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## Judo in Japan

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In

## Secrets of Asian Sport Psychology

Edited by: Peter C. Terry, Zhang Li-Wei, Kim YoungHo,  
Tony Morris, and Stephanie Hanrahan



## Introduction

Judo is more than a sport in Japan, it is an integral part of the culture of the country. As a martial art, judo is proposed to contribute to the healthy development of mind and body as well as to the cultivation of a well-rounded character. With these benefits in mind, judo is promoted in Japan and around the world as an ideal activity for males and females of all ages. The founding father of judo, Dr Jigoro Kano, proposed that “*Judo is a teaching for life itself and with it we learn to overcome the pitfalls and obstacles of everyday living.*” Judo is part of the physical education curriculum at Japanese schools as a life-long activity, and there are approximately 190,000 registered judo players in Japan.



Credit: Courtesy of judophoto.com.au



view video:  
*Judo for Kids*

## Olympic Achievements

Judo became an official Olympic sport at the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games for males and at the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games for females. Japan is the birthplace of the sport and the country’s judo players have traditionally produced excellent performances in Olympic competition. Japan ranks first in the world for the number of Olympic gold medals won (36) during the period from 1964-2012, as well as the total number of medals won (72). This record of achievement is both a source of pride for Japan and an enduring source of pressure on the country’s national judo team to continue to excel in Olympic and other major international competitions.

This chapter presents a brief overview of the historical developments of judo and provides an explanation of its popularity. We then address how sport psychology is positioned within Japanese judo, outline a mental management program, and describe the involvement of mental training consultants in the sport. Finally, we present case studies relating to mental skills training and psychological support for two Olympic judo players.



view video:  
*101 Judo Games Trailer*



view video:  
*Japanese Olympic Judo Compilation*



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## Historical Development

Judo was established in 1882 when Dr Jigoro Kano opened a *dojo* (training hall), referred to as *Kodokan*, at the Eishoji Temple in Tokyo. Kano had previously trained in jujutsu, a fighting sport descended from ancient Japan. Having studied various ancient forms of self-defence and making many modifications and improvements, Kano established systematic techniques and instructions for his new form of jujutsu, which he called judo. This breaks down into “*ju*” (gentle) and “*do*” (path or way), or the way of gentleness. Kano’s primary goal was to assist students of judo to become better human beings. The two guiding principles of judo – inner tranquility (*Seiryoku Zenyo*) and outer harmony (*Jita Kyoiei*) – encourage students to strive to achieve a sense of being at peace with themselves and the world.



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Judo was introduced into Japanese schools as an extracurricular activity around 1887 and as a formal subject in 1931. The sport was also adopted as part of the curriculum to train police officers and became widely used in the armed forces, companies, and local dojos. Judo was prohibited in Japanese schools immediately after World War II because of the order made by postwar occupation forces to prohibit all martial arts. The All-Japan Judo Championship was reestablished in 1948, the All-Japan Judo Federation was formed in the following year, and judo was reintroduced into schools in 1950. Nationwide competitions among students became popular, leading to wider dissemination than in prewar times. The postwar dissemination of judo to overseas countries resulted in the 1st Judo World Championships in 1956 and its inclusion as an Olympic medal sport eight years later. Article 1 of the International Judo Federation’s regulations includes a sentence stating that “the IJF acknowledges what was founded by Jigoro Kano as Judo” recognising that the event in 1882 was the birth of judo in the world.

As well as an Olympic sport, Judo is seen as an educational activity that emphasises human development, rather than winning or losing. Thoughts and sayings reflecting this emphasis include “beginning with a bow and ending with a bow,” “flexibility overcomes stiffness,” “efficient use of energy,” and “mutual prosperity for self and others.”



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## Flexibility Overcomes Stiffness

Flexibility overcomes stiffness is an important concept in judo. The phrase refers to controlling the opponent by using the power of the opponent. With this technique, a smaller person is able to defeat a bigger person. We sometimes see a small Japanese athlete throwing down a big overseas athlete, which is a vivid demonstration of this concept.

## Efficient Use of Energy

Judo promotes efficient use of physical and mental energy. Power can be created by using the movements or weight shift of the opponent. Dedication to judo and ascetic training helps to establish the ability to use energy efficiently. Judo players are encouraged to use economy of effort to neutralize an attack and are encouraged to apply the same principle to daily living, using their energy efficiently for the purpose of doing something beneficial for the world.





## Mutual Prosperity for Self and Others

Another principle promoted through judo is that mutual trust and assistance has mutual benefits and leads to collective prosperity. Involvement in judo is proposed to cultivate a spirit of working towards the creation of a world where both self and others prosper. Devoting oneself to judo to help develop these ideals is considered to be important in Japanese culture.

The original collection of 40 throwing techniques in judo are referred to as *Gokyo-no-waza* (see Figure 1). A full list of throws and other judo techniques recognized by *Kodokan* can be found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Kodokan\\_Judo\\_techniques](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Kodokan_Judo_techniques)

# Gokyo-no-waza

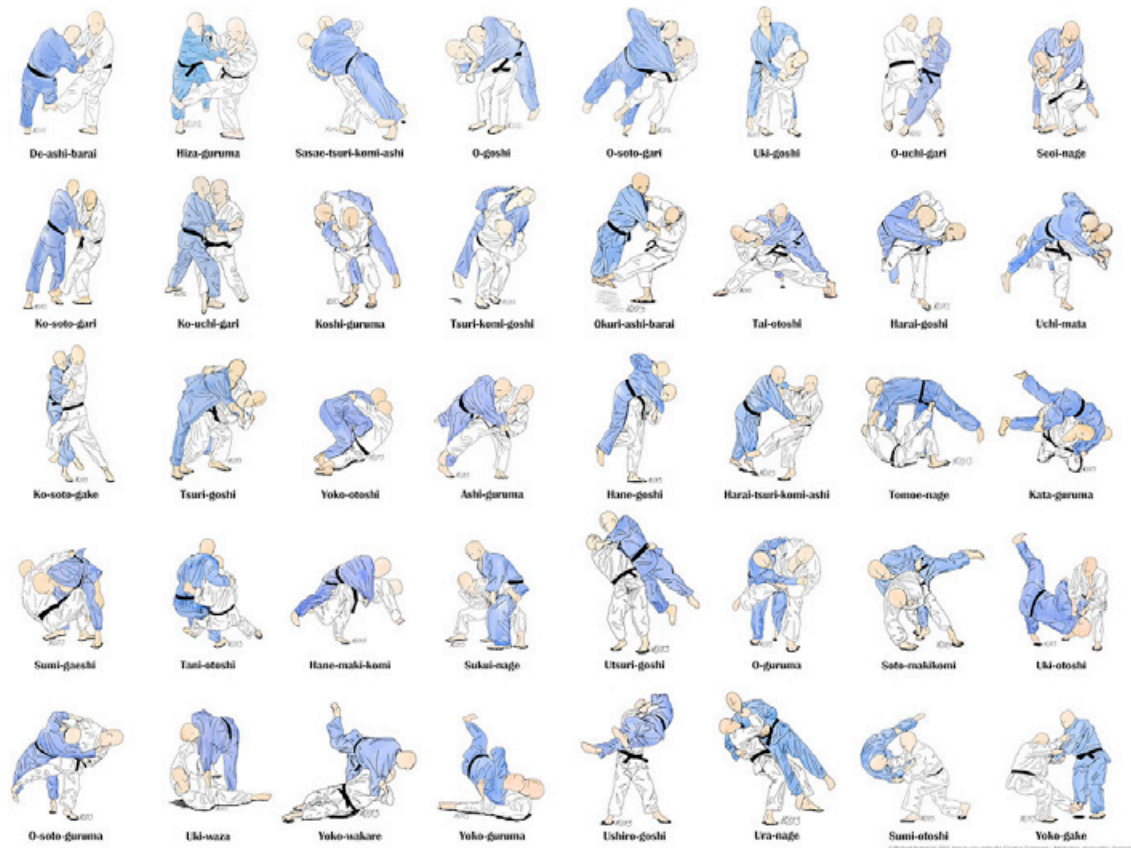


Figure 1. Gokyo-No-Waza: 40 original throws.

## All-Japan Judo Federation (AJJF)

The AJJF has made sustained efforts to promote and disseminate judo to the public, on the grounds that the sport contributes to the healthy development of mind and body, and helps to cultivate a well-rounded character. The AJJF has also sought to strengthen and train national-level athletes who aspire to become the best in the world, as well as to nurture and improve the quality of instructors. Training young judo players and developing high-quality instructors are seen as important tasks to secure a strong base for the future of Japanese judo. Programs promoted by the AJJF focus on physical strength, judo technique, mental training, nutritional guidance, and physical conditioning.

To accredit instructors, seminars are held in all 47 prefectures of Japan with the emphasis on safety and basic skills. A qualification system for instructors was refined and implemented in 2013. Attempts to further improve the quality of judo instructors includes coaching seminars delivered by the Japan Sports Association, workshops for community instructors co-sponsored by the Japan Budo Council, and the promotion of activities by female instructors in the community. Support is also provided in judo for people with visual impairment, the “Kids Judo” initiative, as well as the many national judo competitions held every year in high schools and colleges for both genders.

In regards to international relations, exchanges are promoted by inviting overseas teams to Japan and dispatching instructors to overseas countries. In addition, Japanese officials who attend major international events are actively supported. With deepening relationships and exchanges with the International Judo Federation and judo organisations in various countries, information on judo is collected, analysed, and disseminated. The development of judo throughout the world is regarded by many as Japan’s responsibility.



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## Mental Management Program

The Sports Medicine Committee of the Japan Sports Association began a study on the mental management of athletes to enhance athletic performance for the 1984 Olympics. Results from this study were used for various types of sports, and the term “mental management,” referring to self-management of the mind, was introduced to many sport organisations in Japan. Training for athletes in Japan has traditionally relied on strict practice and physical training only, with scientific training given little attention. Only general mental concepts such as “will power” and “patience” are emphasised in this traditional way of thinking. Specific methods to control the mind, such as attention control and maintenance of proper activation levels, were not seen as part of athlete development. This is ironic because psychological considerations and specific techniques for self-control were explained in traditional Japanese martial arts, represented by the “*Gorin-no-sho*” (Book of Five Rings) by Musashi Miyamoto, which was written around the year 1645 (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Book\\_of\\_Five\\_Rings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Book_of_Five_Rings)).



Mental management for judo involves a scientific and logical way of thinking, unlike the times when training relied only on experience. Contemporary mental training techniques for athletes, including relaxation, imagery, attentional control and mood profiling, are incorporated into the mental management program. In international judo events, it is

important to properly control one’s own mindset by dealing with pressure from the surroundings, focusing attention at critical moments, and creating or maintaining the optimum level of psychological arousal by relaxing or increasing activation as necessary. It is now accepted in the Japanese judo world that athletes need to learn these and other mental skills to be able to reliably demonstrate their physical abilities to the maximum. Mental management programs for instructors and coaches include leadership, motivation, and stress management strategies. Mental management programs unique to Japan have been established, based on approaches used in Europe and the USA. One example is the Mental Management Program for Mental Stability, an excerpt of which is shown in Box 1.





## Box 1: Excerpt from the Mental Management Program

To achieve good competition results you need to prepare your mindset, taking into consideration your daily living and training, as well as the period before, during, and after the competition. Training for mental stability consists of two parts. The first is a relaxation program involving biofeedback, autogenic training, and breathing techniques. The second is developing a clear mind in daily life and competition, using imagery training to create the best mindset for competition. Adequate skills practice, physical conditioning and psychological preparation are necessary to perform at your best. There are many ways to develop psychological skills, but also try to generate a clear mind before competition.



A long time ago, a samurai organized his belongings and exercised abstinence before he risked his life on the battlefield. By doing this, he was able to fight with all his strength without leaving his mind with his family or daily life. Clearing your mind before competition can assist you to have a clear mind during competition, resulting in a clear mind after the competition, and a sense of fulfillment that you completed the competition without regret.

Before leaving for the competition, you are encouraged to complete unfinished tasks, finish the tasks you can, and ask colleagues to attend to the rest. Tidy up and clean your desk and room, so that your mind will not be cluttered by thoughts of home. By preparing the best you can for daily life, practice, and competition, you can have a perfectly clear conscience and enter competition without worrying about the results.



## Psychological Interventions

Six support staff were appointed by the Japanese Olympic Committee and the AJJF to support A-ranked Japanese athletes designated for special training to prepare for Olympic and World Championship events. The support staff included two doctors, a mental training consultant, a fitness coach, a trainer, and a dietitian. The roles of mental training consultants and other support staff become increasingly important during an Olympic year. There have been many cases, not limited to judo, where young first-time Olympic athletes failed to perform to their true potential for psychosocial reasons such as competition anxiety, the burden of expectation, and relationships with coaches. With Japan being the home of judo and the strong public interest in the sport, gold medals are expected as a matter of course. Judo receives more attention than most other sports, therefore pressure from the media weighs heavily. Although Japan has produced many Olympic champions in judo, on the flip side there have been many examples of Japanese judo players who fell short of public expectations due to their inability to cope with the pressure inherent in the Olympic environment. Case studies are provided of psychological consultations with judo medallists, one male and one female. Yoichi Kozuma and Katsuaki Yamamoto conducted the psychological consultations with the male and female athlete, respectively.



## Case Study #1: Men's Olympic Team



Kozuma provided psychological support to the Japanese men's judo team, starting at a training camp four years out from the 2004 Athens Olympic Games. A program of goal-setting, relaxation, psyching-up exercises, visualization, concentration training, positive thinking, and mental preparation for competition was delivered to the whole team. Kozuma participated in all training camps for the judo team, and travelled to various competitions within Japan and overseas. At the Olympics four years later, the team excelled, winning three gold medals.

As mental training was a relatively new concept for the athletes and coaches, an introductory seminar was provided to introduce them to the principles of sport psychology. Data were collected from all team members using two standardised psychological tests to assess motivation and other psychological factors. Mental training sessions were delivered at all training camps for the team as a whole, and individual

counselling sessions were also offered. Mental training was integrated into the daily schedule of the training camps. Athletes met at 07:00 every day for morning exercise with psychological conditioning. Activities included attitude training, laughing, listening to relaxing music, discussion with a partner, breathing control using karate techniques, meditation, and reproduction of their best performance in slow motion.

Morning exercise was followed by 15 minutes of walking, so that athletes had the opportunity to talk with each other. Open communication between the mental trainer and the athletes was seen as very important, and so Kozuma ate breakfast with the athletes after walking and time was set aside to converse with athletes for one hour at the training venue prior to the start of training. Training sessions occurred in the mornings and afternoons during the camp. A 15-minute mental preparation routine was taught to athletes and practiced before all training sessions. Eventually, athletes were responsible for conducting their own mental preparation and to use the method they had been taught to prepare for training and competition.

Athletes were observed during training sessions to assess their attitudes and mindset. They were provided with feedback, which was then used in the goal-setting process. An opportunity for athletes to talk with each other about their attitudes toward training was provided after the afternoon session, followed by a visit to hot springs with the athletes. Getting into hot springs is a traditional Japanese







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technique to promote bonding within a group in a relaxed atmosphere. After bathing, dinner was taken together. Sharing time while bathing and eating dinner plays an important role in providing opportunities for open and honest communication among athletes.

A judo player never wants to appear vulnerable to an opponent, and so it is strictly prohibited to show emotion. Therefore, athletes do not express emotions such as pain or pleasure during competitions or training. Athletes were taught psychological skills involving psyching-up and relaxation exercises to develop their ability to control emotions. Although music is used by athletes in some countries, listening

to music during training was resisted. Music in the Japanese judo culture is seen to detract from the seriousness of the sport and distract attention. Therefore, psychological warm-up or cool-down with music never occurred. It was completely out of the question at the national team level. Listening to music might be a common arousal control technique in Europe and the USA, but it does not fit in the world of Japanese judo.

Judo is a one-on-one sport in which those athletes who are not participating wait patiently until it is their turn to compete. Imagery techniques were taught to the athletes to implement during this waiting time. They were encouraged to visualize the weaknesses of opponents and imagine the specific techniques that would be effective against the opponent during the impending contest. This technique was readily incorporated into athletes' routines while they were waiting to compete.

To prepare for international contests, simulation training was conducted for the team on the day before competition. All aspects of the forthcoming competition were reproduced, including the actual competition schedule, recording of fans shouting at the venue, and announcements in foreign languages. Everything, including the wake-up time, weigh-in, breakfast time, and transportation time to the venue of competition was incorporated. With this simulation training, the team became physically and mentally prepared for competition scenarios prior to the actual event. The simulation training and the imagery-based preparation routines during wait time were innovative concepts that had never previously been accepted in the judo world. The athletes steadily acquired effective psychological skills as a result of this mental training program.



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view video:  
Tadahiro  
Nomura - The  
Warrior - Judo  
Compilation



## Case Study #2: Female Olympic Medallist

Katsuaki Yamamoto, the psychological consultant, had experience of providing mental training for judo in the past and was accredited by the Japanese Olympic Committee. His consultation work began with the athlete before she was selected as a first-time Olympian. Consultations were held not only with the athlete, but also with others who were significant influences on her. The team manager, coach, and the athlete's mother were all contacted to form a trusting relationship via regular communication. Interviews with the athlete combined with observation of training at her high school dojo helped Yamamoto understand the athlete's psychological and behavioural characteristics.

Her self-analysis indicated psychological characteristics such as her insistence to train hard, a winning-is-everything attitude, a strong performance orientation, concern about relationships within her team, and a tendency to be easily influenced by suggestion. She practiced meditation, respiration control, and imagery training daily, and felt that she was equipped with mental toughness in addition to solid judo techniques and physical strength. She achieved good results in the lightweight class at the World Championships, and her quick movements and sharp techniques garnered attention from the public, resulting in the expectation that she would be selected as a member of the Olympic team. Therefore, a 4-month intervention with sessions conducted once a week was implemented. Her initial goal was to be selected as an Olympic team member by winning the Olympic trials.

The intervention focused on five areas of concern: a tough training schedule, relationships within the team, psychological preparation for the trials and the Olympics, attentional and behavioural control during practice and competition, and dealing with the mass media.

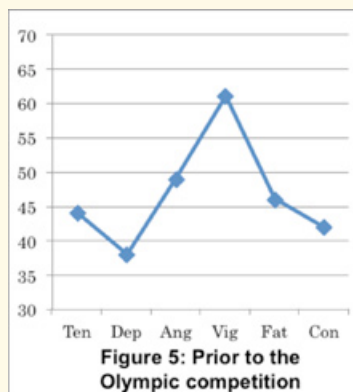
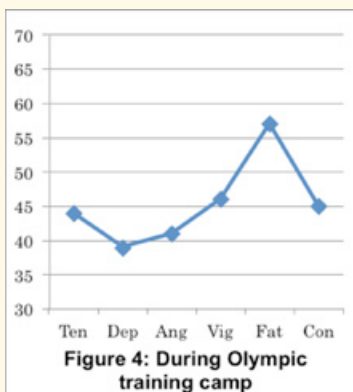
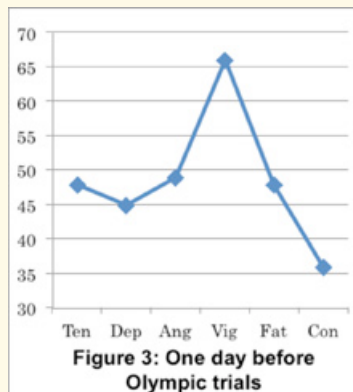
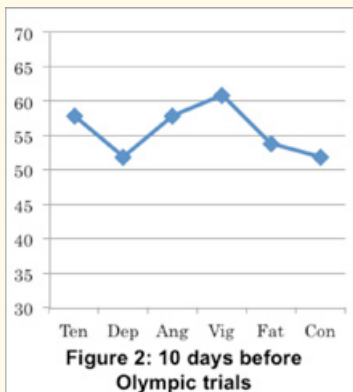
To address concerns about the demanding training schedule, her mood responses were monitored once a week using the Profile of Mood States (POMS: McNair, Lorr, & Droppleman, 1971), to help detect staleness and prevent overtraining (Kuipers, & Keizer, 1988; Yamamoto, 1990). With the athlete's permission, mood profiles were communicated to the coach to assist with decision-making regarding fine adjustments to training load. This approach continued through six training camps after the Olympic team had been selected.



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In regards to the athlete's concerns about relationships within the team, all male and female members of the team attended lectures on sport psychology that covered topics such as mental stability, optimum level of awareness, goal-setting, imagery rehearsal, attention and concentration, muscle relaxation, positive thinking, cue words, switching mindset from practice to competition, and performance routines. Enhancing the psychological skills of the entire team seemed to reduce her concern about intra-team relationships and diminish the psychological burden.





Figures 2-5. Mood profiles for a Female, Olympic Judo Player

To address attentional and behavioural control during practice and competition, advice was provided in cooperation with her coach to develop her concentration skills by identifying attentional cues and thoughts relating to point of focus, eye line, offensive and defensive techniques, and high-risk retreating moves. In terms of the mass media, the problem was associated with the excessive number of interviews, so media requests were managed by having to be made in writing, to avoid disturbing concentration during competitions and practices.

Mental rehearsal using imagery formed an important part of her planned competition routine from the first competition bout to the final championship bout. The competition plan included how she would occupy herself in the rest week before the Olympic competition began, and what she would do during the 3-minutes wait time immediately preceding a bout. Advice was given to reflect on her

performance in the previous bout (1 min.), consider tactics for the next bout (1 min.), and then relax by lying on her stomach to recharge energy.

Figures 2 to 5 show the POMS profiles for the athlete assessed 10 days before the Olympic trials (Figure 2), 1 day before the trials (Figure 3), during the Olympic training camp (Figure 4), and prior to the competition at the Olympic Games (Figure 5). POMS scores were used to assess her responses to training, and specific recommendations were based on responses to individual questionnaire items and her profile across the six POMS factors of tension, depression, anger, vigour, fatigue and confusion. Vigour scores peaked, as planned, prior to the Olympic trials and the Olympic competition itself (see Figures 3 and 5). Fatigue reached its peak during the training camp (Figure 4), as confirmed by her parents, and excessive training was suspected. Therefore, relevant coaching and support staff were advised to limit the training burden and allow her to make adjustments at her own pace. Although the training activity level increased before the competition phase at the Olympics, a classic “iceberg” profile (Morgan, 1985) was maintained (Figure 5). Tension and anger scores were high in the lead-up to the Olympic trials (Figure 2) but subsided closer to the trials (Figure 3) and remained in the normal range in the Olympic environment. Depression and confusion scores remained in the normal range throughout. Having successfully navigated the Olympic trials, the athlete lost in the final of the Olympic competition by a very narrow margin, earning the silver medal. Since then, she has won two Olympic gold medals.



view video:  
Judo -  
Women's  
63KG - Beijing  
2008 Summer  
Olympic Games



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## Summary

The sport of judo has maintained its traditional popularity in Japan. Judo is incorporated into physical education classes as part of the school curriculum, with the competitive nature of the sport increasing when it is practiced as an extracurricular activity. The ongoing accomplishments of Japanese judo athletes at major international competitions such as the Olympic Games and World Championships give courage, energy and inspiration to the Japanese public.

In this chapter, we covered the development and dissemination of judo in Japan, a system of training not only for athletes but also instructors, along with two case studies of interventions with Olympic judo athletes. The incorporation of sport psychology consultants into the traditional world of Japanese judo has been a gradual process. The demand for highly-qualified consultants to be available to support coaches and athletes over the long term has grown. Qualified consultants who are available to immediately respond to issues identified by coaches, to accompany teams to international competitions, and to provide support to individual athletes at mutually convenient locations are increasingly valued as part of Japan's attempts to maintain its position as the dominant force in world judo.



Credit: Crocus08/flickr/CC-BY-NC-2.0



view video:  
Judo - Men's  
+100KG -  
Beijing 2008  
Summer  
Olympic Games

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## VIDEOS

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2	Judo for Kids	<a href="http://vimeo.com/35494707">http://vimeo.com/35494707</a>
2	101 Judo Games Trailer	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ub4-YrEGmgg">www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ub4-YrEGmgg</a>
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13	Judo - Women's 63KG - Beijing 2008 Summer Olympic Games	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oniaQ_ya04w">www.youtube.com/watch?v=oniaQ_ya04w</a>
14	Judo - Men's +100KG - Beijing 2008 Summer Olympic Games	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Y-6wU2JdD0">www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Y-6wU2JdD0</a>

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5	Figure 1. Gokyo-No-Waza: 40 original throws. <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gokyo-no-waza.jpg">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gokyo-no-waza.jpg</a>
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