

Menden Judoki

~In Myanmar, 4,364 km away from Japan~🇲🇲 vol.13~

Photo 1: A two-shot with my Kohai. The junior is on the left, and the author is on the right.



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1.1. The Background and How He Came to Visit	2
2.The Training and Interactions	3
3.The Impact on the Athletes	5
4. The Potential of Deep Connections Fostered by Judo	7
5.Message from My Kohai	8

We have reached VOL.13 of "Menden Judoki." This milestone is thanks to the unwavering support from all of you and the relentless efforts of the Myanmar Judo National Team's athletes. In this issue, I focus on a special week in October that became an unforgettable memory for me.

That week was marked by the visit of my kohai from my high school to Myanmar, where he participated in a week-long training at our dojo. Not only was it a delightful reunion, but it was also a valuable experience for both the athletes and me, as he engaged in intense training with them and deepened mutual connections. Through this experience, I was once again reminded of the bonds and learning that transcend borders, made possible through judo.

During practice with my kohai, the athletes gained new perspectives and inspiration, which elevated the quality of their training. In this VOL.13, I will share how that week influenced us and discuss the potential that deep connections fostered by judo can bring. I hope you will read until the end.

1.1. The Background and How He Came to Visit

The story of how he came to Myanmar goes back about three months. One day, I received an unexpected call from him saying, "I want to hear about your experience working overseas" and "I want to challenge myself abroad." After several conversations, it became clear that although he was satisfied with his coaching career in Japan, he had a strong desire to broaden his horizons and grow further in a new environment.

However, working abroad is not easy. The journey itself can be challenging, and in judo coaching, skill alone is not enough; luck and connections also play significant roles. Without thorough preparation, one could miss valuable opportunities when they arise.

Meanwhile, in Myanmar, where I coach, there was a growing demand for Japanese training partners. Due to the limited number of local

practice partners and my position as the national team coach, his visit to Myanmar became a reality.

His goal in Myanmar was to gain experience through judo and build on that to advance his career. On the other hand, the Myanmar side aimed to raise the overall team level by practicing with a Japanese judoka and sharing techniques.

After confirming his trip, we planned his travel route. He chose a flight via Singapore, departing Narita at 7 p.m. and arriving at Singapore Changi Airport at 1:15 a.m. After a 6-hour and 40-minute layover, he departed Singapore at 7:55 a.m. and arrived in Myanmar at 9:20 a.m. local time.

Securing a visa was another challenge after finalizing the travel route. Given the current unstable situation in Myanmar, obtaining a visa was essential. While there were options for a tourist visa or a work visa, he opted for the latter. Despite starting the application process a month in advance, the visa was issued just two days before his departure. With support from the Myanmar Ministry of Sports, the Myanmar Judo Federation, and friends of the Myanmar Ambassador to Japan, we managed to obtain the visa in time.

After completing all these preparations, he finally embarked on his journey to Myanmar.

2.The Training and Interactions

Upon arrival, he immediately expressed his desire to start training. Despite the fatigue from travel and the differences in climate between Japan and Myanmar, he began practicing without hesitation. His passion and professionalism were impressive, showcasing a quintessentially Japanese judoka's dedication. This attitude also motivated the local athletes and boosted their morale.

During his stay, his training schedule included two and a half hours in the morning and two and a half hours in the afternoon, totaling five hours of practice daily. The morning sessions focused on randori (sparring), while the afternoon sessions centered on technique instruction and movement-based drills. I joined him for the morning randori sessions, feeling a mix of tension and excitement from practicing with a fellow Japanese judoka after a long time.

Between training, we took the opportunity to explore the local area and enjoy meals at local restaurants, offering him a taste of Myanmar's culture. Additionally, there were evening gatherings with Japanese expats and officials from the Myanmar Judo Federation, making his days full and enriching.

Photo 2: Commemorative photo with federation officials at Yangon International Airport after arriving in Myanmar.



My Kohai, who competes in the 81kg weight class and specializes in uchi mata, o soto gari, and sasae tsurikomi ashi, brought valuable skills to share. In contrast, I compete in the 66kg class, with seoi nage and Ashi waza as my specialties. Differences in body size and weight influence judo strategies and favored techniques, and Myanmar's most promising athletes often compete in the 73kg and 81kg classes, with many excelling in uchi mata and o soto gari. Therefore, my kohai 's techniques and style captured the attention of the local athletes and made a strong impression.

3.The Impact on the Athletes

Through their interactions with my Kohai, the athletes learned a great deal. They particularly experienced the importance of the Japanese judo style of gripping both the "tsurite" (lifting hand) and "hikite" (pulling hand) to control the opponent during offense and defense. His demonstration of the uchi mata technique, which lifted opponents with both power and finesse, captivated the athletes' attention. The strength required to withstand such techniques and the precision of his attacks were eye-opening for them, providing new and stimulating lessons.

Moreover, watching the randori sessions between my kohai and me, the athletes were struck by the intensity and speed of our grip-fighting. Later, many commented that they "realized the calculated nature of each movement in Japanese judo and its unparalleled speed and accuracy." Such intricate techniques and dynamic exchanges are rarely seen in Southeast Asian judo settings, making our practice sessions valuable spectacles.

These experiences allowed the local athletes to feel and learn firsthand about the precision and strength inherent in Japanese judo. They walked away with a better understanding of its essence and depth.

Video 1: Moving uchi mata drills by my Kohai . The expression on the Myanmar athlete's face after receiving the technique is very striking.



Photo 3: Instruction on grip fighting with an ai-yotsu (same stance) opponent.



Photo 4: Group commemorative photo after completing the entire schedule.



4. The Potential of Deep Connections Fostered by Judo

For me, reuniting with a high school peer and sharing judo in a foreign land was both surreal and deeply rewarding. Watching my kohai interact with the athletes reaffirmed the power of judo to forge international connections. Judo transcends being just a sport or competition; it acts as a bridge between countries and cultures.

For instance, students studying abroad often navigate their daily lives as individuals and learners. However, the reality is that they often face discrimination and obstacles due to cultural, institutional, religious, and racial differences. Historically, Asians have been subjected to prejudice in Western countries, and remnants of that history persist today. Moreover, relations between Southeast Asian countries like Myanmar and Japan can be traced back to World War II (known in Japan as the Greater East Asia War), while interactions with the Middle East have been shaped by oil resource imports. Thus, the term "overseas" encompasses a wide array of countries, peoples, and religions. These complex backgrounds bring new perspectives and challenges when living abroad.

In such situations, Japanese judokas who have practiced the sport for many years have an advantage. Their experiences often translate into career opportunities and personal growth overseas, a significant strength. The years of practice and experience in judo become assets that extend beyond techniques—they aid in building trust and forming connections with people abroad.

The fundamental principles of judo, "Seiryoku Zenyo" (maximum efficient use of energy) and "Jita Kyohei" (mutual welfare and benefit), emphasize using one's abilities to the fullest and prospering together with others. These values are universal and serve as a common language that transcends challenges and cultural differences. This experience reaffirmed my belief that the training and knowledge accumulated through judo can contribute not only to individual growth but also to the development of those around us and society as a whole. Watching my junior's dedication also reminded me of my own early days, allowing me to reconnect with my roots and renew my commitment to progress. This realization has become a source of strength and determination for further development.

Through this reunion, I also felt a responsibility to pass on the benefits I've received to the next generation. Leveraging the connections built through judo, I hope to help many individuals grow, strengthen mutual understanding, and thrive in different cultures. I am determined to continue this effort to support such a future.

5. Message from My Kohai

First of all, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Hiranuma-senpai, the Myanmar Judo Federation, and everyone who supported me for giving me the opportunity to have this rare and invaluable experience. I do not have particularly outstanding achievements myself, yet they listened attentively to what I had to say. I was deeply moved by their serious dedication to judo, despite the language barrier, and their intense, focused gaze.

The situation in Myanmar and their training environment are far from ideal, and there is a constant sense of tension in daily life. Even in such circumstances, their determination to "become stronger" and "improve their skills" resonated deeply with me. If what I taught them can be of even a small help, contributing to their further growth, it would give this experience even greater significance.

Through this experience, I have learned many things and gained valuable insights. I strongly hope to use these lessons to support the growth of new athletes through judo. By continually honing my own judo skills and teaching abilities, I aim to grow further and spread the appeal of judo even more. Once again, I extend my deepest gratitude to everyone, and I sincerely pray that boundless potential awaits them in their future.

6.Future Outlook and Conclusion

This issue has covered my Kohai 's visit to Myanmar and his participation in our training. In these challenging times, having a Japanese judoka visit and train with us was a significant step forward for the Myanmar judo community. For my kohai , practicing in a foreign country was also a valuable experience that will undoubtedly enrich his future judo journey.

As 2024 draws to a close, the Myanmar Judo National Team continues to train for the upcoming Southeast Asian (SEA) Games to be held in December 2025 in Thailand. With this major goal in mind, we aim to participate in training camps and international competitions to build on the lessons learned from this experience and strive for further growth.

Additionally, we warmly welcome individuals and groups interested in training in Myanmar. We will cover accommodation and meal expenses, so only travel expenses will need to be borne. We hope you will take this opportunity to practice with us and deepen bonds that transcend borders. We look forward to your visit.

Lastly, I would like to take this moment to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who supported us in making this exchange possible despite the challenging circumstances, as well as to my kohai for making the journey to Myanmar. It is through the support of many that such interactions are possible, and I am deeply grateful. Thank you once again, and this concludes my report.

Photo 5: Commemorative photo taken during a visit to the Malawyzaya Temple.

