

Interview of Nakamura Hiroshi Sensei held with the All-Japan Judo Federation and published on August 19th, 2020.

(Free translation from Japanese)

That road is one-Judo connects the world.

Hiroshi Nakamura, the "father of Canadian judo," who brought up the first Canadian judo Olympic medalist. "I like judo." That thought led Hiroshi Nakamura to teach judo abroad. Somehow, the words got to the field. What is important is that children, parents, and leaders continue to have passion.

Q- When and how did you start Judo?

A-I started right after entering middle school at the age of 12. I was the fourth of my six brothers and we were always fighting, but I wanted to be stronger, so I started going to the Yanaka Police Dojo in the neighborhood. There was an off-duty police officer that gave me guidance, but eventually I wanted to do something more seriously, so I started going to the Kôdôkan, which was right next to the Suidôbashi station at that time. At that time, there were about 300 to 400 people coming to Kôdôkan, but there was no teacher to teach children. High school students Akio Tanaka (later Meiji Univ.) and Tsuyoshi Okumura (later Waseda Univ.) were boys. He took care of the club and had us practice there. At the same time, in order to learn the basics, I also introduced to the nearby Utsugi Dojo and started practicing twice a day at the Utsugi Dojo and Kôdôkan. After Kôdôkan moved to Kasuga, there was a boy club. At that time, I had Mifune Sensei, Osawa Sensei, and Daigo Sensei as teachers.

Q- What kind of training did you do during your time at Chuo University?

A-At that time, dojo was in Ochanomizu, and there were also dojos in the immediate vicinity of Meiji University and Nihon University, so I often practiced jointly. At that time, there were about 150 members at Chuo University. The practice was from 3:00 to 6:00, but OB (former graduate students) working for Nippon Steel (currently Nippon Steel), Asahi Kasei, Hitachi, etc. used to come to the dojo after finishing their work at 5 and 5:30, and therefore the training would last until about 7:30 pm.



Q-There was Isao Okano and Shinobu Sekine, both your kohai, and the two of them has won the All Japan Judo Championship and the Olympics, but the practice must have been quite hard?

A-It was a tough training. It was a training with no break. If you were a little careless, you were being thrown, strangled, crushed, and got into armlocks. I couldn't relax for a second.

Q-After that, you entered Hakuodo and you were active in a business group for a while, but you quickly cut off your active duty and went to Canada. What happened to you?

A-I was dispatched from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Kôdôkan in 1966, and I had the opportunity to go to the Middle East (Egypt, Sudan, Iran) for about a month to spread and develop judo. I had a lot of trouble, but I liked judo, so I felt like wanting to do it somewhere overseas. Therefore, among the foreigners who came to Japan from overseas, I often practiced with a judoka named Doug Rogers (Tokyo Olympic heavyweight silver medalist), and got invited me saying there is no teacher in Canada, then I felt like going to Canada. So I came to Canada in 1968.



Q-How did you feel about going to Canada?

A-First of all, I wanted to develop athletes who could achieve the goal of winning an Olympic medal, which I could not achieve myself. Second, Canada had a small judo population, so I wanted to spread it to be as popular as hockey. And third, I wished I could become one page in Canadian judo history when I died, and I came up with these three goals.

“I had three judogis and spend your days teaching judo.”

Q-Did you have any problems in your life?

A-I always have problems (laughs). For the first two years since I came to Canada, I went to the dojo and taught me under a contract, but I hurt my knees. So I was hospitalized for about 3 months after the surgery, and my savings ran out. I wondered if I should to go back to Japan. It was really hard back then. I just had a baby. At that time, the students helped me and I decided to have my own dojo. However, I didn't have any income for the first 6 months after I made my own dojo. So, I started teaching at high schools, colleges, universities, and elementary schools around here. I had about three judogis, and taught them all the way from morning till night. I taught judo 6 to 7 hours a day. And I was giving clinics on weekends, so I managed to live by that.



Q-How many students are there in the dojo?

A-At first, I started behind a shopping center in the suburbs of Montreal, there were about 200 children. However, there were not many adults coming. I did not have children around the age of 15 to 20 that I wanted to train most. There were plenty of small children. So, I was at the dojo every day from 10am to 10 pm especially on Saturdays, I was teaching from 8am to 3pm. Parents brought their children around 8:00 on Saturdays, but after that, parents would not come to pick up their children because they would go shopping. It was like a daycare (laughs).

Q-What is the purpose of children doing judo?

A-The first thing is to move their body, to exercise. Then discipline. Quebec has a lot of French people, so everyone knows that judo teaches education. At the dojo, I wanted them to be a person who respects the other person and listens to people properly, while not injuring themselves and become happy and tired.



Q-What kind of teaching did you give?

A-Until they get to 12 years old, I make sure they learn ukemis. Then they go competition and make sure they fix goal. Not everyone can be a champion, so it is important to set goals according to the child's abilities and talents. It is important to identify it. Blindly aiming for all to be champions will cause some of them to give up. For the kid that can not be champion, we fix the goal of becoming black belt. And he can do his best until becoming black belt.

If you do not quit on the way, when you become an adult, you will have your own child practice judo. At my dojo, there are grandchildren of the people who came to us in the past. And soon I think that the fourth generation grandchildren will be coming soon. Therefore, I think it's important to get to the point where you have no regrets and to have the feeling that you have done your best.

When I was young, I would invite people to follow me because so they could be a champion, but that was a mistake. If you do not come by yourself, you will not feel betrayed if you can not become champion. I can't go back in time. So, if this child thinks that far, build a program up to the point he wants to reach, build a program with the future in mind. If this child can be a champion, I think it is the role of the coach to bring him up to the maximum.

Finding future potential in children's eyes

Q-What is the current judo population in Canada?

A-There are about 12,000 registered members in Quebec and about 20,000 registered members across Canada. It hasn't changed much compared to when I came (52 years ago). The big difference is that when I came, there were four federations. I went with to the Canadian Kôdôkan Blackbelt Association as soon as I arrived. I would like to go to dojos here and there to make "dojo yaburi" or "break the dojo". Dozens of people used to wait when I went to the dojo and were told to fight. So I lined 20 to 30 people and threw them from one end to end. For the first year or a year and a half, I went to other

association dojos every weekend and did that. I was 26 years old and still young. Then, people move to the Canadian Kôdôkan Blackbelt Association in time. It was around 1975 that the organization became one.



Q-What have you been happy with your teaching?

A-After all, when Nicolas Gill won the bronze medal at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. When my student's goal was to win a medal at the Olympics, I was happy.

Q-Gill said you Nakamura Sensei taught me from the age of 13-14. Did you find in him anything different from other competitors?

A-No, he liked judo and I could see that it was burning, but I honestly did not think that he would be so strong.



Q-It's important to feel that kids like Judo.

A-I look at the eyes of the children aged 14 to 15 who really like judo. A child whom eyes talk and reflect judo. A child who likes judo from morning till night, judo even when he eats food, judo when he sleeps. That is the first condition. Next is the parent. How financially, family support can parent give their children? This is because there is no monthly fee exemption, no free dormitory fee, or a special treatment system like in Japan, so it would be bad if parents could not support it. Third, how far did the first teacher teach the basics? There are some dojos that do not practice breakfalls. If you can not take breakfalls, you will be lost. It's hard to fix such a child, and I feel sometimes discouraged before I fix it. And the fourth point is how far he can you go? The coach has to evaluate the athlete and how much the coach can the athlete. You have to decide whether he will be a national champion, a pan-am champion, or an Olympic athlete. The

rest is talent. For athletes who win medals at the Olympics, up to 90% of their success is hard work based on the four factors, and talent and the remaining 2 to 3% is luck, or something like a god's plan that will decide whether it will be gold or silver, I think. I also have to find out what that is.

The most important thing is to remain passionate.

Q-What kind of position is Nakamura Sensei currently involved with in the judo world in Canada?

A-My dojo (Shidôkan) is a youth training center for U-18 in Canada, and I am developing children development dojo (training dojo). So when kid becomes a good judoka, Nicolas Gill will take him to the National Training Center (laughs).



Q-52 years since you went to Canada. It's twice as long in Canada as in Japan?

A-That's right. I think I'm kind of a weird Canadian. I cannot live 100% as a Japanese. I think somehow that I am becoming Canadian. But my heart is still Japanese.

Q-How do you feel about Japanese Judo today?

A- Good, strong, extraordinary. This is also true with soccer or rugby, but since it is the birthplace of judo, it has no comparison. However if judo is now so strong in Japan, it is also the result of tradition and teachers, right? I think it's great that the Japanese competitors are winning where the world has become so strong. It's really good, I salute this achievement.

Q-You said you were commended at the Canadian Olympic Committee Hall of Fame last year?

A-Yes. Thank you. However, as I talked about at the award ceremony, I couldn't do this without my wife's understanding, so I really appreciate my wife.



Q-Finally, do you have a message for young people who want to go abroad?

A-The time is different from when I came, so I think it is necessary to fix your goal first. And you need some ability. Also, study the gokyō and kata before leaving Japan. If you are thinking of teaching abroad as an expert, at a minimum, you should thoroughly study it. The problem of language is okay even after going to the site. It depends on your passion.



Hiroshi Nakamura

Born June 22, 1942 in Tokyo.

Started judo at Kōdōkan at the age of 12.

Chuo University → Hakuōdo → Ministry of Foreign Affairs Middle East Dispatch → Go to Canada. He has been the Canadian national coach for many years, including the Montreal Olympics Canada Judo Head Coach and the Athens Olympics.

Currently, at the Shidōkan Judo Club, we are training promising players under the age of 18.

Major students: Nicolas Gill (Silver Olympics silver medal, Barcelona Olympics bronze medal), Arthur Margelidon (men's 73kg world ranking 4th place *as of August 2020).

Country of residence: Canada (Montreal)

Current position: Representative of the Shidōkan Judo Club, Pan Am Judo Federation member, member of the National grading judging committee, Zenjuren International Committee overseas member.

Kōdōkan Judo 8th Dan.

Awards: 2010 Foreign Minister's Commendation, 2011 Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee, 2012 Order of Canada, 2019 Canadian Olympic Committee Hall of Fame, 2019 Rising Sun Award (Silver) from the Japanese Government.

(Free translation by Yves Landry. August 23rd, 2020.)