

Kohaku Shiai – Red and White Tournament



Above : Early scene of the Red and White Tournament at the Kodokan

The Kohaku Shiai, started in 1884, is now the world longest running competitive sporting event and predates the modern Olympics by 12 years.

The Japanese ideograph “Kohaku” may be directly translated as Red and White. The first Kohaku Shiai took place in the autumn, Kano later decided to make the Kohaku Shiai a twice-yearly event and this took place in the spring and autumn, this tradition still continues to this day.

At the original Kohaku Shiai’s, there were no weight restrictions or time limits. Competitors lined up from lightest to heaviest. This tournament was based on the “winner stays up” method. Marking this tournament would be two raised flags, one red, one white, at the Joseki, “place of honour” or the “upper seat” of the dojo.

In this method, the two smallest competitors would begin the tournament until one had won. Competitors would wear either a red belt or a white belt to clarify the side they were fighting from. This use of opposing colours, although not necessarily red and white, is still used in modern Judo competitions.

The winner would stay on the mat to fight the next biggest competitor and so on until he lost. The winner of each match, would again “stay up” until losing. The largest person, if he won his bout, would be permitted to fight back down the line up in a limited number of contests, usually about five. The person with the most wins of the tournament, would then be declared the overall winner.

This winner would then be presented with the red and white flags, representing the unity of opposing sides of equal ability of the tournament.

The Original Kodokan Judo Tournament Rules

Jigoro Kano had studied western wrestling rules and had practical experience from Jujutsu matches himself, so he developed a set of rules to guide the Red and White Tournament.



Above : Draft of the first Judo contest rules written by Jigoro Kano for the Red and White Tournament.

The original contests rules of Judo were probably closer to the original intent of the word Shiai, which now means match, tournament, or competition but once referred to the word Shi-ni-ai; meaning symbolically “to meet death itself”. There were no waza-ari, yuko or koka. You scored with a full ippon point using throws, chokes, strangles, holds or locks, whether they were toe, ankle, leg, finger, wrist or arm, that would, in an actual situation, completely overwhelm your opponent. The time limit was up to the judge, it was not uncommon for contests to last up to an hour. You usually continued until someone dropped from sheer exhaustion or the judge ended it, awarding the contest to the clear victor.

The following is the translation script of the original Kodokan Judo Rules for the Red and White Tournament. Note how the original rules are titled Kano Jiu Jitsu Contest Rules rather than using the term Judo. Jiu Jitsu is the English translation of Jujutsu and can be translated in other ways, such as Jiu Jiutsu, Jujitsu. The same book published in 1905 is also titled “The Complete Kano Jiu Jitsu (Judo)” with the term Judo bracketed.

Also note how vastly different and basic the rules are compared to today's modern Judo competition rules. Changes to these rules by the introduction of safety rules began in 1899. At first, Kodokan Judo was seen as a form of Jujutsu and contests were held in the older Jujutsu style.

Kano Jiu-Jitsu Contest Rules

The Original Kodokan Judo Tournament Rules

**H. Irving Hancock and Katsukuma Higashi, *The Complete Kano Jiu-Jitsu (Judo)*,
(New York: Dover Publications, 1905)**

1. Each contestant shall wear coat and belt.
2. A contestant shall be deemed to have been defeated when his two shoulders and hips shall have touched the floor, provided that said contestant shall have reached this position on the floor through having been thrown down.

3. A contestant shall be deemed to have been defeated when in such position on the floor, if said combatant cannot free himself from his opponent's arms within two seconds' time.

4. A contestant shall be deemed to have been defeated when from any cause or causes he may become unconscious. But it is not permitted to use serious tricks when the wrestling bout is between friends. Such tricks as kicking and the breaking of arms, legs, and neck are barred.

5. A combatant shall be deemed to have been defeated when he has been reduced to submission through the employment by his opponent of any hold or trick.

6. When a defeated combatant finds himself obliged to acknowledge his submission, he must pat or hit the floor or his antagonist's body, or somewhere, with his hand or foot. This patting with foot or hand is to be regarded as a token of surrender.

7. When a defeated combatant pats or hits the floor, or anywhere, in token of submission, the victor must at once let go his hold.

8. It is understood and agreed that the Jiu-Jitsu man, whether he fights a boxer or contests with a wrestler, shall be allowed to use in his defense any of the tricks that belong to the art of Jiu-Jitsu.

9. It is further understood and agreed that the Jiu-Jitsu man assumes no responsibility for any injury or injuries caused by any act or thing done during the contest, and that the Jiu-Jitsu man shall be held free and blameless for any such ill effect or injury that may be received during the contest.

10. Two competent witnesses representing each side, or four in all, shall see to it that these articles of agreement are properly drawn, signed, and witnessed, to the end that neither contestant or other participant in the match shall have cause for action on any ground or grounds resulting from any injury or injuries, or death, caused during the contest.

Note : part 10 ends the transcript.

Development of Kohaku Shiai and Dan Ranking

As participant numbers increased in the Kohaku Shiai and the increase in Dan ranks became more common, the introduction of divisions was created, based on people's ranks and abilities and later weights.

In the early formative years, the Kohaku Shiai was seen as the easiest way to get a rank promotion as it took place twice yearly. By winning with 5 ippons, one could receive a one Dan promotion on the same day. Likewise, if you could win enough contests, you could receive a double "Batsugan", an instant promotion, and or in exceptional cases, if the Dan ranks being fought and beaten, were of substantial higher rank, you could receive a triple Batsugan.

From an historical point of view, Tokio Hirano (5'5", 75 kg), obtained Godan (5th dan) at age 19, is considered perhaps the greatest Judo technician of all time. He is probably the best known Japanese Judoka in Europe. In 1952, Hirano went to teach Judo in Europe. Within six years, he had accumulated over 4,300 wins.

On October 19, 1941, Hirano participated in the Kohaku shiai. Hirano defeated a Kodokan record 14 opponents in succession by ippon. All of his opponents were 4th Dan, and were defeated with Ippon Seoinage, Juji Gatame, Kamishiho Gatame, Tai Otoshi, Ouchi Gari, Tsurikomi Goshi or Osoto Gari, his favourite throw. He fought to a draw with his 15th opponent. This record has never been surpassed by anyone before or since. For this he received his 5th Dan as "a present" !!!.

This twice yearly event is still considered special, as you get the promotion instantly on the day without any need for a theory examination, its therefore considered a unique opportunity for grading.

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