JUDO LEGENDS LOSE FROM OUTSIDERS

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Abstract

Introduction. Since Judo first showed up in the Olympic Arena (Tokyo, 1964) we have observed many top-ranked Judokas losing from athletes classified as “Outsiders”. How exactly did these famous athletes lose to someone who is not considered to be at the same level as them? Since there are no published studies on the subject, we planned a study whose aim was to discover the causes of “Judo legends” defeats against “outsiders” in Olympic Games – 2016. *Methodology.* The methods of the study were: analysis of match documentation in all 7 Olympics’ Men categories and analysis of video records of judo matches. As an “outsider” we classified a Judoka who is: 1. Not in the top 8 of the World Ranking list before the Olympic Games (WRLBOG), but ends up being in the top 7 Olympic athletes; 2. At least 10 positions below (in WRLBOG) the Judoka with whom he competed. 3. Not a former Olympic champion. All 256 Judo matches of men during the OG-2016 were analyzed; 24 of them met all of these 3 criteria and were submitted for further analysis by observational criteria. *Results and discussion.* Three main reasons for defeat of famous Judokas were identified: 1. The “outsider” is using an unorthodox technique or grip which cannot be classified as traditional, i.e., he is performing a movement a little bit different from the traditional or known way so far. 2. The “Judo legend” is doing a “fatal mistake”. 3. The “Outsider” is following a tactical strategy leading to penalizing the opponent. Ideas similar to our finding were discussed by Sterkovicz & Maslej (1999) in a study on Polish Judokas and Sacripanti (2014) in his biomechanical analysis of Judo throws. Based on the results of our study, coaches can establish new training methodologies for enhanced effectiveness against superior opponents.

Key words: Judo, victory, defeat, causes, superior opponent

Introduction

Judo is explained best by Angus (2006) as a “multi-faceted sport” thus meaning there are many aspects to it. Angus (2006) further states that the sport “requires the fast hands of a boxer for obtaining a grip, the explosive power of an Olympic lifter for executing a throw, and the agility of a gymnast for maneuvering into and out of various attacking situations”.

Since Tokyo Olympics in 1964 when Judo first showed up in the Olympic arena we have seen many Judo legends and top rank Judokas in World & Continental Championships and in the Olympics, who lost. How exactly did these famous athletes lose the game? What had happened in these cases besides physical trauma or physical fatigue from previous matches?

Can we locate some of the factors which actually define who will win and who will lose? Why is it that there are so many cases reported in which great and famous Judokas lose by someone who is not considered to be at the same level with them? How common is that actually? Is it possible to explain these significant “surprises” that happen in Judo? Is it a matter of technique, strategy/philosophy or physical abilities? Is it the combination of all the above? What are the possible explanations?

we designed a specific study focused on the Judo Olympic Championship–2016 which aim was to identify the main causes of “Judo legends” defeats against “outsiders”.

Judo is a very philosophical and individual discipline which is an Olympic sport and a martial art at the same time. We should consider seriously the fact that we are trying to find an explanation which may not cover all possible subjects (top judo athletes) but it’s the best-case scenario according to the latest standards for scientific research.

Methodology

In order for us to be more scientifically correct, we decided that we should set up our own criteria and define who is considered to be an “Outsider” and after that move on to the analysis of match documentation and video.

As an “outsider” we classified a Judoka who is:

1. Not in the top 8 of the World Ranking List before Olympic Games (WRLBOG), but ends up being amongst the top eight Olympic judokas ranked 1-7 place (because the Repechage system).
2. At least 10 positions below (in WRLBOG) the Judoka with whom he competed
3. Not a former Olympic medalist.

Since there are no published studies on the subject, All 256 Judo matches of men during the Rio Olym-

pic Games in 2016 were analyzed. Out of 256, the phenomenon of “outsiders” winning against judo legends” was identified in 24 matches which were found to match exactly the above 3 criteria and were submitted for further analysis mostly based on observational criteria. 13 videos from the 24 matches were found online and analyzed in depth. For the rest 11 matches data about scores and information about the athletes was collected online from the site of IJF - Live judo results of Rio 2016 Olympic Games (2016), Judo Inside portal (2017) and World Judo Today (2016).

Results and discussion

The average difference between the ranks in WRLBOG of the studied Judokas was 20 places (Minimum 10 – between Iliadis and Cheng, and Maximum 43 - between Mateo and Olenic). All Judo categories were represented in our study.

The hypothesized influence of younger age did not help outsiders because the average difference between the ages of “Outsiders” and “Legends” was 0.04 (ranging between -10 (Van Tichelt and An) and +7 (Bouchard and Puliaev). We have seen that it is possible to win an Olympic medal at 32 years old (Van Tichelt) and become Olympic Champion at 30 years old (Mudranov), playing against opponents who were placed in WRLBOG quite higher than them.

The most important result of our video analysis was the high frequency of so called “Unorthodox techniques”. Under this term we integrate the terms “Innovative Throws” and “Chaotic Throws”, introduced by Sacripanti (2014): “Innovative Throws” are all throwing techniques that keep alive the formal aspect of Classic Judo throws, and differ in terms of grips and direction of applied forces only” (Sacripanti, 2014, p.14); “Chaotic Throws” are characterized by the application of different grips positions which apply force in different (nontraditional) directions, while simultaneously applying stopping points in non-classical position, or utilizing “no rational” shortening trajectories (longer than the usual) between athletes” (Sacripanti, 2014, p. 15). Or, as he noted, “the “Innovative throws” are “variations (henka) of classical Kodokan throwing techniques”, while “Chaotic throws” are “non-classic” solutions applied in competition and which are different from “Innovative”(henka) throws” (p. 14).

In 9 (69.2%) out of the 13 matches which were video analyzed, it was found that the “Outsider” Judoka used an “unorthodox”, or non-traditional technique, - which allowed him to win against the “Judo legend” (Table 1). This means that the “Outsider” Judoka didn’t use Japanese traditional grip (Tsurite - Hikite) or during the execution he used a slightly different kind of motion/variation, either in Kuzushi (breaking of balance), Tsukuri (entering in the technique) or in the Kake (throwing) phase. In some cases, it’s even a combination of unorthodox gripping (Kumikata) and unorthodox/variety movements. Of course, the application of these surprising techniques is pre-planned and well-practiced during the “Outsiders” preparation. Sacripanti (2010) states that “The most intriguing part of the fight preparation is the research of new techniques and tricks. This part is very often developed taking in account other fields or other type of wrestling. Normally also a simple variation of the throwing technique often can be considered as a new technique but the variation biomechanically speaking may require different direction of force and/or body placement” (Sacripanti, 2010, p. 210).

Out of the 13 matches which were video analyzed, in 7 of them (53.8%) we noticed that the “Legend” has done a fatal mistake while leading his opponent in scoring (Table 1). In some cases, we are talking about counter attacks which were unexpected by the “Legend” Judoka but were very well executed by the “Outsider”. What happens is that the “Legend” Judoka goes into attack and at the same time he is demolished by the counter-attack (Gaeshi-Waza) of his opponent. Two such examples were demonstrated both in the matches of Bouchard Antoine (CAN) vs Davaadorj Tumurkhuleg (MGL) and Marconcini Matteo (ITA) vs Ivanov Ivaylo (BUL). In both matches the Judo “Legend” is attacking with a Daki Kosoto gake and he is counter attacked with an “Unorthodox” (as far as it concerns the grip) Ouchi gari. In other cases, a fatal mistake may be described as a wrong reaction. For this, a very good example is the athlete Cheng Xunzhao (CHN) in -90kg. When watched in slow motion, Cheng pulls his opponents a little bit forward so that his opponent resists backwards and after that he executes a throw in that direction. Cheng did this trick 4 times (using an “Unorthodox” Osoto Gari in the direction where his opponent is resisting) in the last Olympics. This resistance may be considered as a fatal mistake of the “Legend”. He doesn’t know what

Table 1. Successful tactical solutions of “outsiders”.

Full name of the outsider Judoka	Full name of the legend Judoka	Classification of the technique used to win (Outsider)	«Legend» Judoka has done a fatal mistake	Strategy of “Outsider” leading to penalizing the opponent
BASILE, Fabio - Italy	AN Baul - Korea	Unorthodox Kata Guruma	-	-
MUDRANOV, Beslan - Russia	SMETOV Yeldos - Kazakhstan	-	Fatal mistake	-
BOUCHARD Antoine - Canada	DAVAADORJ Tumurkhuleg - Mongolia	Unorthodox Ouchi Gari	Fatal mistake (Kosoto Gake)	-
VAN TICHELT, Dirk - Belgium	AN Changrim - Korea	Unorthodox Counter - Technique	-	-
MARCONCINI, Matteo - Italy	IVANOV Ivaylo - Bulgaria	Unorthodox Ouchi gari	Fatal Mistake (Kosoto Gake)	-
MARCONCINI, Matteo - Italy	BOTTIEAU Joachim - Belgium	-	-	YES
CHENG, Xunzhao - China	ILIADIS, Ilias - Greece	Unorthodox left Osoto gari with right Kumikata	Fatal Mistake	-
CHENG, Xunzhao - China	TOTH, Krisztian - Hungary	Unorthodox left Osoto gari with right Kumikata	Fatal Mistake	-
CHENG, Xunzhao - China	NYMAN, Marcus - Sweden	Unorthodox left diagonal Osoto gari with right Kumikata	Fatal Mistake	-
CHENG, Xunzhao - China	LKHAGVASUREN, Otgonbaatar - Mongolia	Juji Gatame and unorthodox reverse from the Ippon Seoi Nage	Fatal Mistake (Drop Seoi Nage)	-
MEHDIYEV, Mammadali - Azerbaijan	DENISOV, Kirill - Russia	Unorthodox - Ni Dan Kosoto gake	-	YES

is going to happen and that is why he is attacking in a “wrong” way or he is reacting to a motion not the way he should have, which leads to his defeat. Of course, in Cheng’s situation someone could say that the coaches’ scouting is responsible for the defeat of their athletes. They had the opportunity to see what happened in previous matches but they didn’t do anything to prevent it; everyone except the Japanese athlete who changed his Kumikata and stance in order not to let Cheng use the same technique against him.

In 2 matches (15.4%) out of the 13 matches video analyzed we can clearly observe that the “Outsider” is following a tactical strategy leading to penalizing his opponent. As stated by Sacripanti, “Judo competition is a fight under referee regulations, between two athletes who aim a same goal: to grasp the victory” (Sacripanti, 2010, p. 216). So, by tactical strategy leading to penalizing the opponent we mean that the “Outsider” is using, in a sort of way, the rules in order to penalize the opponent. We know that Judokas are penalized with shido if they don’t attack, so the “Outsider” is attacking continuously all the time thus not giving the opportunity to his opponent to attack. Also, shido may be given to a Judoka during the fight if he steps out of the mat. The “Outsider” is using this second rule in his benefit, he sometimes leads the fight just where the

mat (tatami) ends and tries to take out his opponent without throwing him or in some cases even without pushing him, just leading him where he wants (everything for the shido).

According to our video analysis, in 8 out of 13 matches (61.5%) the outsiders who won were left handed. The advantage of left-handed athletes was well recognized in sport sciences (Hagemann, 2009; Loffing, Hagemann, 2016; Mikheev et al., 2002; Ziyagil et al., 2010), so it is not a new finding. It always helps if you are left-handed and your opponent has not practiced enough against left-handed athletes.

Fig.1. Frequency of the successful tactical solutions of Outsiders.

The general conclusion from our analysis is that in the studied matches we can observe carefully

prepared and well-practiced combinations of: development of surprising unorthodox techniques; related to them feints provoking “fatal mistakes” of estimation and decision; and strategy leading to penalizing the opponent (Table 1, Fig. 1). The observation and scouting during the current competition (in this study: Olympic Judo tournament) is of utmost importance as most of these unorthodox techniques and feints are prepared especially for this competition and kept in secret before that.

Even though no similar researches were found in scientific literature on judo, there are some ideas about techniques and attacks which are discussed by Sterkowicz & Maslej (1999) in a study on Polish Judokas. They noted that “Techniques counted as “OTHER” are 100% effective. These are techniques that do not belong to the traditional GO-KYO classification system. Despite low overall frequency of attempts (6 attacks out of 798 attempts, i.e. less than 1%) each resulted in received points. Without a doubt this is related with lack of developed counter measures against unorthodox moves.” (Sterkowicz & Maslej, 1999; citation according the English translation of the article, p. 3). Sacripanti (2010) also mentioned that “unorthodox” or “unspecified techniques”, sometimes take place and have a great results that no one expects.

Both studies underline the main factor influencing the high effectiveness of unorthodox throws – the surprise resulting by the unpreparedness of the Judoka. Thus the solution for the prevention of the problem and preparation of our Judoka is the intellectual preparation of both athletes and coaches.

As the Olympic champion Ilias Iliadis (2016) stated in his interview in Rio, just after the end of the Olympics, “In Judo everything can happen”. So, as he said, Judo is a sport in which you cannot define who the winner will be, and this is why it is so attractive.

Conclusion

In our study we found that people defined as “Outsiders” can stand up and win against famous athletes which we call “Legends”. We discovered 3 main different reasons for this phenomenon: development of surprising unorthodox techniques; related to them feints provoking “fatal mistakes” of estimation and decision; and strategy leading to penalizing the opponent. There is a lot to be investi-

gated furthermore in order to complete the picture of the “Outsiders” and their techniques and strategies against stronger or higher-level opponents.

Here we must state that the findings of our research could be useful to coaches who strive to develop a methodology for the development of “unorthodox” techniques for their athletes or even competition strategies for victories against stronger or higher-level opponents. Also, these findings should encourage athletes to practice better and smarter, because in Judo, as proven, everything can happen. As stated by Syd Hoare (2006) “One should regard champions or those with a reputation as a challenge. So, what if they have won a gold medal – let’s see if you cannot take them down”.

The development of methodological strategies, techniques and tricks against superior opponents will probably change the way of thinking of the coaches and also sport specialists as a whole and, hopefully, open a new era in Judo.

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