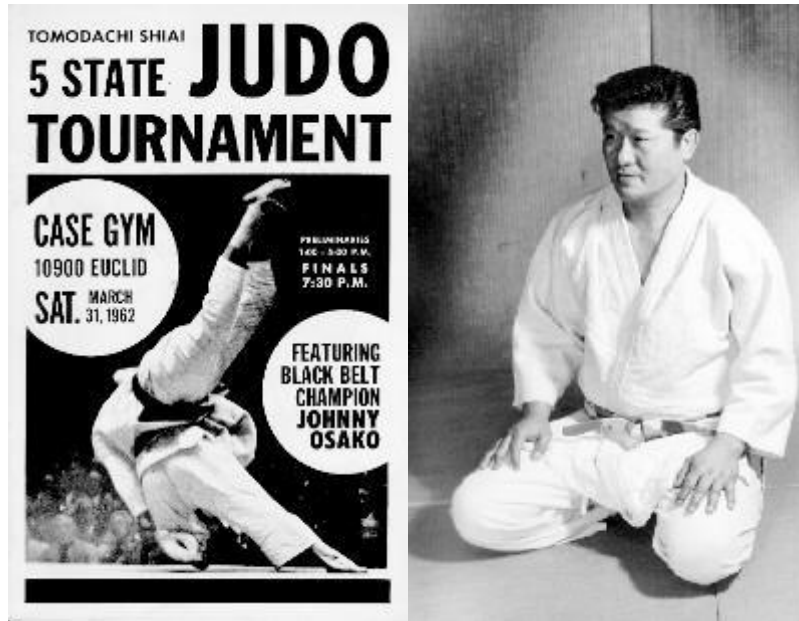


John Osako: A Great American Fighter



**from Judo World, March 1963
LET'S ORBIT by Liz**

Every world-wide sport produces along with champions - traditions and immortal names. In the Pan-American Judo realm, there exists many such names, but one that is brought to mind at this time, is a person that holds many international judo championships, numerous waza, a quiet likable symbolic figure of the respective American Judo fighter.

Born in the early roaring twenties in Stockton, California during the Christmas month, he traveled in his teens to Japan and started his judo career at the age of 13 at the Kagoshima Middle School, Kagoshima Ken, Japan. Continuing in his judo career he rapidly was promoted to shodan in 1938, nidan in 1939, sandan in 1940 and in 1948 he received his yondan.

Recently, during a visit to [Wally Jay's](#) in Toronto, Mr. Jay enlightened us to some Aikido thoughts that were along the line of Judo. While teaching the class I couldn't help but think of this American judo fighter. Wally Jay's theory was, if you concentrate hard enough that your opponent is going up in a fast fast elevator while you are executing a technique you will be surprised that all of a sudden your opponent is as light as a feather. The same applies about being thrown, if you believe that you are going down in a fast fast elevator you will all of a sudden become dead weight for your opponent.

Have you ever noticed John Osako as he approaches the tournament area? He is relaxed, that is as well as anyone can be during tournament fighting. As he reaches the edge of the mat he removes his slippers and as he steps onto the mat, he takes a deep breath and prepares his body by concentrating on making his body solid for the coming match. Not many people have been able to budge John for an ippon during tournament fighting. John Osako whose present grade is godan received this rank during his visit to the Kodokan on the 1st US-Japan goodwill tour in 1955.

In the many tournaments John's opponents were surprised and stunned with his use of one of the

favorite judo tournament wazas - uchi-mata. I believe this is due to the fact that Mr. Osako has studied uchi-mata to the finest and minute detail and he has reached a point where he is able to execute this technique seven different ways. Each opponent that one faces, is of a different stature, posture and moves differently. John has suited his uchi-mata to his various opponents, so that he can execute this technique on anyone of any size. He also finds that by using various combinations with each type gives him tremendous opportunities. For example, if you have seven types of uchi-mata with five different combinations you have 35 ways to apply your uchi-mata. This is a very good point that was brought up by Mr. Osako, and should be considered very carefully by the future Olympic and international competitors.

Listed below are the many tournament and good-will trips that he participated in. During his stay in Japan he competed in five All-Japan Middle School team championships, won the 1940 Kagoshima Ken All-State Middle School individual shiai. He represented U.S. at the 1st and 2nd Pan-American games and brought back the coveted trophy of first place in each tournament, both championships were held in Cuba. In 1953 he captained the Pan-American team which toured France, Belgium and Holland in the 1st Pan-American team championship. Mr. Osako states that this is the time when he had the pleasure of competing with the present world champion, Anton Geesink. In the AAU National championships that are held in United States every year, he won the 1954, 1958 - 180 lb. championships held in Los Angeles, California and Chicago, Ill. respectively, and in 1956 he won the AAU national heavyweight and overall championship in Seattle, Washington.

In the good-will tours he made, many judoka in far off lands saw the spectacular tokui-waza of John Osako, his uchi-mata, ashi-guruma, shime and kansetsu-waza. He visited Cuba many times and made other trips to such places as New York, Washington, DC, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Cleveland, Milwaukee and Kansas City and Toronto, Canada. The most exciting tours for Mr. Osako were when he participated in France, Belgium, Holland, Cuba and Japan. He believes that the greatest honor a judoka or any other sportsman can receive is to represent his country in an international meet or good-will tour.

A few well-known masters of this sport that have impressed Mr. Osako greatly during his tours are:

**John Osako with Kyuzo Mifune at the Kodokan during the 1st U.S.-
Japan Goodwill tour, 1955**

Mr. K. Mifune 10th dan - Mifune's judo which I had the pleasure of seeing during my goodwill tour in 1955 with the team, is a lesson in its self. As it is known to all judokas, his execution of techniques is truly the highest calibre of judo. It is difficult to put into words how graceful he does it, only the ones who have ever seen him would know.

S. Kotani, 9th dan - Sensei is head of the Foreign service department at the Kodokan. In 1955, Sensei spent several hours demonstrating technique and kata for me.





1955: Prof. Sumiyuki Kotani, the Most Famous Judoka in the World.

1963: John Osako, Glenda Osako, Mr. Kotani, Mr. Daihaku, Mr. Nakabayashi

Mr. S. [Nakabayashi](#), 7th dan - Sensei is well known among the Air Force and U.S. judokas for his many trips to the U.S. National championships. I had the honor to spend many days with Sensei. He has a vast knowledge of techniques and a knack of bringing out the finer points in his explanation of each technique. He also taught me the difficult task of refereeing. One time I spent many hours asking him questions. I am indeed happy to say Mr. Hoffman (father of Ron Hoffman, nidan, who was a former pupil of mine) a great supporter of judo, is sponsoring Mr. Nakabayashi to this country. I am sure his presence here will be of great help for many judokas.



Mr. K. Kobayashi, 6th dan - Sensei is the co-author of Sport of Judo. I had the pleasure of having him as coach of the U.S. team when we toured Japan in 1955.

I started my judo teaching career in Japan during my school days. When I returned to the U.S. and during the war I taught in the relocation camps. After serving in the army I went to Chicago and purchased Mr. T. Kuwashima's (5th dan) dojo, the Chicago Judo Club, which I had for 16 years. I then traveled to Cincinnati, and then on to Cleveland, Ohio. At present I am at the Detroit Dojo as the chief instructor.

His advice to teachers of children is "This is a stage where mental and physical training must be taught with patience." For male adults "This is a stage where each judoka must THINK, STUDY, and WORK." For females "Same as the male adults but should work hard on the various katas."

John believes that through judo magazines such as JUDO WORLD it helps to bring judoka closer to one another both spirit and technique wise.

His advice to the judo students that are training for the 1964 Olympics and other international tournament is

- You must first get yourself, body and mind into tip-top condition.
- A tremendous amount of hours in study and work on your techniques as mentioned in this

article earlier.

- A very necessary condition that quite a few judokas are very lax on is to develop right and left side techniques and study more ne-waza.

It takes two kinds of judokas to make this sport operate, the fighters and the teachers, without the teachers I am afraid our fighters would be in very bad shape. In North America we concentrate on our fighters to the fullest degree, but we have neglected to develop a study or research field of teaching methods for men, women and children. (note: a year later, in 1964, the JBBF held its [1st Technical Clinic](#) in Detroit)

I am sure that everyone that has met or been in direct contact with John Osako has carried home some invaluable knowledge from this world-wide versatile judo traveler. I have, I know. How about you?