
Conditioning for Judo: and Judo as a Conditioner for Other Sports

By
Jack Richards, Strength Coach
Parkersburg Catholic High School, Parkersburg, West Virginia

Judo is a means of physical and mental education. Adapted from the Japanese fighting art of Ju Jitsu by Dr. Jigoro Kano of Tokyo, Judo provides many benefits to the practitioner; it cultivates an unstrained, upright posture; mental and physical poise; and a sense of courage and self-recognition.

All of the training for sport Judo begins and ends with conditioning. As in wrestling, football and all contact sports, Judo conditioning and training consists of the following:

1. **Safety**
2. **Cardiovascular conditioning** along with **muscular endurance** and **development**.
3. **Strength development** combined with **flexibility** and **speed development**.

Safety begins and ends with discipline and strict adherence to the rules. I allow no horseplay in the weight room or on the mat. And during a training session, I want no unnecessary talking—it is distracting and not conducive to practice. You always have some students who can talk a good game, and disrupt a session. Another part of safety training in Judo is the "breakfall". This allows the practice of a throw with your partner without injuries due to the hard falls involved.

Cardiovascular conditioning and muscular endurance and development go together in my program. Jumping rope, swimming, wrestling and combining exercises do a great job. A few examples of this are running the stairs while carrying a weight box supported only by side hand pressure; climbing stairs with a barbell or partner on your shoulders; supersets during weight training, where opposing groups (i.e. French press-curls) of exercises pro-

vide a balanced development of muscle groups affecting given joints.

Strength development is done mostly in the weight room and is discussed later in this article. However, there are some lifting techniques that are not limited to the weight room. We do a squat exercise on the mat by having a partner stand on our thighs while we go to parallel (photo 1). We do presses by lying on our back, and having to lift our partner who is standing on our hands (photo 2). Curls can be done by using the youngsters in the class and lifting them by the belt, (make sure they press down on your wrists for their comfort) bridging from the neck. We use a neck exercise which also works in the weight room. I call it the "dead man press." You place the back



Figure 1. Squat to parallel with partner.

of your head on a padded bench about 18 inches high. Your feet are 18" to 24" apart, and your body is straight and locked. Two partners, one on each side, give you a barbell and you do ten reps of a press from this position. We also do a variety of push-ups.

Flexibility and speed are accom-



Figure 2. Press with partner.

plished by repetitive drill exercises. I teach a throw in five stages. First—by explaining and demonstrating; second—by having my students perform it "by the numbers". This allows me to see the entire class easily, and do individual instruction at the same time. Third—by alternating throwing and falling with your partner. Fourth—by drills where fast—and correct—Fit-in's are practiced, followed by Fit-in and throw with increasing speed. Fifth, and last, I teach variations of the given technique to com-

pensate for the technical weaknesses of the individual players. Flexibility will be discussed in depth further in this article.

Matwork is the great endurance exercise in Judo. The ground work of Judo is broken into three types:

1. The holding techniques, where at least one quarter of the body is held and you must control your partner for 30 seconds.
2. Joint locks applied to the elbow.
3. Choke (cutting off the air) and strangle (cutting off the blood flow to the brain) techniques.

For safety, the referee or coach watches over the holding and choke/strangle holds, ending the hold at 30 seconds of controlled immobilization or ending the choke/strangle when an obvious effect occurs to the recipient. The recipient of a choke or a joint lock can submit by saying he submits or by tapping the one applying the hold twice as a sign of "giving up." This is recognized universally in Judo circles.

Other exercises for conditioning we use include step-ups, four step running of the stairs (three steps in place and then up one step and repeat), back and forth lateral jumping over a 24" box, and turning 180° while jumping.

I would suggest using some imagination to prevent the classes from becoming static.

Going back to flexibility and strength, we have two kinds of very basic exercises performed at each session. First are the warm-up (Junbi-Undo) exercises which consist of general body motion and stretching.

The first area is loosening the neck. We do this by dropping the chin to the chest and rotating the head in a full range—first to the right and then to the left with ten full head rolls in each direction. The head, as it is rolled, is kept close to the body—by this I mean as you roll from chin on chest you try to put your ear on your shoulder, your back of head on your back and so on—the neck is always stretched in one direction to another.

Second, we loosen the shoulders by swinging the arms from front to back—then reverse, then across the body in both clockwise and counter-clockwise directions—ten reps each.

Third, we twist the trunk—most all forward throws in Judo receive trunk flexibility, since you must move from a position facing your partner to a position where you are making (your) back

to (his) chest contact. This is called Tsukuri or "Fit-in".

Fourth, we bend the trunk from front to rear, (photo 4). This exercise is started in a relaxed upright position with hands on hips. Then you slightly bend your knees and push the abdomen forward (for balance) and bend backward, looking over your right shoulder until you can see your left heel. Bounce and look twice. The exercise is completed by bending forward (legs now straight) and touching the floor (again bouncing twice) between your feet. Ten reps. Again, in most forward throws, the body must bend forward after the "Fit-in" to execute the throw.

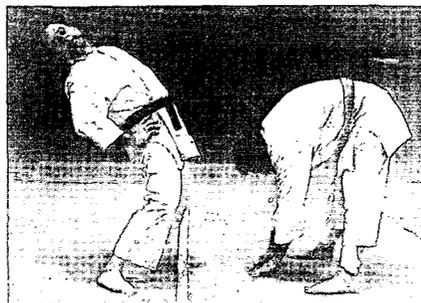


Figure 3. Bending the trunk front to rear.

Fifth is bending the trunk from side to side. This is accomplished by taking a wide stance, and placing your right hand on your right thigh with the fingers extended, and your left arm with the bicep by your left ear and the forearm over your head in a "L" shape. Make a fist and *drive* this left arm like you are punching over your head—at the same time you bend to your right (do not lean forward) and try to touch your right ankle with your extended right hand. Repeat, alternating left to right and back again, ten reps each side. As you can see in the photo of Hane-Goshi (Hah-nē Gō-shē) (Spring Hip Throw photo 4) as compared to O-Goshi (Gō-shē) (Major Hip Throw photo 5), not all forward throws are back to chest contact as in O-Goshi. The Hane-Goshi is a side chest (yours) to chest (his) contact, which requires this side bending.

Sixth is starting leg flexibility and stretching exercises. This is started with a type of deep knee bend. However, this exercise is strictly controlled. You start with your hands on your hips and your feet parallel and about twelve inches apart. You keep your upper body as straight as possible, and

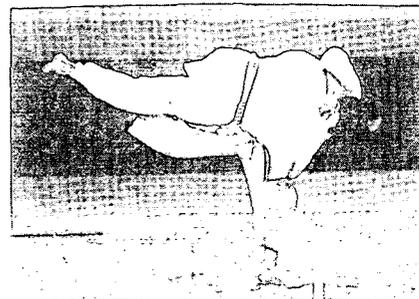


Figure 4. Hane Goshi—Bending and stretching the trunk. Note: the head ends up lower than the waist.



Figure 5. O Goshi—Bending the trunk to front. Both legs drive straight up to execute the throw.

your feet *flat* on the floor as you bend your knees *slowly* until the tops of your legs are parallel to the floor. Then come up slowly—i.e. parallel squats using barbell or a partner of your equal weight. Ten reps. Develops leg lifting strength and balance required for any power type throw.

Seventh (photo 6)—This exercise works the knee, hip and ankle in a full range of bending flexibility and develops balance. Assume a wide stance. The distance between your feet will be determined by your particular build. Turn your right foot so that the heel is on the mat and the toes are pointing straight up in the air. It is very important that the left foot remains *flat* during the entire exercise. Now—bend your left knee and lower your body so that your left shoulder is inside of your

(Continued, page 60)

Conditioning for Judo



Figure 6. Exercise 7 illustrated.

(From page 33)

left knee. Keep your right leg *straight* and try to touch your right calf to the ground. Remember to keep your left foot flat on the mat. Now do the opposite side. This exercise must be learned in stages until you can get your calf to the ground, but don't give it up; it may take several weeks to become flexible enough to do it correctly.

Eighth—Knee, ankle and hip rotation—Sit down with your legs drawn close to your body. Scoop first one foot and then the other by putting one hand around the toes and the other under the ankle and try to put this foot behind your neck. Ten reps each foot.

Ninth—We now shake and rotate our wrists and using our hands, we rotate the ankles in all directions.

At the end of the workout, we do the "Sumatsu Undo" exercises (cooling off). These consist of any group of stretching exercises that affect the body areas we have worked particularly hard during our workout.

Judo throwing techniques require upper body strength to break balance (Kuzachi). The balance is broken in four directions; front, rear and to either side, with a myriad of variations. To develop breaking balance to the rear, we do two types of upper body exercises. The first are regular curls, or power curls from the floor. This type of movement and strength is to enable you to lift your partner on to his toes very quickly and get him into an unbalanced position. He is now set to be thrown to the rear, provided he is inclined slightly that way. If he is not, you very quickly change from the lifting movement with your arms, and attack him by driving suddenly towards him, using pushing strength from your upper body and driving strength from a stationary leg. The upper body strength for this movement is developed from the bench press.

The reverse of this type of throw is

to the front. An example, we have already referred to, is O-Goshi. The upper body strength exercises we use for this type of throw are regular curls, power curls, power cleans, and also heavy barbell rows. As with any upper body routine, the lat pull downs are a must, as well as the standing press done as a military and behind the neck.

Another type of throw that is somewhat unique to Judo is the tripping or foot sweeping techniques. These are my personal favorites, as they are very fast and decisive and require less body turning. They are accomplished primarily by lifting your partner to a floating position and attacking him before his weight can be assumed on either of his feet. At this point, the throw is accomplished either by a pulling and tripping action, or by "sweeping" his feet out from under him. Again—upper body and arm strength.

Without going too deeply into actual Judo training, since I wish to stress strength and endurance primarily, there are key factors to becoming a good Judoist. These are:

Fundamentals of Body Positioning:

- A. Gripping methods.
- B. Front and rear throw circular motions.
- C. Left hand pull and lift.
- D. Position of right shoulder.
- E. Pressure movements of the right hand.
- F. Foot placement.
- G. Breaking balance—the importance of hip and shoulder twist.
- H. Keeping your center of gravity low.
- I. Body twist used in a throw.
- J. Follow through the throw to mat work.

These are taught through progressive training that continually introduces more variables into the training.

Six elements of competing in Judo must be learned—these are:

- 1) A favorite forward throw (right or left)
- 2) Opposite side throw (opposite to your favorite throw)
- 3) The three rear throws—Osotogari (Major Outer Reaping)—Ouchi Gari (Major Inside Reaping, photo 7)—and Kollchi Gari (Minor Inside Reaping)
- 4) Defenses, combinations of throws, and counters to throws
- 5) Take downs (as opposed to throws) and matwork
- 6) Foot techniques (Ashi Waza) to break up your partner's defense



Figure 7. O uchi Gari—Throw to the rear. Note: Hard drive with the left leg and the upper body.

The partners used in the learning process must vary in size, strength and speed.

The training progresses from pantomime practice of basic movements for specific throws to stationary drills with a nonresisting partner to stationary drills with a resisting partner. The next step is moving timing drills with a non-resisting partner, then, a moving resisting partner. We practice with attacks on command, and multiple attacks of 30 in 30 seconds with and without resistance, and multiple attacks against counters.

Finally, the students progress to supervised "Randori." This is a free practice, or contest training, where anything is practiced, but there is no declared winner. In this form, the Judoists teach each other—especially when the higher ranks randori with the lower ranks.

To summarize, Judo, football, wrestling and certain other sports have a lot in common in the conditioning aspects. So, I highly recommend the sport for off season, and I also recommend power lifting for year round training. The disciplines apply to sport and real life. The rank system is a visual sign of accomplishment as is a 1000 lb. club for weight lifting, whether it is for three or four lift totals. The resultant self-confidence and gained self-esteem that come from these two sports are invaluable to the growth of your athletes. ©