

**The Trinidad and Tobago Judo Promotion Project Abstract**  
**August 11-29, 2023**

The Martial Art and Olympic Sport of Judo has had a tremendous journey from its modest beginnings on the compound of a Buddhist temple in 1882 Tokyo. Its founder, Dr Jigoro KANO probably had no idea that it would take a life of its own to become one of the world's most recognisable fighting forms and a way of life for millions. Unfortunately, the English-speaking Caribbean is one of the regions where Judo never took off. Despite having World and Olympic Champions from the islands of Cuba and Guadeloupe, with the former in particular having raised them from childhood and trained them to the heights of competitive judo, the sport still struggles in the English-speaking Caribbean region as a unique activity that forges discipline, builds character (grit) and changes deviant behaviour to calmer, more thoughtful responses to volatile interpersonal conflicts. Below is how I hope we can help judo become more a part of the lives of the people in T&T and possibly the Anglophone Caribbean.

#### INSTITUTIONALIZATION

I have been on the forefront of many attempts to make judo more visible in T&T, including doing countless demonstrations and interviews on print and electronic media for almost as long as I've been a judo teacher, 31 years. Since 2008 I've been heavily invested in two secondary schools where I teach judo as an after-school activity to boys and girls. These have yielded some scattered results and although my judo colleagues try to do the same at other schools, we might all agree that there hasn't been the progress we had hoped for. I didn't give a reason for *why* "Judo never took off." The ideas on this are varied and some are quite plausible. One noteworthy contribution to this enigma is that judo is not attractive enough to Caribbean people – it does not involve striking and the flashiness of other Martial Arts found in the movies of pop-culture and now on sports channels. Although I would dare to imagine that if judo were half as popular in Trinidad as it is in Cuba or the French West Indies we would be in a much better place. Culturally we are not vastly different from our Spanish and French speaking brothers and sisters.

My belief is that the difference can be found in the ***Institutionalization of judo*** in the Spanish and French speaking islands. In Cuba, as part of the Cuban Revolution, judo was one of many sports used by the government to foster discipline and physical fitness among the people and it found favour with the population. We all know how centralized the planning of offering sports in Cuba is. There are many sports schools in different regions on the island and judo is among the sports taught at these schools. Cuba has a rich tradition of physical education and judo offered many pathways to teachers, coaches and athletes to enhance their lives with their work in judo. Despite all of the ills of colonialism, in Guadeloupe and Martinique the people there benefitted from the policies of their government to offer judo to anyone who was interested at clubs that were systematically funded by their local authorities. It was always easy to find a judo club in France where judo is one of the most popular sports with around 600,000 registered members. This enthusiasm in France trickled down to its overseas colonies where many of their world and Olympic champions were first exposed to the sport.

We are not a developed nation with a high enough standard of living to have the luxury of government spending on programs for judo in schools and clubs. We are not a country like Japan where judo is a part of their national identity. For these reasons I strongly believe that the only way to make judo a mainstream sport is to get it in an institution where it is needed – the T&T Police Service (TTPS).

It is not a secret that the officers of the TTPS have difficulty in carrying out arrests at times, being unable to restrain excitable individuals and having these scenes spread on social media. Although these instances might represent a small fraction of arrests they do give the perception that officers

are not fully equipped to handle these volatile situations, and sometimes shouts of “police brutality” seriously undermine the ability of the police to have good relations with the communities in which they operate. Being able to effectively, quickly and safely execute arrests is something judo can help the police with. Judo for police is used in departments all over the world and there is no reason it should not be adopted here. This is easy to justify, but there is a broader use for judo in the TTPS. In 2012 I was invited by the Embassy of Japan to take part in a program offered by the Japan Foundation, a non-profit organisation dedicated to spreading Japanese language and culture around the world. During this visit I learned how judo was administered in schools, at clubs, at their national Olympic training site and at the Tokyo Metropolitan Police. It was a life-changing moment for me to see police officers who were all highly qualified judo teachers give judo lessons to children from the community at the police station. The officers were well respected and admired by their students as well as the parents who were there to watch the training. Needless to say that this admiration transcended to outside the police station and into the community where there was and still is a good relationship between the police and residents. To me this is the highest ideal of judo – the bringing together of people through sport to grow their minds, bodies and spirit to enhance society. This was what the police were doing in Tokyo that day. I immediately made the connection with our police service that did not (and still doesn't) have that level of respect and trust with the people here. This is how judo can help to reduce the levels of mistrust and some anger that exist between the police and communities alongside the great work already being done by Police Youth Clubs. I already described this as a game changer in mitigating the spread of violence at the source through Community Policing.

#### WE NEED HELP

My first and obvious choice to help me with judo training for the police was the Embassy of Japan. They had a vested interest in making judo available to police around the world because in Japan is where the concept of judo for police began in the late 1800s. In fact it was through the efforts of then Ambassador Mr. Tatsuo HIRAYAMA that I was able to get an audience with the Commissioner of Police at the time, Mr. Gary GRIFFITH who subsequently agreed to introduce judo training to recruits. Even with the change of Ambassadors in 2022 the current Ambassador, His Excellency Yutaka MATSUBARA continues to support the project and has also convinced the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, Ms. Ute KÖNIG to come on board and endorse the project. Furthermore, on the decisive action of the current Commissioner of Police, Ms. Erla HAREWOOD-CHRISTOPHER, Ambassador Matsubara was able to gain an audience with the Provost of the TTPS Police Academy Dr. Simon ALEXIS who has now thrown his support behind introducing judo training.

Although I have 31 years of judo teaching experience, I have no background in teaching judo to the police, the focus of this project. I needed the expertise of someone who had international acclaim and was vastly experienced in this field. I could have only found that person at the largest and most prominent judo organisation in the world, the International Judo Federation (IJF), the world's governing body for judo. That person was Mr Johannes DAXBACHER, head of the police section of the IJF's Military and Police Commission in late 2019. We shared the same judo values and vision of what judo can do for police – smarter conflict resolution, a reduction of police violence and excessive use of force, better community relations, and physically and mentally healthier officers. His passion for judo and its use as a tool to uplift people and their societies has taken him to challenging terrain in places like Myanmar, Ethiopia, Lesotho and South Africa where he and his wife Regina have spread these judo values and even helped to create a national judo federation, as was the case in Ethiopia recently. He and his wife who are German have received numerous awards, including from the German Government. So impressive was his resume that the TTPS wanted to engage Mr. Daxbacher in 2021 to help me implement judo training at the TTPS, to which he agreed. However, COVID restrictions and change of Commissioners have stymied us moving forward up until now.

## THE EXPERTS ARE ON THEIR WAY

Even before the TTPS requested his expertise in April 2021, Johannes and I have been working closely together to create a framework to introduce judo there. With his help I produced a document detailing this framework, a part of which I have shared with the Police Academy subsequent to our meeting 2 weeks ago on July 5. The project to implement this framework comes in two (2) phases:-

**Phase 1** – A visit from the experts at the IJF Military and Police Commission (Regina and Johannes Daxbacher) who will come to Trinidad from August 11 to 29, 2023 to carry out training for the trainers in the fields of judo, law enforcement, education and sport. The 2 experts will also convene workshops with these same groups so that there is a better understanding of how judo training and its values can be utilized to benefit everyone with maximum value, not just for judoka, but for all sports and people from all walks of life. An added feature to this is the issue of Gender Equality and the rights of women and girls to participate in ALL aspects of society, including the male-dominated realm of Martial Arts, without bias and abuse. Regina is the expert in this field and will be conducting workshops solely for women and girls to grapple with these challenges. The Embassy of Japan are expected to use their networking capacity with the Ministries of National Security, Education, Sport and Community Development and the Office of the Prime Minister – Gender and Child Affairs to gain their support and to send the relevant people to these events. I and the resources I have at my organisation, the Queen’s Park Judo Club (QPJC) will gain the support of other bodies for the promotion of judo locally and possibly the wider Caribbean. They include the Trinidad and Tobago Olympic Committee (TOC) and Judo Trinidad and Tobago (JudoTT). Also the QPJC will see about other aspects of the visit including ground transport, training, workshops, media coverage and recording/archiving the visit. It is important to note that the German Judo Federation has already paid for the airfare of the Daxbachers and they are coming here at no cost to the taxpayers of T&T.

**Phase 2** – This is the actual teaching of judo at the TTPS. This will be done in two (2) parts:-

1. Teaching recruits at the Police Academy for the duration of their training (5-6 months) where they will receive basic judo training up to the level of Yellow Belt or 5<sup>th</sup> Kyu.
2. Continuous access to judo training for those who have already received basic training. It makes no sense to be trained to do something if you do not continuously use it and make it a part of your life. This is the beauty of judo training as opposed to self-defence training where the former is enjoyable enough and safe enough for people to *want* to continue with it. Although further discussions will be held regarding this part, we have ideas of how this can be done – in the short term this can be in the form of utilizing existing judo clubs in T&T, and in the longer term the police sports clubs can, and should, facilitate their own judo training as required for their work, health, recreation and competition.

## CONCLUSION

This is going to be an historic moment for judo and for sport in T&T. We are showing how sport can change lives for the better by having institutions like the TTPS invested in it. Through judo, the TTPS enhance the skills of their officers, who in turn protect and serve with pride and compassion. This is reciprocated by more trusting communities that the police need to do their jobs well. It’s the synergy that is embodied in judo’s highest ideal and the credo of all judoka, ***Mutual Benefit for Self and Others***. In the past we tried to do this on our own, and I believe that was our mistake. We need to work with other organisations, agencies and people, not just locally but from foreign countries as well, as we have done in collaborating with the Embassies of Japan and Germany, the IJF and our experts, Regina and Johannes Daxbacher. With sport, together we can do great things.

**MARK LITTREAN**

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