

The Kenzo Uyeno Story: A Stalwart of Judo

By Robert Wells, BB East Coast Editor



With the passing of Kenzo Uyeno, President of the Judo Black Belt Federation of America, in Washington, D.C., on June 1st, 1963, Judo lost a great leader as well as a keen competitor. Complications in what would otherwise have been a minor surgery was the cause of his death. He was 39. Hiro Fujimoto of Detroit, Vice President of the Federation, assumed Uyeno's duties. The J.B. B.B., the direct representative in U.S.A. for the Kodokan Judo Institute of Tokyo, is responsible for promotion of the sport in the U.S. and for maintaining Kodokan standards.

Uyeno, a 5th Degree (Godan) at the time of his death, was awarded a 6th Degree (Rokodan) posthumously by the Federation. Born in San Pedro, California, in 1923, Uyeno began his Judo career at the age of 9 in Palos Verdes Dojo. Before he was 15, the team that he captained won the Southern California Championship. He was promoted to 1st Degree (Shodan). At the age of 18 he was awarded a rank of 2nd Degree (Nidan) .

When World War II began, the Japanese-Americans on the West Coast were confined in "relocation" camps. Uyeno taught Judo for two years in the Poston Relocation Center and while there, in 1943, he received his 3rd Degree (Sandan).

In 1948 he graduated cum laude from the University of California at Los Angeles. Military service then took him to Washington, D.C., area where he made his home after his discharge.

He won the East Coast Black Belt Championship for five consecutive years starting in 1953. In 1954, the year he earned his 4th Degree (Yodan), he helped organize the Capitol Judo Black Belt Federation (Shufu Judo Yudanshakai), which was to represent the J.B.B.F. from Maine to Florida. He became its first President.

He was awarded his 5th Degree (Godan) in 1958.

In 1962 he was elected President of the J.B.B.F. His associates in the national Judo organization remember him for his dignity and his strong leadership. Those who worked with him were constantly surprised and impressed by his ability to pick out the most essential facts quickly in any discussion or complex problem.

His last official duties for U.S. Judo took him to Sao Paulo, Brazil, in the spring of 1963 to represent the J.B.B.F. in the Pan American Games. He had competed in the Games himself in 1955, 1956 and 1957, and he had a speaking knowledge of Spanish.

At the time of his death, Uyeno was Chief of the Systems Development Division of the Data Systems Office, Army Material Command, in Washington. His civil service rating had the approximate military equivalent of Brigadier-General. He received many honors in government schools and achieved the highest scholastic record ever attained at the Army Finance School. Through his untiring and unselfish efforts Kenzo Uyeno, a dedicated Judo-ka, has contributed immensely to the sport he loved so well. His leadership will be sorely missed.

He truly was . . . a Stalwart of Judo.