

What Motivates You?

Everyone who steps onto a mat at any point in their lives to “learn some Judo” is motivated by something. For some it is rank, for others it is skill, and still more are thinking that this is just “Bruce Lee in 10 easy lessons!” Whatever your reason, this initial desire, passion, fire, motivation, etc is replaced by something more enduring.

When your skills have developed to the point where you simply enjoy playing Judo, which is a simple and wonderful motivation. It is a motivation of just seeking to do what makes you happy. I can only hope that more of us find that in Judo or in other aspects of our lives.

There are also those who have “a servant’s heart” and get tremendous amounts of satisfaction from teaching others and helping others achieve their goals on the mat. We need these “giving” people as much as we need any others on the mat as they help to teach and train the next generation of Judoka.

The last group of people that I would consider is the group who is motivated by winning. These are not bad people as competition is natural. These people can be harmful as much as any other group (yes, I am including the other two groups as having the potential to harm as well as help) in the Judo realm.

Let’s take a look at each.

Happiness

The “Happy Judoka” is the one who shows up to learn or teach and is easy going. They typically don’t get worked up about losing or winning and you can tell by their always smiling face that giving and receiving techniques is what they live for. It is not about who wins or who loses but it is about playing.

These players can have a tremendously positive effect on those in the club that have a bad day on the mat and need a kind word or some gentle motivation. They can even motivate by their presence as some will think, “I want to be just like ... when I play Judo.”

These people have the potential to cause harm on the mat if they appear to not care for others and they appear to be “Winning” motivated. They may play hard just to win and their practice can seem selfish when they walk up and ask a partner to train with them and they end up being Tori for nearly all of the training time.

Remind the “Happy Judoka” that this is a give and take sport where helping others to improve will also help them to improve and have more fun.

Teaching

Some people scoff at the Judoka who wants to be an instructor at an early age in their Judo career. When a sankyu or nikyu indicates that they would prefer not to compete but are interested in refereeing and teaching, don’t cause harm to their goals with bad words but help them fulfill their goals to become ‘Great!’ instructors of Judo.

I was watching some of the international level competitions with a group of Judo friends and a shot of a team coach weighting about 400 pounds appeared on the screen. One of the individuals watching made a comment

to the effect of “That guy could not possible be able to do any Judo..” and then went on to compare this individual against those that train the Japanese team.

The fact is that this seemingly out of place individual must be a great coach and exceedingly knowledgeable about Judo and its training methods otherwise, the team he coaches would not be so highly ranked year after year at the international level. Along that same line of thought, who are we to stifle the desires of one of our brown belt students who wishes to be a coach and teacher of Judo. We certainly don’t know the future and for that reason, I would not tell someone to quit wasting their time and get back to training for the next tournament. It is possible that this individual could be a 5th or 6th dan coach in 30 years having coached and trained a future Olympic Gold medalist.

In my humble opinion, if a student desires to be a coach strongly enough, any and all of their promotion exams should test that knowledge to the fullest extent and look at the quality of the players they train and based on that should reside the justification for promoting that individual. Why not promote a Shodan to Nidan who has 3 years time in grade and is capable of teaching 4 or 5 Katas and has a very well developed sense of tactics in shiai?

The pitfall of promoting someone strictly based on their teaching and nothing more is that you end up with individuals who attained their rank not based on their own merits but due to political influence and fortunate timing. Typically, these individuals don’t cause too much harm as once word gets out about their lack of skill in teaching, the students that flocked to this person previously seem to scarcely be seen around them any longer.

Winning

Having a strong desire and motivation to win in Judo is important in keeping Judo evolving and advancing. What most people find unhealthy and distasteful in Judo are the players whose sportsmanship is bad. They tend to be arrogant, brag too much when they win and all they ever talk about are their tournament matches where they did something great. I have often heard of these types of people referred to as “legends in their own mind!”

Coaching players who are motivated by winning can be difficult in that these types of players can be moody when they are not winning. If they continue to practice for years, then you may see this but most of the time, they get frustrated and want a quick solution to any problem or deficiency they have. With any amount of Judo experience, we know that the skills developed and refined by our National level athletes were not just awarded their skill by attaining a certain rank or some number of classes. It required significant amounts of work and typically the rank follows the skill, not the other way.

Bad manners can be corrected and coached to the point where the player gains respect not only from winning but from the way that they handle their winning. This is not difficult to do but dealing with a marginal competitor that is driven to win and doesn’t react well when they lose is more of a challenge as this person can hurt not only their own reputation but that of their coach as well.

When working with a competitor that is motivated to win above all else, you and the competitor must understand that sound training and commitment make a good player, not arrogance and bad sportsmanship. Get the competitive player to focus on specifics of a match in the beginning; from there, build on getting the

Win. You also have to be realistic with yourself and the player when you can see that they just don't have the talent to reach the level that they dream of. This can be a very difficult conversation to have when they want to be a national champion and you recognize that they just don't have the ability.

Summary

As a coach, your job is to pass on your judo knowledge to the next generation. If you are lucky, you may get the chance to pass it on to multiple generations to varying degrees. Be mindful to not destroy one of your player's dreams about Judo if they don't match up with yours. Help the recreational player have fun and be a 'Happy Judoka' while helping teach the next generation of Judo coaches and also developing new Judo champions to represent you, your team, and American Judo.

Judo is a lifestyle and there are as many Judo lifestyles as there are Judo players. As long as Judo grows and is not harmed by the actions of these Judoka, then help them to achieve their goals, whatever they may be.

Play Hard! Have Fun! Strive to Improve!!

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