KODOKAN JUDO TRAINING 2024 REPORT

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Introduction

Purpose

This is my report on the training program I did at the **Kodokan Judo Institute**, or simply referred to as the Kodokan, in Tokyo, Japan during July and August 2024. The Kodokan is the birthplace of judo and its nerve centre. As a proud member of this organisation since 2009, and Trinidad and Tobago's highest ranking judoka (5th Dan or 5th Degree Black Belt), I felt obligated to renew my ties with the Kodokan and further my training at the most prestigious judo institute in the world. The overall objective of this self-improvement was to raise interest in judo and, subsequently, to grow participation. I would enhance my stature in judo with improved knowledge and skills gained at the Kodokan, and use these to raise judo standards in T&T by way of educational seminars, training programs and demonstrations, to name a few.

About me

I have been doing judo continuously for 39 years, spanning five (5) decades since my university days in the United States in 1986 to the present year, 2025. During that time, as a working man and father I represented my country at regional competition and simultaneously taught judo. My dedication to judo and the belief that it could transform lives led me to establish the Queen's Park Judo Club (QPJC), which has been the main platform that I used to teach over 2,500 students. The QPJC is arguably the "centre of excellence" of judo in T&T having the distinct honour of producing T&T's first, and only, male *and* female Olympians in judo, along with other regional medallists and national champions. Most of my pupils have gone on to become productive and prominent members of society, the achievement of which I am most proud. The next phase of my career is focused on introducing judo training to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS). It is a bold, but necessary, initiative that I hope to see come to fruition.

About the Kodokan training

For the entire period of 54 days that I stayed at the Kodokan I trained in the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of judo that included the following:–

1. A course in the katas (forms)
2. A course in the techniques
3. Daily Randori (free sparring) training
4. Mid-Summer training during the hottest period of the year in Japan
5. Grading Examination for Kodokan San-Dan (3rd Dan)

Every item above was organised and administered by experts in their respective fields, some of the best in the world.

Timing of this visit

As I already explained the purpose of the trip, it is significant to understand why I chose this time to go. Apart from the fact that I needed to update my judo skills and knowledge, which at the time was 12 years since my last visit to the Kodokan, the relatively weak Japanese Yen of 2023 and forecasts that it was not expected to appreciate against the US Dollar in 2024 prompted me to take the opportunity to help reduce the cost of, what would have otherwise been, a very expensive venture.

Pre-Travel Arrangements

Sponsorship/Donations

- Budget – I itemised every aspect I would encounter in Japan. My experience from the last 2 visits to the Kodokan, in 2009 and 2012 was a key element. It was over a decade since my last visit, so I scoured the internet to find updated prices on trusted sites. These helped me to prepare a detailed budget, which I used to seek sponsorship and donations. I requested funding from the Office of the Prime Minister, Sport and Culture Fund and they were gracious enough to donate TT$ 15,000 to this venture, notification of which I received on May 27, and which was 30% of total cost. I also received TT$ 6,000 in donations from family members, or 12% of total cost. The remaining 58% of cost was covered by me, of which TT$ 20,000 was via a loan from my bank and TT$ 9,000 from my savings. A Summary of Contributions and Expenses is on page 8.

Bookings

- Accommodation – My first task was to book accommodation at the Kodokan Hostel. I chose to stay at the Kodokan because it was affordable, convenient (at the training site) and secluded enough for me to focus on the purpose of my trip. The duration of my stay was dependent on the period of lowest judo activity for me in any given year (schools vacation) and the time I would need to get the most from this type of training (roughly 2 months). I was capably assisted by the friendly staff at the Kodokan and in April I booked my stay for 53 nights in a single room, from June 30 to August 22, 2024. The Kodokan requested advanced payment for accommodation 1 month before arrival, which I made on May 30.
- Air Travel – I opted for which I thought was the best route to Tokyo, via New York. Being a local carrier I chose Caribbean Airlines (CAL) to John F. Kennedy International Airport for the Port of Spain/New York flights, and Japan Airlines (JAL) to Haneda International Airport for the New York/Tokyo legs. The CAL flights were booked in February, while the JAL flights were booked in March. Payments were made at the time of bookings.

Visa

As a Trinidadian I required a visa to enter Japan. It was quick, easy and relatively inexpensive (TT$145) compared with the US visa, which I already had. The only challenge with the Japanese visa was a policy for it to be valid for 90 days from the date of approval in T&T, so one would not be able to get one too far in advance, and would have to time the approval for it to be valid while in Japan.

Continuity

As with any other profession I had to ensure that operations at the dojo continued during my 2-month absence. Although the volume of activities were reduced by two-thirds, there were still classes ongoing for the Teens/Adults group. Responsible members were assigned tasks, which were handled perfectly.

Travel to and from Japan

I left Port of Spain on June 29 and returned August 26. In all, there were 36 hours of flying, 53 nights in Tokyo, and 4 nights in New York where I spent time with family and friends on the return leg from New York to Port of Spain. I was very satisfied with both Caribbean Airlines (CAL) and Japan Airlines (JAL). Flight Itineraries for CAL and JAL are on page 8. The only issue I had was with CAL's hidden baggage fees, which can be easily overlooked during online bookings by inexperienced travellers like myself.

Days1 – 12, Jul. 1 – 12

This part of my stay was the "settling in" and "fact finding" stage characterized by observations, meetings, exchanges of ideas and decision making for the rest of my time at the Kodokan.

On July 1 I met Mr. Chikara KARIYA, Head of the Kodokan's International Department, who was the first person I contacted in December 2023 to start preparations for this venture. His help and counsel was extremely important to the success of my visit. Kariya-sensei confirmed that for me to have any discussion with the Tokyo Metropolitan Police was unlikely because they have not been collaborating with other external agencies, including the Kodokan, in recent times due to "security issues." In fact, there has been no cooperation between the judo section of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police and the Military and Police Commission of the International Judo Federation (IJF) in recent memory, despite overtures made by the latter. This meant that, for now, no contact with the Japanese Police Department to help further my agenda of introducing judo to the TTPS was possible. During our meeting I was formally introduced to Mr. Hirofumi OTSUJI, Deputy Director of the General Affairs Department who would become my main contact at the Kodokan for any information and advice I needed. Otsuji-sensei and Kariya-sensei were instrumental in my decision to train and be examined for a Kodokan grade which would become strategic in my plan to increase participation in judo in T&T, including introducing judo at the TTPS.

Although I had a budget and sufficient funds, I used the first 12 days to make definite plans on how to effectively spend my time in Japan so as not to waste a single day and make the most efficient use of the money I had. This included comparing food prices and deciding on whether to eat in or out, which would be the biggest expense I had control over and accounted for about 15% of my total expenditure.

My daily judo training began on Day 1 with randori in the Main Dojo. Kata training was also on every Tuesday and Thursday before Randori class. Randori is a special training in judo that can be best described as sparring. However, unlike sparring in boxing or practice matches in football, some consider randori to be the heart of judo training that binds the kata (choreographed forms of judo techniques) and shiai (competition), all 3 of which form the foundation of judo practice or how we engage with each other on the mats. These 2 classes (kata and randori) were the backbone of my training regimen and were to help me mentally, spiritually and physically for all that I was to encounter during my time in Japan and beyond.

Figure 1 Otsuji-sensei, 7th Dan, and Mark after Summer Course 1

Days 13 – 20, Jul. 13 – 20

Summer Course 1 - Kata

Summer Course 1 was the first of two international courses offered by the Kodokan annually. It was international because it was open to foreign, as well as Japanese, judoka of advanced levels. As explained earlier, the practice of kata is choreographed forms of judo techniques, standing and grappling, for self-defence and for physical and mental wellbeing. There were 8 katas studied, at least 1 every day and a day for participants to do an optional competitive demonstration. This was a practical course involving 6 hours of repetitive exercises in the movements of the kata with partners. It was well administered and I learned aspects of each kata that I could not have from a video or textbook. I received my certificate which was given to those that attended at least 7 of the 8 days. I did not do the kata competition because one needed a partner with whom one had to be working with regularly for at least one year.

Days 21 – 26, Jul. 21 – 26

Summer Course 2 - Waza, Jul. 22 – 26

Summer Course 2 immediately followed the kata course and was the last of the two international courses organised by the Kodokan for the year. This was a "waza" or techniques course open to all judoka of different skill levels and ages, although not tailored for beginners and children under the age of 14 years. Lecturers were a mix of Kodokan instructors and outside specialists, such as All Japan Judo and IJF Grand Slam champions and runners-up who showed their best techniques, which we, in turn, practised. As with the kata course, this was an intensive 6-hour training with a 2-hr lunch-break needed for sustenance and recovery. Again, this was a well organised course that gave me the knowledge to boost my technical repertoire necessary for all the skill levels and age groups that I teach. As with Summer Course 1, I received my completion certificate after having attended the entire Summer Course 2.

Examination for Kodokan Grade, Jul. 26

I applied to the Kodokan for a Dan Grade, and after receiving a letter of sanction from my federation, Judo Trinidad and Tobago (JudoTT) and reviewing my credentials, I was invited by the Kodokan to be examined for the rank of San-Dan (3rd Dan). As a non-Kodokan Dan Grade holder I was eligible to take the test for only 3rd Dan, even though I was 5th Dan in my country. This was a rule of the Kodokan as explained to me by Mr. Sanshiro YAMAMOTO, Deputy Director of the Kodokan Grading Department. Nevertheless, this was a very significant part of my growth as a judoka and one of the brightest highlights of my judo career. The examination took place soon after the closing ceremony for the Summer Course 2 on the afternoon of Friday July 26th in one of the auxiliary dojos below the Main Dojo. There were 5 examiners, and all were all high Dan Grade holders. There were 5 of us (all non-Japanese) going for Kodokan Dan grades and each of us had our uke (a partner to do the exam with). We were asked to demonstrate the fundamental and technical aspects of judo relevant to the grade each of us was being examined for, and assessed accordingly. At the end of the hour-long exam I was told by the panel that I had passed but that the Grading Department had to meet to make it official, which they did on July 30th.

Figure 2 Mark receiving his 3rd Dan diploma from Uemura-sensei, 9th Dan, and Kodokan President

Days 27 – 54, Jul. 27 – Aug. 22

Halfway Stage, Jul. 27 – 31

This period marked the halfway point of my trip and, therefore, was a time for me to rest after a month of constantly focused training during the 2 courses and preparations for my grading. Although randori and kata training continued normally from the week after, the pace was slowed to begin the next phase of this venture which allowed me more time to absorb the finer points of training. This was very significant because in the second phase I was building my repertoire as a judo teacher.

Shochu-Geiko (Mid-Summer Training), Aug. 1 – 10

Traditionally the Shochu-Geiko was considered a means of training in extreme heat for one to find a balance between one's desire for hard training and the conditions. It is the same concept as Kan-Geiko in January, the coldest period of the year. But unlike Kan-Geiko where the windows of the dojo are open to let the cold air in, the Shochu-Geiko changed recently and now the dojos in the Kodokan are fully air-conditioned in the summer. I was told by one of the instructors that this was required by the Japanese government to prevent the occurrence of heat-related emergencies in participants. Being accustomed to training in hot conditions, I was fine in 2009 when I last did Shochu-Geiko, so this time was quite cool for me. However, there still were complaints from some participants, most of whom were from colder climates. I completed all but 2 days of the training, missing 1 day due to a mild sickness on the 3rd and another day to watch the All Japan High School Championships at the Nippon Budokan on Sunday 4th.

All Japan High School Judo Championships, Aug. 4

Although the All Japan High School Judo Championships was not on my to-do list for this trip, being a teacher for 40+ students of high school age it was certainly an event that I was very glad to attend. These were the national championships for high school students and teams. My judo teacher, Mr. Kiyoshi SHIINA, was a national high school champion, hence my added interest. The Nippon Budokan was the site of the first judo competition at the Olympic Games in 1964, and then in Tokyo 2020, so the historical significance of the venue made my visit there irresistible. It was a massive event with thousands of spectators and participants combined making it the largest judo event I attended, probably even larger than the Rio Olympics in 2016. My main takeaway from this event was the universal attitude among the young judoka to give one's best and to not be afraid of losing. Fear of defeat is a common theme at many high level competitions for all age groups, including World Championships and Olympic Games. The preoccupation with not losing ultimately takes away from the standard of performance of any sport, so it

was impressive to see girls and boys doing judo as it was meant to be done, at 100% without fanfare in victory or show of disappointment after a loss, but just a bow to show respect for one's opponent.

Figure 3 All Japan High School Judo Championship, at Nippon Budokan

Asa-Geiko (Morning Training), Aug. 19 – 20

Asa-Geiko was scheduled for August 19 – 28, but I only attended the first 2 days of training because of preparations for my departure from Japan on Aug. 22. Asa-Geiko was a new feeling for many judoka who normally train during afternoon and evening periods. It was revived by Kodokan the year before in 2023 and not a regular fixture on the calendar. Nevertheless, the 2 days I spent were enjoyable and gave me a new perspective on sport training at 7AM, which is that it shocks the senses and gives one greater adaptability to perform when necessary. Taking one out of one's comfort zone is a common theme of these "specialty trainings" – Kan-Geiko, Shochu-Geiko and Asa-Geiko. And just like the others, Asa-Geiko was mostly judo exercises followed by randori practice, in this case for 1 hour (7:15-8:15) every morning.

Departure from Japan, Aug. 22

I retraced my steps to leave the Kodokan by train to Haneda International Airport where I boarded my flight to JFK International Airport, New York City. 13 hours later I was in New York and my tour of Japan was officially over.

Benefits of the Kodokan Training

Training the trainer always has positive outcomes, and there are two types of benefits that I gained from this venture. The first set are immediate and where I will have a greater influence on.

1. I pass on the knowledge gained from my training to those in my immediate care – members of the Queen's Park Judo Club (QPJC)
2. I am available to the National Sporting Organisation (NSO) to help their instructors/coaches
3. I have the impetus to offer training seminars/workshops
4. I have greater motivation to re-approach the TTPS to introduce judo training to their officers

The other is longer term and will include, but not limited to, the actions of those that benefit from my short-term work.

1. The better quality of judo training results in improved results in the holistic development of the individual

   - Physically – judo includes movements that are dynamic when standing (throwing) or on the ground (grappling) and uses all parts of the body. As a sport, speed, flexibility, strength and coordination are integral in its practice

   - Mentally – judo is an easy sport to understand but difficult to master. This allows the individual to focus on attaining goals and gain a sense of accomplishment from the challenging nature of the activity. It is a discipline that requires acceptance, responsibility and awareness

   - Spiritually – judo's ideals are epitomised in higher of its two principles: *"Mutual Welfare and Benefit for All"*. This suggests that I grow only when you grow; we need each other to get better and there is synergy in our interactions that benefit all of us. This principle reminds us that there is something greater than us, it grounds us and gives us purpose in our actions.
2. The NSO can improve their technical knowledge that will ultimately help their member clubs and ultimately, their competitive athletes. This can be a catalyst for yielding positive results in local, regional and international competitions
3. There is no greater impact on the perception and, ultimately, the relationship between the police and communities when **police officers can teach judo to young and vulnerable youth**. This will mean that officers must be properly exposed to judo and trained, which will take at least 5 years from inception. The shorter term impact on officers can be found in #1, and the obvious benefit of capably and safely apprehending suspects without excessive and sometimes lethal force.

I have already started the work with roughly 70 students of the QPJC under my care. I feel the difference in my lessons and see the changes in the judoka, more than three-quarters of which are children 4 to 16 years old. I was also instrumental in the Judo/Kendo public display at the Queen's Hall in September 2024, for the Together 2024 festival, put on by the Embassy of Japan to commemorate 60 years of diplomatic relations between Japan and T&T. Some of the techniques displayed were from my training in Japan. Although this has not resulted in any significant increase in membership at the QPJC, it showed that we have a story to tell that the public found interesting, as evidenced by the warm reception we received from the audience. It also showed that we can collaborate effectively with the Embassy of Japan in telling that story. A further testament to the success of the Together 2024 demonstration is another request from the Embassy of Japan for us to collaborate once again for a demonstration at Asian Nights 2 at the T&T National Library (NALIS) on May 14, 2025, albeit on a much smaller scale. The interest is evident.

Closing Views of the Kodokan Training

I am always grateful for the opportunity to lift my standard of judo, whether it is at the Kodokan in Japan, in a dojo on the basement floor of a building in Cuba, or at the QPJC. Anywhere in the world that offers me a window to learn so that I can pass on to others and watch them grow as I have, is my passion. Nevertheless, this stint at the Kodokan was by far the most important to me over my 39-year judo career, one which I admit I am still trying to process because of the vast and profound nature of the experience. This was not a one-way street, I was fortunate to have people there learn from me because of my background. The most significant aspect of this visit, however, does not lie in the breadth and depth of our exchanges during that time. It lies in the broader spirit of collaboration and mutual benefit for everyone involved, and what this signifies – connectivity, working together to grow, and interdependence. At a time when we see people are becoming more hardened with thoughts of isolationism, this venture was a manifestation of the power of the exchange of ideas. This is a distinctive characteristic of the judo

movement worldwide, which is central to one of the two the main principles of judo, jita-kyōei (mutual benefit for all). The spirit of mutual welfare and cooperation will remain at my core.

Summary of Contributions and Expenses

	ESTIMATED AND ACTUAL				
	KODOKAN TRAINING COSTS	ESTIMATED		INCURRED	
	June 29 - August 26, 2024	US$1.00 = TT$6.80		US$1.00 = TT$6.80	
	DESCRIPTION	USD	TTD	USD	TTD
1	AIRFARE	3,182.90	21,643.72	3,286.75	22,349.90
2	ACCOMMODATION	2,320.00	15,776.00	2,289.99	15,571.93
3	FOOD & DRINK	1,054.54	7,170.87	790.75	5,377.10
4	LOCAL TRANSPORT	69.64	473.55	26.27	178.64
5	LAUNDRY	63.67	432.96	36.09	245.41
6	PERSONAL ITEMS, MEDICAL	-	-	95.73	650.96
7	ENTERTAINMENT	-	-	101.71	691.63
8	KODOKAN SUMMER COURSE FEE	58.36	396.85	147.98	1,006.26
9	KODOKAN MEMBERSHIP & TRAINING FEES	126.01	856.87	86.24	586.43
10	JUDO UNIFORM	288.18	1,959.62	225.54	1,533.67
11	GRADING FEES	-	-	237.63	1,615.88
12	MISCELLANEOUS	-	-	68.30	464.44
	GRAND TOTAL	**7,163.30**	**48,710.44**	**7,392.98**	**50,272.26**
	DONATIONS/CONTRIBUTIONS	PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF INCURRED COSTS		AMOUNT OF CONTRIBUTIONS	
				USD	TTD
1	SPORT & CULTURE FUND	29.84%		2,205.88	15,000.00
2	FAMILY	11.94%		882.35	6,000.00
3	M. LITTREAN	58.23%		4,304.74	29,272.26
	TOTAL	**100.00%**		**7,392.98**	**50,272.26**
	TRANSACTION TYPE	NUMBER OF TRANSACTIONS	PRECENTAGE OF TRANSACTIONS	CURRENCY PAYMENTS MADE	
				IN USD	IN TTD
	CREDIT CARD	63	32%	6,883.18	0
	CASH	133	68%	488.48	145.00
	TOTAL	**196**	**100%**	**7,371.66**	**145.00**

Flight Itineraries

Flight 1 – Caribbean Airlines BW 520

Saturday, June 29, 2024 Departure:	12:10 AM	Piarco Intl, Port of Spain
Saturday, June 29, 2024 Arrival:	07:30 AM	John F. Kennedy Intl, New York

Flight 2 – Japan Airlines JL5

Saturday, June 29, 2024 Departure:	13:30 PM	John F. Kennedy Intl, New York
Sunday, June 30, 2024 Arrival:	16:35 PM	Haneda Intl, Tokyo

Flight 3 – Japan Airlines JL4

Thursday, August 22, 2024 Departure:	18:30 PM	Haneda Intl, Tokyo
Thursday, August 22, 2024 Arrival:	18:30 PM	John F. Kennedy Intl, New York

Flight 4 – Caribbean Airlines BW 521

Monday, August 26, 2024 Departure:	07:30 AM	John F. Kennedy Intl, New York
Monday, August 26, 2024 Arrival:	12:30 PM	Piarco Intl, Port of Spain

*****END*****