

A WISPER IN YOUR EAR...

or an historical sketch of judo, from Kano to you.

Thought I'd write this down for a bit of a giggle. When you hear a coach talk about Japanese judo, or their contention to judo, Japan or whatever else, here's a little piece of info you can keep in the back of your mind~

So, you all know Kano, the man who invented judo back in 1882, right? Once it was well established after WW1, he took a group of his "students" with him on a world tour. One of the countries he visited was England. One of the outstanding English judokas at that time, was a man called T.P. Leggett (incidentally a concert standard pianist, Zen master and speaker of Sanskrit. He also interrogated Japanese POWs during WW2, there are other things which he did, no one is quite sure what, perhaps the files are still classified?). He was taught judo by a man called Tani, who brought ju jitsu from Japan and performed in the music halls of the early twentieth century. Therefore making him, Tani, one of the pioneers of British judo. More in detail of that some other time.

Once Leggett started teaching judo at the Budokwai, (the oldest judo club in Europe, 1918), he notice a young player with some talent, my father. He then proceeded to take him under his wing. This was about 1948.

One of Kano's students was a man called Takasaki. A light heavy weight (I should find out more about him, I do know he ran a factory during WW2 making aeroplanes, more of this later). Two important facts relate to Takasaki one he married Kano's daughter, and two he became friends with Leggett.

With my father became of a very high standard, taking part in the first post war international between GB & France, in about 1951. Leggett, said "you should go to Japan", to complete his judo training. He contacted his old friend Takasaki, who replied, "send him" pure and simple! Luckily my father had been doing an apprenticeship in aircraft engineering at Fairies, where Heathrow now stands (compulsory purchased by the British government in 1944, putting a death nail into that company).

Saving all he could, my father prepared to go to Japan. He only managed half the fair. Leggett organised a wip round from the senior members of the Budokwai, figures such as Marcus Kay the sculptor and others, who I can't remember, for the other half. This bought a one-way ticket on a tramp steamer, and off my dad went...

After several adventures on the three month journey, like driving around Singapore while the "Malayan Crisis" was on, being tied to the deck in a storm with waves so tall that you had to look straight up to see the top, he arrived in Yokohama, with only a few coins left in his pocket (he'd spent most of the rest, sending telegrams warning of his delayed arrival due to the storm). He gave those last remaining coins to the man at the end of the gangplank as he stepped off and was then duly penniless. Luckily for my dad, there was a limousine waiting, which took him away to his new home!

That was Takasaki's house, with his wife, Kano's daughter! My father had a job straight away at the aircraft factory, so proceeded to work there during the day, taking himself off to train in the evenings. After about three months, old man Takasaki took him aside, and said, why you working in the factory? Don't, go to training! So from then on, my old man only showed up at the factory to pick up his wages. He spent all his time training; judo, kendo, aikido, karate, bo jitsu, studied at a Zen monastery and many other things, which I might tell you when you're older... My father lived with the Takasaki's for three and a half years, before coming home – to then be GB team captain in the '58 European team champs(which they won!) and later professional National Coach – see his books, films, etc. All that's a story for another time.

Fast forward forty years-ish, I am in Japan, and after a couple of visits by my old man before he dies, I marry a Japanese girl. At my wedding, Takasaki's daughter (the granddaughter of Professor Kano) and her husband are honoured guests, making a speech at my wedding. I go on to live there for a total of nine years, also training at the Kodokan and various other dojos around Tokyo.

So, there you are, a brief historical sketch of how learning judo with me, links you right the way back to Kano himself!