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The History of Judo

Taken with permission from Matsumoto, D. (1996) An Introduction to Kodokan Judo: History and Philosophy. Tokyo: Hon-no-Tomosha.

To attain a full understanding of the origin of Judo you must trace its origins through its predecessor, jujitsu. In early prehistoric Japan, primitive peoples developed techniques for throwing, striking, and grappling with other humans to assure success in contests of strength and in hunting. During the middle ages (1392 - 1582 A. D.) social stability was virtually non-existent and warlords ruled. In turn, samurai and the citizenry continued to study martial arts out of necessity. Jujitsu was among the arts studied.

The Takeuchi - style of jujitsu, under Hisamori Takeuchi, is the oldest known form of jujitsu. This particular school specialized in immobilizing the aggressor. Around 1598 other styles became popular among the samurai warriors. About 1650 in the Wakayama Prefecture, Jushin Sekiguchi taught what became known as yawara, and developed the principles of break falls (ukemi). Free-fighting (randori) was introduced in the 17th century. During this time jujitsu was still identified primarily as a battlefield art.

The Edo period (1604-1867) was a peaceful time; however, following the adage "living in peace, but remembering war," the practice of jujitsu continued to spread. The study of classic literature (kokugaku) began to play a large role in society, and this carried over into the training halls (dojos). Consequently these dojos were not only places to refine the physical skills needed to be a good martial arts artist, but they taught mental and spiritual aspects as well. Even though each school had a separate physical regimen, they all followed the ethical code of the samurai warrior, Bushido. This manifested itself in the master-servant relationship between a teacher and his students.

By the end of the Edo period over 160 jujitsu schools thrived, including the Kito-style (which started in 1795). The Kito-style and kyushin-style were known for, and specialized in free-fighting (randori). The Yoshin-style and Tenjin Shinyo-style were known for their joint bending techniques (kansetsu-waza), striking techniques (atemi-waza) and forms prearranged (kata).

Professor Jigoro Kano was born in the City of Kobe on October 28th, 1860 and in his youth had a superlative record. Compared to his peers he had a weak body and he was small. He always wished to make his body healthy and become a strong person.

In 1870, his mother died, a young ten year old and his father, who became an officer of the Meiji Government, Jigoro Kano arrived in Tokyo from Hyogo Prefecture to continue his education. Kano studied jujitsu under Masatomo Iso and Hachinosuke Fukuda of the Shinyo-style dojo; where he learned kata (forms) and randori (free-fighting). Later, receiving guidance from Tsunetoshi Ihekubo of the Kito-style school, he learned joint manipulations, striking, and grappling. Kano also studied the teaching scrolls of various other styles to further his knowledge and understanding of the arts. Combining these styles, Kano selected only the best and most effective techniques, while eliminating the dangerous and potentially harmful ones; he formed his own art which he dubbed "Judo". In 1882 he accepted a teaching position at

