

The Development Of Judo In Great Britain
And The Introduction Of Kyu Shin Do

Webmaster Note:- The following article was written by Nigel Porter who has been a member of the British Judo Council, Kyu Shin Do Budo Academy (Bideford) and The Tokushima Budo Council International. And is reproduced here with his kind permission.

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On the 26th of September 1899 a British engineer, called Barton Wright, returned to England after an extended period of living and working in Japan. He brought with him an eighteen year old Japanese man whom he had developed a friendship with, and who he believed had something special to give to the British people.

The Japanese youth was Yukio Tani (1881 - 1950) and he was an exponent of the Japanese art of Jujutsu. The combination of Barton Wright, as entrepreneur /manager and Yukio Tani, a natural showman, led the two men into touring the Music Hall circuit, where Tani would challenge anyone willing to wrestle with him. With the temptation of winning £1 for lasting each minute, over an initial 5 minutes, or £50 for winning, there was never a shortage of challengers. However, at a diminutive 5 feet 6 inches (1.67Mts) Tani allegedly lost only one music hall match and that was to a fellow Japanese national.

In 1900 S.K. Uyenishi joined the circuit, but soon after began teaching self defence and physical education at the Army Gymnastic HQ in Aldershot. In the May of 1906 the feet of arguably one of the most famous Judoka, in British history, touched our shores. His name was Gunji Koizumi (1885 - 1965), a Chinese lacquer expert by trade and master of Tenshin Shinyo Jujutsu, Kenjutsu, Akishima Ryu Jujutsu and Katsu. He was only to stay for a year, training and instructing his martial Arts around the country, notably at the Kara Ashikaga Jujutsu school, the Piccadilly School of Jujutsu, the RNVR, etc. until he decided to journey to the United States. He did, however return in 1910 and eventually founded the London Budokwai, in 1918, offering Jujutsu, Kendo and other Japanese arts to the British public. A year later Koizumi asked Tani to join him as an instructor at his school of Martial Ways and Tani accepted, retiring from his Music Hall bouts.

In 1919 another, yet to be famous, Martial Artist arrived in Britain. This time it was a Japanese gentleman by the name of Masutaro O'Tani (1899 - 1977), who had worked his passage on a merchant vessel. He was a Jujutsu man, having trained in Japan as well as Ceylon, where he had lived during his passage. [Top](#)

Chapter 2 - Judo Is Accepted

Koizumi and Tani were teaching their Jujutsu method at the Budokwai until 1920, when a delegation formed by Jigoro Kano, the founder of Kodokan Judo, Hikoichi Aida and E.J.Harrison, both Kodokan Dan grades and members of the Budokwai, influenced them to convert to Judo. This was achieved and the Jujutsu men were awarded their Judo 2nd Dans, in recognition of their technique and status. From there on Judo was formally

taught at the Budokwai and this can be recognised as the starting point of British Judo. Meanwhile Masutaro O'Tani had been looking to continue his Martial Arts training and subsequently joined the budokwai in 1921. Within 5 years he had risen to the position of assistant instructor to Yukio Tani and become close friends with this character.

In 1948 the British Judo Association (BJA) was formed, uniting the majority of Judo clubs in Great Britain and installing Gunji Koizumi as President. Two years later Yukio Tani passed away, having previously suffered a debilitating stroke. Over the next few years O'Tani became disenchanted with the Judo that was being promoted by the BJA and its anglicising of the Japanese sport he loved. He was also said to be unhappy with the level of support and care that had been extended to his old friend Tani. Consequently, in 1954 O'Tani severed his links with the BJA and formed his own organisation - the Masutaro O'Tani Society of Judo (MOSJ).

Around that time the London Judo Society (LJS), a BJA group co-founded by George Chew and Eric Dominy, decided to invite a high ranking Japanese Judo player/teacher to their society, to become their chief instructor. [Top](#)

Chapter 3 - Kenshiro Abbe and Kyu Shin Do In 1955 and as a result of the LJS decision, a man, whose credentials were incredible by Japanese standards let alone British ones, arrived in Britain. The man was Kenshiro Abbe (1915 - 1985) and he was single handedly to have more of an impact on British Martial Arts than anyone who had gone before or, for that matter, after.

Abbe Sensei was born in Tokushima province, Japan and was first introduced to Martial Arts by his father, a Kendo teacher, at the age of 3. Abbe Sensei learnt Sumo wrestling at school and became the regional school champion. In 1931 Abbe Sensei began Judo and one year later, when only 15 years old, was graded 2nd Dan. His Judo prowess grew from there, becoming the Tokushima High schools champion at 16 and receiving his 3rd Dan from the national Martial Arts governing body, the Butokukai.

In 1933 he enrolled at the Butokukai's special teacher training college and later was graded 5th Dan, graduated and retained as an instructor. In 1935, aged only 18, Abbe Sensei won both the All Japan East/West Tournament and the 5th Dan championships, a pinnacle in competitive Judo. It was around this time that Abbe Sensei began a 10 year study of Morihei Ueshiba's Martial Art - Aikido and formulated his own Budo philosophy of Kyu Shin Do. Abbe Sensei received his 6th Dan in 1938 and during the war years ran a military training company, where he studied and mastered Jukendo, the way of the bayonet.

In 1945 the Butokukai graded Abbe Sensei 7th Dan Judo and 6th Dan Kendo and in 1949 he took up the position of chief instructor to the Kyoto Police and the Doshisha University. Six years later Abbe Sensei was teaching in Britain.

Although initially invited by the LJS to be their chief instructor, a series of disagreements resulted in Abbe Sensei parting company with them. The stage

was set for Abbe Sensei to teach pure Kyu Shin Do to the British and in order to achieve this Abbe Sensei formed a number of martial Arts Councils, including the British Judo Council (BJC), the British Kendo Council, the British Karate Council, etc. as well as an overall governing body - the International Budo Council (IBC). It was through these various councils that, by 1957, Abbe Sensei had introduced Kendo (the way of the sword), Aikido (the way of spiritual harmony), Kyudo (the way of the bow), Jukendo (the way of the bayonet), Iaido (the way of sword drawing), Yarido (the way of the spear) and Naginatado (the way of the halberd) to Europe.

Around this time (1956) O'Tani, by then a 5th Dan, made contact with Abbe Sensei and very soon began training under him. By 1958 O'Tani had been given the position of national coach to the BJC. The early 60's were to prove very exciting for British Martial Artists and Abbe Sensei was instrumental in inviting leading Budo teachers to Great Britain, including Nakazono Sensei - 6th Dan Aikido and Harada Sensei - 6th Dan Shotokai Karatedo.

In 1964 Abbe Sensei returned to Japan in order to see the Olympics hosted in his home land and Judo represented for the first time. It was 5 years later that he finally returned, his delay being caused by an old injury to his neck, that had gradually got worse since the car accident that caused it, back in 1960. What he returned to was a near dormant IBC and a BJC that had changed course in his absence. He felt that, instead of studying the truth of Budo, most BJC members only wanted the physical instruction, misunderstanding the origins of the teaching and consequently corrupting the essence of Abbe Sensei's Kyu Shin Do philosophy.

Subsequently Abbe Sensei set about redressing the situation, virtually dismantling the BJC and leaving in place only those worthy to help in the reconstruction. O'Tani was made president of the BJC and graded 8th Dan. O'Tani was also left in charge of the IBC, with a number of other loyal students. In 1970 Abbe Sensei returned to Japan and in the same year O'Tani merged the MOSJ into the BJC. During the early and mid 70's the management of both the BJC and IBC became difficult for O'Tani and those that had been left to continue Abbe Sensei's teachings. In 1978 the BJC severed it's links with the now 'all but' redundant IBC. Since then many organisations have sprung up, promoting the Kyu Shin Do philosophy, but few truly grasp what Abbe Sensei meant.

Abbe Sensei sadly passed away on December 1st 1985.

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