

 Login



Judo master teaches Georgetown the gentle way



JAN 29, 2009



BY TIM SHINE

IN SPORTS.

World class judo is probably not commonly associated with Yates Field House in the minds of most Georgetown students. But every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday night, Georgetown's aspiring judokas, or judo experts, train under the watchful tutelage of James Takemori.

Takemori, affectionately known to his pupils as Jimmy, is an institution in the

Recent Comments

Palestinians Exist on Transcending Battle Lines: Taking Stock of Israel's Narrative

viani on Portrait of a Basic Hoya

KSA on Foreign Service grad stats only half the picture

Latest congressional spending bill blocks D.C. marijuana legalization | kentuckyproudchicken on GU IMPROV: A light in the darkness

Critical Voices: Punch Brothers,

world of judo. He first began practicing judo in 1937 in Fresno, California, and has been an instructor in the D.C. area for over 50 years. He has coached both the men's and women's U.S. national teams. And now, 82 years old and holding a ninth degree black belt—the second-highest rank in the sport—Takemori is still instructing.

“[Takemori's] out there,” fellow instructor Tad Nalls says. “You have to be careful because he can still teach judo, but he can't have kids throwing him because he's got artificial knees and stuff. You have to respect him.”

Nalls now takes the lead with most of the instruction duties for the club. A graduate of Georgetown and a lawyer by day, Nalls comes to Yates at night to teach the “gentle way” to a group of students who range from accomplished black belts to neophyte undergrads.

Of the roughly 90 regulars Nalls estimates come to the classes, a little less than half are Georgetown students. Many begin as freshman with little to no experience. Ben Bordoley (SFS '09) and Fiore Mastroianni (COL '09) both began as white belts in their freshmen year, and now as brown belts are two of the

The
Phosphorescent
Blues |
kentuckyproudchick
en
on
CV: Punch Brothers,
The
Phosphorescent
Blues

Archives

SELECT MONT

most experienced undergraduates in the club.

“Anybody who’s seen a wrestling match or even an MMA (mixed martial arts) match will have an idea of some of the fundamentals,” Bordoley said. “You can win by submission, you can win by a throw.”

But the sessions at Yates are more than simply introductory lessons for Hoyas looking for an alternative to the treadmill. Judoka of Nalls’s and Takemori’s stature draw some of the best competitors in the world to the Hilltop.

“It’s cool to work out with people who’ve competed at the highest level of the sport and then just kind of show up at your school gym,” Fiore Mastroianni (COL ’09) said. “I don’t think you can really do that with any other sport.”

“The people here at Georgetown are lucky because we have so many black belts to teach,” Takemori adds.

“Usually in most colleges they have one or two black belts at the most. Here we have 25 or 30.”

That number helps make Georgetown’s judo club one of the largest in the area, if not the country. One of those black

belts is Yasutaka Ohkawa, a fourth degree visiting instructor and former Japanese collegiate champion. Ohkawa, who has been featured on The History Channel's "Human Weapon," is more than just a skilled competitor. Having earned his master's in linguistics, he will return to judo powerhouse Tokai University as a professor of English and a judo instructor.

"You have to control yourself when you practice judo. When you study you have to control yourself. It's the same thing," Ohkawa said.

Instructors like Ohkawa ensure that Hoyas who make the trek up to Yates will be learning from some of the best judoka in the sport. But Takemori doesn't let the youngsters do all the work.

"Jimmy is sort of like the godfather of the club. He's always here, and he'll always be wandering around giving tips," Bordoley said. "Jimmy will be wandering around and saying 'No, bend your knees grandma.'"

Takemori is not at all hesitant to step in and criticize and correct his students. He still suits up in his gi—judo training clothing—and patrols the mats.

“That’s probably why they promoted me to ninth degree, because I’m still active,” Takemori said. “Most guys my age, they’re doing judo in the closet. They don’t even come out. You don’t even know if they’re doing judo.”

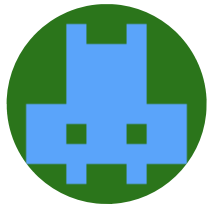
Indeed, Takemori has received plenty of recognition for his contributions to his sport. In 2004, he was honored by the Japanese ambassador and the emperor for his work teaching and promoting judo in the United States. His students’ success speaks for itself. He coached the 1964 Olympic bronze medalist, and in the 1983 Pan-American Games he coached the American women to seven gold medals in eight weight classes.

“In the years I’ve been in judo, it has been real good to me,” Takemori reflected. “I love to teach judo.”

Now, in addition to his work at the Georgetown judo club, Takemori is involved with the United States Judo Federation. As is characteristic for an elder statesman of the sport, he is the chairman of the promotional committee.

“Our biggest problem is that judo is not a popular sport in the United States,” Takemori said. “It’s just that right now we don’t have the instructors.”

Judo has a long way to go in the United States before it can begin to rival its popularity overseas. But if and when it does, James Takemori and his 55 years' worth of pupils will be remembered as its foundation.



Tim Shine



— Share This: —



PREVIOUS:
< Community & Disunity: scrutinizing diversity at Georgetown

NEXT:
Bearcats maul reeling Hoyas in Big East battle >

— Leave a Reply —

Enter your comment here...

