



Before the invention of tourism,
travel to another country
was considered the highest form of education.



Living a dream

On November 5, 2014, I packed my Judogi and boarded a flight to Tokyo, Japan, to study Judo at the world famous Tokai University. I hadn't the slightest clue what they had planned for me. To say it was the most amazing experience would be an understatement.

I took enough notes to write a novel, but for now, it is my honor to share with you a glimpse of my wonderful journey.

Enjoy,

Roy Kawaji
Head Instructor, Portland Judo
PortlandJudo.com

WELCOME

KODOKAN

Our journey started with a warm greeting by our host, Keiko Mitsumoto. We were then introduced to Professor Naoki Murata, curator for the Kodokan Museum. He gave us a private tour of the Kodokan Museum. He was so sincere in answering our questions and wanting to know each of us at a very personal level. His personality was so alive and entertaining.



KANO STATUE

Our first group picture in front of the Jigoro Kano statue.



EISHOJI TEMPLE

A private charter bus shuttled us to Eishoji Temple, the birthplace of Kodokan Judo.



ASAKUSA

It was a delight to stroll the festive streets of Asakusa Kannon which led us to Sensoji Temple. The shops and food stands in the Kaminarimon area were a special treat. We all enjoyed lunch there and headed back to the Kodokan, driving past the Budokan before loading up our bags and making our way to the Tokai University Shonan campus.

BEGINNING

DORMS We received a first taste of Judo in Japan with an early rise and bicycle ride to the Tokai Shonan main campus. We were introduced to our Head Instructor Kenji Mitsumoto. He is considered an expert in Judo development.

We reviewed our schedule for the next month, and were told of our requirements and expectations as students, some of which were to take lots of notes, keep our Judogi clean, and always be on time.



PRESENTATION After watching a video presentation featuring Yasuhiro Yamashita and his vision for Judo, we were presented with gifts from the NPO sponsors. These included a custom embroidered Kusakura gi, a UniQlo hoodie, a Mizuno shirt, and a duffel bag for our uniform.

ETIQUETTE Our first class was on etiquette (*Reishiki*). We studied reasons for bowing, sitting, and even the distance at which these rituals are performed. Furthermore, we were taught to respect everything which surround us and to be mindful of everything we do.

It was stressed that as good Judo instructors, we must know the meaning (*Riai*) of what we are teaching and how it connects together. We must also understand the principles of the movements and techniques.



DAILY LIFE Hey, when in Japan...



TECHNIQUES

TACHIWAZA with Kenji Mitsumoto

FOUNDATION We reviewed our posture (*Shisei*) and our stance (*Shizentai* and *Jigotai*). We covered teaching methods for breakfalls and the lessons stressed the importance of mastering *taisabaki*, *kumikata* and *kuzushi*.

We did *kuzushi* partner drills from squatting, sitting on a chair, standing, moving, and incorporated the use of resistance bands on our *kuzushi* training.



POINTS Study the way your fingers grip and how they affect the movement of your wrist. Do not lean back when pulling for *kuzushi*, otherwise you can lose your balance and get countered. Off-balance in front of your chest and bring your chest to the person when applying the throw.

If you release your grip when you throw, you cannot control them. Without the grip, there is no finish to the technique.

THOUGHTS I benefitted most from these classes because these are lessons I can immediately apply in my own dojo. Mitsumoto Sensei clearly explained why these movements are so important and how they apply to techniques. Even fundamental techniques must be broken down into levels. This is how you build great instructors, who in turn produce great students.

LESSON

Always train moving *uchikomi*, not static. Take at least one step. Back to front and circular. Take the time to train balance and agility. Incorporate ladder drills and leg speed drills. Some students won't get it, but that is how it goes. Don't be discouraged. Proper body movement and awareness are crucial for Judo. Even if it's taxing, always show the correct form the right way.

Tori and *uke* must work together to become good in Judo. Do various partner *uchikomi* drills such as *osotogari* partner drills, *ouchigari* partner drills, carry/run drills, 3-man standing resistance drills, and 3-man drag/pull drills.

Uchikomi is about discovering your opponent's weak spot. The more strenuous the training, the more efficient you will need to be. You will learn to use less strength and feel your opponent more. When you are fatigued your balance and form will be tested and challenged.



TECHNIQUES

ASHIWAZA with Makoto Takeuchi

Kuzushi can be difficult to accomplish in actual *randori* or competition. If you are good at *ashiwaza*, you can effectively use foot techniques to off-balance your opponent.

LESSON Always start by attacking the feet. Do not go into big throws when the path is not there. Create the ideal situation with *ashiwaza*. You can create many combinations. Have several good *ashiwaza* techniques to choose from for each situation. *Ashiwaza* is a technique that requires timing. If you decide to do *ashiwaza*, the moment has passed. These techniques must be practiced relentlessly so they become natural in their execution. *Ashiwaza* must be instinctive.



Kouchigari is a good start because it is very effective in off-balancing your opponent, but rather difficult to counter.

THOUGHTS The same can be said for etiquette and doing the right thing. It's not something you do only sometimes. It cannot be something you deliberately try to do. It must become a part of you. Train doing the right thing until it becomes natural in its execution.

NEWAZA with Kenji Mitsumoto

LESSON Study and drill *taisabaki* for *newaza*, especially *waki jime*, *ebi*, *zenten*, and *koten*. Train *osaekomi* drills and transitions. Study combinations for *newaza* like you would for your *tachiwaza*. Don't attack with only one technique. Set them up with combination primary moves and create an opening. It is about creating a weak spot then attacking it. If you are good at *newaza*, incorporate your *tachiwaza* techniques to bring your opponent to the ground.

THOUGHTS *Newaza* is like a metal link puzzle. You cannot force the loops apart. If you rush without thinking, it won't work. Think about what you are doing and the puzzle will unravel.



TECHNIQUES



COACHING with Kenji Mitsumoto

To build a champion, it is important to notice talent. Take notes on specific students who exhibit high levels of body awareness, agility, flexibility, and coordination.

Other than the athlete themselves, there are two other important factors that make a champion. First, the competitor's sensei must excel in fulfilling their training requirements at the highest level. If their sensei cannot provide a level of training that is necessary for continued growth and success, then the student must seek out better

instructors. Another crucial factor is the training facility. The competitor's dojo must provide a healthy culture with a lot of good training partners. If this is lacking, they must find other gyms at which they can supplement their training.

We were given a copy of Mitsumoto Sensei's study guide called "Judo Kids Passport" for teaching and recording a student's progress.



KATA with Tomoo Hamana

It was an honor to have four-time World Kata Champion Tomoo Hamana visit us from Hamana Dojo to fine tune our Kata. He was very humble in his approach and reminded us to not only memorize the techniques, but to focus on the meaning behind each technique.

Learning the history of the technique while studying the mechanics of the throws made it very enjoyable.

OBSERVING KATA CLASS with Hideharu Shirase

Observing the Tokai University Judo students study their *kata* under the watchful eye of Shirase Sensei.



SPECIALTY CLASSES

SPORTS MASSAGE with Tomoko Ishida

I took away so much more than massage techniques from this class. First she explained that you must love what you are doing, because this will show in the sincerity of your work. Your mind must always be present in the moment. Without the right mind frame and care, you could actually cause harm to your patient through massage. Second, you must treat everyone walking in the door seeking your assistance as equals. A novice competitor and a celebrity athlete should get equal care. This is true for how we must treat all of our students in our class.

POINTS Do not use strength; position your body well; and use your posture and balance to transfer your weight into your patient.



SPORTS TAPING with Michiko Hanaoka

Sports taping is an art in which your job is to provide care for the injured. Not only does it act to support or take the place of a damaged area, it gives the injured athlete added confidence and inner security to continue training.

THOUGHTS The same can be said about our roles as *judoka*. If there is a teammate or student in need of support, we must be there for them so they have the confidence to continue. If a colleague, teammate, or student is totally broken, we will stand in their place until they are ready to continue. This is how we can better society.

ATHLETIC REHABILITATION

with Takayuki Imamura

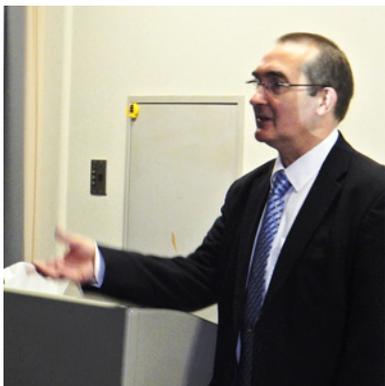
Individual stretches and partner stretches; core strength, balance and rotator cuff exercises; reflex development games; use of balance mats, light dumbbells, medicine balls, resistance bands, and fitness balls.

THOUGHTS I have a renewed admiration for experts in this field. The amount of knowledge and care these experts bring to provide support to the athletes is easy to overlook.

We often focus on developing the big muscles, but if we neglect the smaller supporting muscles, we will break from the inside. In life, we should also make sure to take care of the small things that often go overlooked. By strengthening our "inner core" we can create a solid base in which to support ourselves and even those around us.



SEMINARS



PREVENTION OF JUDO INJURIES

by Dr. Mike Callan from Judospace.com

We had the privilege of having Dr. Mike Callan share with us his much sought after lecture series on Judo injuries and prevention. We were made aware of head injuries sustained in Judo and the urgent need for everyone to be vigilant in keeping our students safe. The compounded damage that can be caused by “second impact” syndrome is something we must be aware of.



My favorite part of Dr. Callan’s presentation was a very eye-opening section on the etiquette and deep-rooted culture that surround Judo. The day ended with an entertaining documentary on the creation of Judo. This easily could have been a movie!



DR. MATSUMAE LECTURE

by Professor Toshiaki Hashimoto

This was a very good reminder that as we look to the future, we must never lose sight of the past. If we forget where Judo came from, we will be destined to create a Judo no one will even recognize.

“Use your Judo to bring the world closer.”

REFEREE CLINIC with Kenji Takahashi

In addition to reviewing current IJF tournament rules, I was really impressed with the Japanese rules for kids’ tournaments. They focus on ensuring the proper use of Judo techniques instead of seeking out power grips and forced moves. They don’t allow high collar grips. This was very refreshing in a sport where winning by any means possible has become very common. I was also very impressed with their efforts to ensure the safety of the kids. For example, not just stopping at removing double-knee *seoinage*, they also go as far as calling *matte* during *newaza* when they felt any forced leverage move may be causing an unseen injury. Takahashi Sensei also pointed out that you should not penalize kids too quickly as they are still learning to understand the rules; an overly strict style of officiating will not let them enjoy Judo. As long as they are safe and trying their best, let them play. The role of the officials are also to help competitors enjoy the sport. All the sideline bickering and attacks on referees are very damaging for kids to see and hear.



EDUCATION

TERMINOLOGY

with Dr. Seiji Miyazaki

Study the meaning and origin of each word in Judo. This can often unlock the secrets to the techniques you may not have realized were there. We heavily discussed the word *tsuri* and how that motion was translated and interpreted differently by different instructors throughout the world. It was quite fascinating.



BEGINNER CLASS with Ryohei Anai

Beginners were taught *ogoshi*, *tsubame gaeshi*, and an introduction to self-defense *goshin Jutsu*. *Ogoshi* is practiced to get a good feel for Judo; *tsubame gaeshi* because it's complex enough to be a challenge, but fun, understandable, and easy to take falls for; and *goshin-jutsu* for its practical application.

When I asked the students if they would use these techniques in a street fight, they quite simply explained, "No, we never fight. We will always walk away. If we fight, even if we win, we will go to jail. So we always lose."

THOUGHTS Perhaps this is why Japan takes its sports so seriously. The dojo is where the battles are fought. Maybe if the Western World focused on having kids in sports, they would fight less and stop hurting each other in the streets.



TEACHING BEGINNER CLASSES

1. Start with proper etiquette.
2. Cover posture, *taisabaki*, *tsuriashi*, *kuzushi* and *ukemi*.
3. Teach *hiza-guruma*, *osotogari*, *taiotoshi*, and *ogoshi*.
4. End the class with small group testing.

Being able to test my coaching style using the techniques I learned from this program was an incredible experience. I was able to confidently build and structure a very basic beginner class for a group of first-time *judoka* at Tokai University.

MASTER CLASS

TOKUJITSU CLASS

Every Saturday there was a *tokujitsu* class, a day when they would have each instructor teach their specialty.



UCHIMATA

with Kosei Inoue

“You have to win when given the opportunity to win. It does not come often. For some people, the moment will never come. Take the chance when given the chance. In your heart you must recognize this. You must say, ‘This is it!’ ”

Words of a champion.



OSOTOGARI with Yasuhiro Yamashita

I had the privilege to study *osotogari* with Yamashita Sensei!



SEOINAGE with Hidetoshi Nakanishi

The caliber of everyone there was at such a high level, that even the *uke*, Naohisa Takato, is the current World Champion.

KUMIKATA with Kenichiro Agemizu

As the Head Coach for the Tokai University Men’s Team, Agemizu Sensei is credited for their unprecedented consecutive winning streak. His lessons on *kumikata* showcased the precision of every move a high level *judoka* makes.

KENDO with Tetsuo Yoshimura

Many of the great *judoka* cross-train in *kendo*. I feel it keeps them close to their combat roots.



VISITING OTHER SCHOOLS



ASAHI DOJO with Dai Asahi

Having a new club that I am currently in the process of growing, Asahi Dojo was an inspiration with both its huge number of students and its approach to making sure their students fall in love with Judo first. I really related to his philosophy of Judo and was reassured to see the many similarities with his teaching style and mine. One huge difference was the approach to his *newaza* class. He teaches it much more like a *tachiwaza* class. He incorporated a lot of drilling, but made sure it was not static. He applied a lot of combinations in his *newaza* moves and even stressed *kuzushi*.

“Praise the effort, not the accomplishment. Students that get too much praise for their accomplishments will look for easy things to do and avoid hard choices. Instead, praise the kids’ efforts. Then they will seek challenges; each time a more difficult one.”

TOIN UNIVERSITY with Yukiharu Yoshitaka



We were honored to be able to visit the class lead by Yukiharu Yoshitaka Sensei at Toin University. It is always a good experience to see another University team in training. Aside from the typical Judo class, I was really intrigued with the “Judo Certification Class for Teachers”. All Toin University Physical Education students must train to receive their *shodan* in Judo. It was explained that since Judo is part of the Japan PE curriculum, it only makes sense that the instructors be proficient in the principles of Judo. It was clearly not

a competition class, but all the students there had to know the fundamentals of Judo, including getting thrown. The day at Toin University was highlighted with having dinner with Nobuyuki Sato. It’s not everyday you get to sit with the current “Godfather of Judo” and have a drink. I had to pinch myself to make sure I was not dreaming.



MATSUMAE JUDO JUKU with Toshiaki Hashimoto



The Matsumae Judo Juku offer classes for all levels and stresses the importance on balancing a *judoka's* fighting spirit with their overall physical health and kind heart. Hashimoto Sensei’s wish is to have everyone follow in Dr. Matsumae’s dream of creating a better world through Judo by connecting people. The Matsumae Youth Judo program is regarded as one of the best in Japan.

KOMEI SPECIAL SUPPORT SCHOOL Tokyo Metropolitan

We were privileged to participate in a Judo program designed for handicap students. We were proud as *judoka* to know the sport that we loved can be studied by everyone. By witnessing first-hand how kids with special needs overcame their disabilities, made us all realize the goal of Judo is not about beating others, but truly about facing your own challenges and striving to be the best in any situation. I was deeply moved by watching these kids train. I am grateful for the opportunity and will carry this heartfelt memory with me forever.

RANDORI

NIGHTLY RANDORI



There are dojos and then there's the Tokai Dojo. Five nights a week, dozens of the highest level judoka from Japan and around the world would gather in goodwill to test their skills on each other. Training in this world class facility with so many gold and red label patches, symbolizing an Olympic Gold Medal or World Title, was an extremely humbling experience. Many of Japan's finest *judoka* were eager to lock horns with Georgia's Avtandil Tchrikishvili and Varlam Liparteliani.



In the evening, after *randori*, it was very surreal to have Varlam Liparteliani sharing dorm facilities with me. He would relax with his coaches with a game of cards. Meanwhile, the Russian team would be huddled around a single computer screen, watching videos and laughing out loud. It does not matter which country we come from, we are all the same.



SHIAI



BOSEIKI Team Matsumae wins both team titles for the first time in tournament history. Tournaments are always very educational for me as an instructor. I study the competitors, referees, coaches, and even the mannerisms of the parents and spectators. Led by Head Referee Hidetoshi Nakanishi, I really appreciated the fact that the referees weren't too eager to give out penalties to the youth competitors. They really seemed to understand the intent of youth competitions and they let the kids play. More than a bad call, an official's personal ego is more damaging to the spirit of Judo.

The referees were very keen on the idea that young children should be allowed to try competition and enjoy the experience. Competitions were not the time for officials to blast the contestants or fellow referees for their mistakes. Officials must always have poise and control. There is a proper time and place for discussions when the tournament is over.



There were in-house demos by the Tokai University *judoka*. I was surprised to see Takahashi Ono on the sidelines. I asked him what he was doing there. He said he was watching his daughter compete. Just another day in paradise. I really love his Judo and I had to get a picture with him.



JYUKU YU HAI What a treat to witness the fighting spirit of these elementary and intermediate *judoka*. This solidifies my belief that the future of Judo in Japan is alive and strong. We were also required to referee the matches.



SIGHTSEEING

SHINKANSEN

We all boarded the bullet train, the *shinkansen*, and launched our way south to Hiroshima.



HIROSHIMA

Hiroshima Peace Memorial and Museum

I have been there before, but this time it held a deeper meaning as I was with friends who live in countries that are still experiencing the horrors of war on an ongoing basis. The pause and look on their faces as they viewed the photos of death and destruction in Hiroshima with familiar and current sadness was hard to witness and impossible for me to comprehend. To me it was a worry-free trip, but perhaps to my fellow teammates it was another somber reminder of the struggles they face at home.

MIYAJIMA ISLAND

Itsukushima Shrine

Home to the “floating” *torii* gate, this shrine is recognized as one of Japan’s National Treasures. On the way to and from the shrine we were greeted by friendly deer, although one of them did bite my butt.



SIGHTSEEING



KYOTO

Kiyomizu Temple

The temple is honored as a Historical Monument of Ancient Kyoto. There was not a single nail used in the construction of this mammoth structure. At the bottom is the Otowa waterfall where we drank the magical wish-granting water.



Fushimi Inari Temple

10,000 *torii* line the path of the shrine dedicated to the Shinto god of rice. It is a magical experience to be there. A must see!



Kinkaku Temple

The sheer beauty of this temple was breathtaking. The top two-stories of this building are covered with pure gold leaf. This is one of the most popular visitor destinations in Japan. The place was packed! How did I manage that perfect picture to the left? GoPro extension pole, my friend.



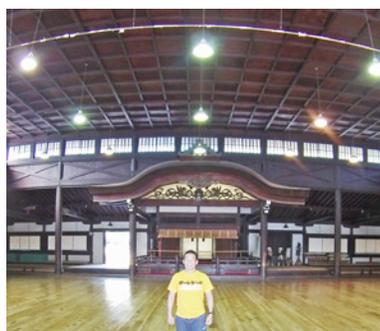
Genkoen Temple

The round “Window of Enlightenment” and the square “Window of Confusion” must be experienced. The blood-stained ceiling in the hallways were a somber reminder of a violent past. There were no photographs allowed at this Zen temple.

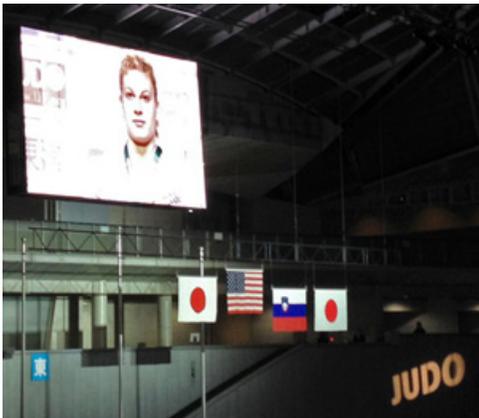


Butokukai Dojo

The birthplace of Kosen Judo. This wasn't originally on the itinerary, but we all begged our guide to take us there.



2014 TOKYO GRAND SLAM



KAYLA HARRISON

Olympic Gold Medalist
World Champion

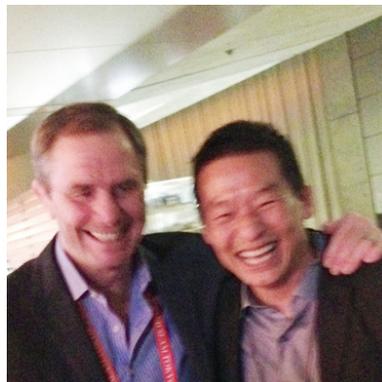
Another highlight was to be able to see Kayla Harrison win a gold medal for USA. No matter how many times I've heard the U.S. National anthem played in an arena, it was really an experience to hear it played at an international arena when an American athlete wins a gold medal.



HAYAKAWA

Kusakura sponsor

VIP Backstage Passes



ADAMS

The voice of Judo



NOMURA

3X Olympic Gold Medalist



KASHIWAZAKI

Tomoenage and newaza master



MIURA

Master Instructor



YOSHIDA

Olympic Champion and Celebrity

GRADUATION



GRADUATION

Graduation day was a very exciting day for us. There were many sponsors and dignitaries in the audience. We all were asked to give a closing speech in Japanese. I spoke to the crowd of the many friendships I had made. It was a proud day for all of us, but a little bittersweet knowing our amazing journey was coming to a close.

After receiving our diplomas, we were treated to a warm gathering with our teammates and supporters. We shared stories of our month, living and training together. We laughed like little kids. We hugged like old friends. We gave our final farewells knowing we may never see each other again. Indeed, we live in a very small world, but the oceans are still vast.

We arrived as individuals.
We graduated Tokai as one.



LIVING LEGENDS

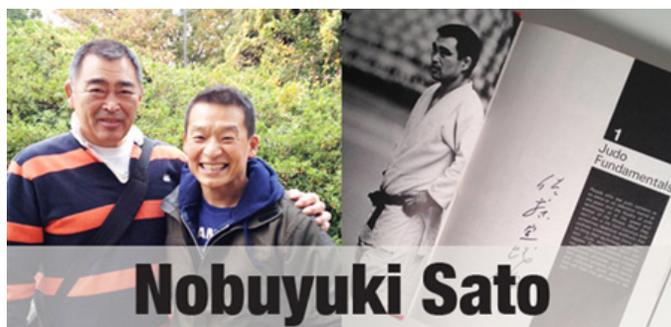
LOOK FOR ANSWERS
SEEK OUT
GOOD TEACHERS



Yasuhiro Yamashita



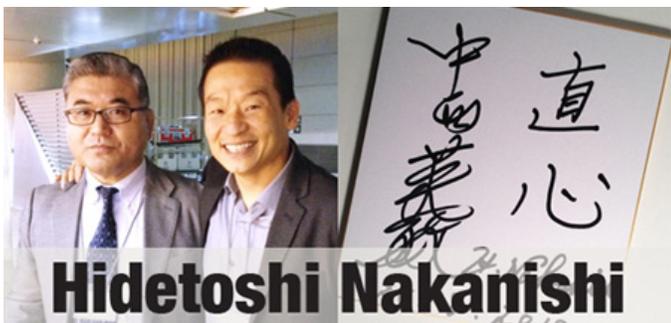
Kenji Mitsumoto



Nobuyuki Sato



Katsuhiko Kashiwazaki



Hidetoshi Nakanishi



Kosei Inoue



Toshiaki Hashimoto

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



Kenji Mitsumoto Sensei

The structure and core of this entire program was built under the guidance of Mitsumoto Sensei. He was caring and kind enough to ask us very early on what our needs were, and was very accommodating in restructuring his classes to fit our requests. His one-on-one, small group classes were the most beneficial Judo education I have ever been given as a new instructor. I feel he holds one of the master keys to unlocking and expanding Judo in the world. I remarked at the end of the clinic that I was so sad to leave. As much as I love teaching Judo, I love being a student. I love learning. When my instructor passed away, I felt as if my training had paused. I had no Sensei. I asked Mitsumoto Sensei if I could consider him one of my new Sensei. He smiled and said, "Of course. Come back anytime. You are now my student."



Yasuhiro Yamashita Sensei

The great Yamashita Sensei is a true Judo ambassador. Everyone is aware of his accomplishments on the mat. Many people know of his dedication to the growth of Judo off the mat. I was privileged to witness the amazingly humble and caring person he is as an individual. He also held himself to such a high etiquette standard. When we were at a meal, he made sure to have us eat first. He would walk over to everyone and offer a *kanpai* toast before having a drink. When going to a destination, he even insisted on driving and offered us a ride. He is a champion of life. He is the definition of a gentleman.



Teruyoshi Yamaguchi Sensei Yamaguchi Sensei has grown to be a very dear friend. He has been a constant link to the many questions that arose before, during, and after the trip. He is the bridge that connects the U.S. to Judo in Japan at Tokai University. I have know him for over 15 years now. Although we live thousands of miles away, our friendship has never waned. Judo friendships are everlasting.

SPECIAL *mahalo*



Keiko Mitsumoto Words cannot express the amount of gratitude I can offer her. It takes a very special individual to perform the job she accomplishes. Many of the students consider her their “mom” away from home. The care she offered was not limited to only school related challenges, but all aspects of the student’s lives. I admire her for the job she does as an administrator, but even more for the sincere friend she is to everyone. I enjoy listening to her speak of her Judo “kids”, because you can see the genuine happiness in her eyes as she recalls moments she shared with them. I am blessed to have her as my friend.

Hiroko Ozawa I would like to thank Hiroko for all the running around she did for us. She would sprint in front of the group to get train tickets so that we would not have to wait when we got there. She would arrive at venues early and be waiting for us with meals. No service detail was left undone on her watch. She is a treasure to the Tokai school.

Yoko Kinoshita All of us were very far away from home for over a month, but we felt like we had a second home at Tokai thanks to our resident manager, Yoko. She would always greet us with smiles in the morning and be waiting with that same smile when we returned after a long day out. I miss her. If I ever go back to Japan, I would make a trip all the way back to the Tokai dorm just to give her a hug.

My teammates

Jean Noel, Abdul, Palitha, Muhammed, Ko, Ido, and Mike.



Teaching assistants

Kenta, Nao, Kotaro, and Hayato.



Michael Kohn Thank you for being the groups designated translator, but mostly for the laughs and the late-night getaways. Hope to see you again soon my brother.



A special thanks to United States Judo Federation President, Olympian Kevin Asano, for his efforts in building connections throughout the world during his amazing Judo career and for bringing us all closer together. Thank you to Directors Hayward Nishioka and Mitchell Palacio for appointing me to represent the United States.



Living a dream

As I approach 50 next year and reminisce of my 42 years in Judo, I cannot help but feel thankful for all the wonderful friends and countless experiences Judo has brought me.

I have been so fortunate. Thank you to everyone for being so good to me. What a beautiful life.

Best,

Roy Kawaji
Head Instructor, Portland Judo
PortlandJudo.com

