it is really difficult to withstand fundamental judo skills without unorthodox wrestling-style leg-grappling solutions. However, it should be asked if this is hard evidence that European judo has no other course but to follow the Japanese-style (and if so, how soon should this happen?) or alternatively, can the two styles continue their rivalry with the invention of crafty new tactics for the next 'milestone' event?

The Judo community has seen numerous changes to the rules particularly most recently. Some of the new amendments have produced the desired effect and have been welcomed and appreciated whilst other changes have still to achieve this aim.

Two trends in the evolution of judo, very much affecting one another, are its professionalization as international sport and the desire to preserve its unique educational values. This causes confusion in determining the long-term strategy for the international development of judo and makes the decision-making process as difficult as sitting on two chairs.

At the same time many judo experts and coaches hold serious concerns about the way these new changes have been communicated and discussed. This is especially true with those amendments which were put in to effect long before they were discussed and ratified by the IJF congress. This has left a large number of coaches with the discomforting effects of feeling disengaged from the whole process. Introducing change in such a way places coaches in the difficult position of having to form emergency action plans, regarding what they teach and how they prepare their athletes. This is particularly awkward in the middle of the Olympic cycle with less than 1,000 days before the next Olympic Games.

### **A retrospective view of the evolution of the rules of Judo.**

The rules of judo were shaped over the course of many decades as a result of numerous competitions between various ju-jitsu schools. According to W. Muramoto in the 'Furyu' (The Budo Journal) "in its early days judo looked very much like a duel with no compromise, where one could win by way of applying a wide range of throwing, armlocking and strangulation techniques not caring much about the harm and damage caused to the opponent". The first and utmost concern was to rectify and amend the competition rules to make Judo a safe practice.

Numerous traumas and injuries, commonly occurring during contests between fighters of various ju-jitsu and judo schools, triggered a process of elimination of the dangerous and risky techniques. The process started with the very first Kodokan competition in 1884 which was known as the "Red-and-White Tournament" as it is to this day.

The year 1899 was marked with the ban of the finger, wrist, knee and ankle-locks in all competitions between ju-jitsu and/or judo schools.

The year 1916 saw the ban of the very popular knee-lock Ashi-Garami. It was followed with the elimination of the technique known as Do-Jime (so-called 'knee scissors') when the opponent's body was squeezed, in the area of the kidneys, between Tori's knees.

Various locking techniques applied to the shoulders and hands leading to submission were still common up till 1925 when finally they were limited exclusively to Juji-Gatame and Ude-Garami.

The next technique banned in 1970 was lifting opponent from a newaza stalemate up to the level of shoulders and throwing him flat onto his back on the tatami.

In the 1980s a leg scissors originating from Ju-jitsu and known as "Kani-Basame" was banned. It is an interesting fact that famous judoka Yasihuro Yamashita was severely injured with this technique and could have missed the 1984 Olympics if he had not made a happy recovery just in-time to compete.

Another motive driving the rule changes was (and still is) the desire to make contest judo more spectacular. This was also the underlying idea that led to the shortening of the duration of contests from 20 minutes (1950-1960) to 15 minutes (1970 WC finals) then to 8 minutes (1976 WC finals) and to 5 minutes at present. The introduction of weight categories also played a significant role in this process, resulting in a widening of the range of techniques favoured by contestants of various weights. Judo has gone from a structure of three weight categories in 1964 Olympic Games (68, 80, over 80) to eight categories in the 1980 Olympics (60, 65, 71, 78, 86, 95, +95, open) and seven at this moment. The same consideration led to reducing the mat area, appearance of red zone, introduction of blue judogi, etc. (all of these happened much later).

In 1974 the minor scores of Koka and Yuko were introduced, together with a penalty for minor infringements, the Sido. According to some judo experts, this was a major turning point in judo's evolution leading to a deterioration of the technical values and moral standards of judo. Playing for a shido became part of the crafty tactics and strategies of many performance players and made 43% of the overall scores in the 1996 Olympic Games. In addition, the strategy of physical domination was very often chosen as an alternative to 'technical judo' sadly allowing stronger but less accomplished contestants to win. Moreover, this led to the adoption of many wrestling techniques as an effective tool to compensate for limited judo skills and was favoured by many international participants.

The penalisation of wrestling-style leg-grabs seems to be a way of rectifying the problem, however it is possible that new strategies and tactics may continue to influence the technical evolution of judo in a way we are certainly not expecting at the moment.

**Speculations (as there are few studies or statistics available on the subject) on the immediate effects of the new rules from the stand-point of a 'European Style' judo coach.**

1. One of the perceived problems, which is supposed to be rectified by the severe penalising of direct leg-grabs, is the stance (Shizen-Tai). The intention is to bring this back to being open and straight but will it happen? Will it not be very tempting to go for a leg-grab from the crouched and low stance, particularly when one hand does not hold a grip. But this could it be enough to penalise a defensive crouched stance with a one handed grip?

2. Some of the dynamics of Judo, in terms of attacks, are also targeted. Leg-grabs are not actually banned, they are allowed as a second move in a sequence of attacks, and as a direct counter. It may be the case that a sequence of actions looks more spectacular than a single drop. However, some questions arise:
  - a) How realistic does the first attack have to be (assuming this to be a classic throw) to prompt a leg-grappler to pursue his usual counter?
  - b) Will it be enough to apply a half-way move with the leg imitating entry into a throw?
  - c) How easy will it be to trick an opponent into conceding a penalty if the entry is used as a provocative move (a feint)?
3. The correct judgement of a leg-grab as a counter urgently requires clarification as to what constitutes an attack. This will require a high standard of refereeing experience if the movements are to be scored correctly and unerringly. There are three ways to take the initiative in judo: anticipation and counter-attack (Sen-Sen), avoiding and counter-attack (Tai-No-Sen) and blocking and counter-attack (Go-No-Sen). Each strategy is aimed at stopping opponent's attack at different stages of the throw: during Kuzushi (Sen-Sen), Tsukuri (Tai-No-Sen) or the Kake (Go-No-Sen) phase and then applying the countering throw. I believe that it may be extremely difficult for referees to define the genuine attack unless it is visibly in its final stage of the take-off (Kake).

This also indicates that Judo may become more physical with some loss of the psychological dimension of contest. This may apply particularly with counters (as with Kaeshi-waza with leg grappling) during the stages of anticipation and the early stages of the avoidance of an opening attack.

4. Kumi-kata will probably increase during the contest time and may also may increase in intensity.
5. It is also possible to speculate that the tight gripping, typical of the European syle, will increase as a counter-measure against the quick and manoeuvrable Japanese Judokas.
6. We should expect sacrifice and knee-dropping techniques to receive new impetus, at least among European Judokas, on the assumption that an entry into a standing throw is a compelling situation for any leg-grappler to go for the leg.
7. The side stance (which I define as of the Georgian Style) may recieve new impetus as a means of withstanding the skilled and manoeuvrable Japanese Judokas. This stance is also useful when meeting other European syled oponents because it appears to be 'trouble free' as no leg grappling will be allowed untill the real attack is under way (Koga-Boras: 1996 Olympic Scenario). It will be interesting to see if this becomes a popular performance scenenario in the very near future.
8. Finally, what will happen to European syle judo in the short and long-term? time will tell. It is most probable that it is going to adapt and produce a new wave of even

more crafty tactics and strategies than hither to and will survive within its own emergent traditions.

There are other equally controversial issues which are not touched upon here such as the video control of contests and the limitation of one referee on the mat. These measures have caused no less concern, criticism and confusion for Coaches and judo experts.

However, I am limiting my attention here to the 'Technical Repertoire of Judo' in an attempt to help coaches to adapt their coaching in both the short and long term. The lack of serious studies and the unavailability of data make projections of future trends speculative.

## **Conclusion**

Having said this speculation can be a remarkably useful tool in enabling us to predict what might happen in the future or vice versa, see what is not happening. For a Coach the most exciting thing about the process of the technical evolution of judo lies in the attempt to predict its further development so that with limited time he can adapt his system in order to prepare his athletes for competition. In this case before the next World Championships and the 2012 Olympics.