

# Menden Judo Judoki Vol.16

## 4,364 km Away in Myanmar 🇲🇲

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## 1. Greetings

It's been a while. This is Hiranuma, currently working to promote and develop judo in Myanmar. As 2025 flies by, I hope this message finds you well.

In this report, I would like to share how one of my juniors from university spent a month in Myanmar as a training partner, practicing together with our athletes. He was a first-year student when I was in my third year of university. After working as a high school teacher until last year, he is now preparing to start a new career as a firefighter in April. I am truly grateful that he chose to spend part of his valuable time between jobs supporting judo in Myanmar.

From January 18 to February 18, during his stay, our athletes gained not only technical knowledge but also significant mental stimulation. Through this article, I hope to convey how this international exchange through judo influenced both our athletes and his personal growth. Thank you for reading until the end.

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## **2. Background and Purpose of His Stay in Myanmar**

### **Why He Came to Myanmar**

As mentioned earlier, he worked as a teacher at a private school after graduation while also coaching judo. However, over time he began to feel constrained by the closed environment and longed to see a broader world and gain new perspectives. He had always dreamed of gaining experience abroad, and connecting with the world through judo was one of his major goals.

In Japan, many athletes from around the world come to learn judo, which is wonderful. Yet he wondered, “How often do Japanese people go abroad to teach or learn judo themselves?” That curiosity sparked his desire to experience firsthand how Japanese judo is received abroad.

As a senior and junior from university, we had kept in touch from time to time. One day, after he had decided to leave his teaching job and was pondering his next steps, he called me. After listening to his desire to take on a new challenge, I suggested, “Why not come to Myanmar?”

Opportunities to be involved in judo abroad are rare, especially from within the Japanese judo community, where such chances often feel distant. But such opportunities arise through connections and timing—and this was exactly one of those moments. Whether to seize it or not was entirely up to him.

I believe motivation and passion have their own seasons. If you don’t act when the urge strikes, it often fades. That’s why when he called, I immediately said, “Let’s look up flights.” He agreed on the spot, and while still on the call, we searched for tickets. As soon as we settled on a departure date, he bought the ticket right then and there. That moment remains vivid in my memory.



## **Travel Schedule and Visa Acquisition**

He chose to enter Myanmar via Bangkok. He left Nagoya Airport around noon and arrived at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi International Airport at 3:40 PM local time. After a 90-minute layover, he departed Bangkok at 5:10 PM and finally set foot in Myanmar at 6:00 PM.

This time, we took extra care with preparations. Previously, a high school junior faced difficulties obtaining a visa for Myanmar. Learning from that, we prepared everything well in advance.

Due to Myanmar's political situation, all foreign nationals require a visa. While he could have chosen a tourist visa, we opted for a work visa since he would be involved in judo activities. Thanks to support from the Ministry of Sports and the Judo Federation, the process went smoothly and we secured the visa without any issues. Our prior experience certainly helped.

After all the careful preparation, his journey to Myanmar began—an adventure into the unknown, and the start of new experiences through judo. I, too, was excited to see what kind of time it would become for him.

### 3. Activities as a Training Partner

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#### **What Kind of Practices He Joined**

He arrived at Yangon International Airport and traveled to Naypyidaw, where I live, the following morning. Despite the long journey, he immediately said, “I’d like to join practice,” which surprised and impressed me. It showed his deep passion for judo and strong will to gain experience abroad.

Myanmar’s weather at that time exceeds 30°C daily, while Japan was in the middle of winter—a temperature gap of over 20°C, along with a 2.5-hour time difference. Still, he immediately put on his judogi and joined our athletes in practice. His attitude surely had a strong impact on the local athletes.



Judo in Myanmar is relatively closed off, with little opportunity for interaction with foreign players. Athletes mainly rely on online videos to learn. So this time, we gave him 30 to 60 minutes in each practice to teach his favorite techniques and methods directly.

Our athletes watched his every move intently and eagerly asked questions. It was clear that experiencing his techniques firsthand left a strong impression. During uchikomi and randori, they had direct contact with him and seemed more enthusiastic than usual to absorb his skills.

I, too, had an international tournament coming up at the end of February, so I practiced randori with him and analyzed my future opponents by reviewing videos together. Our relationship went beyond that of training partners—we challenged each other as fellow competitors. This became a valuable experience for me as well.

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## **Interaction with Local Athletes**

He became a major inspiration to the Myanmar athletes. Competing in the 81kg division, he had similar body size and favorite techniques as local athletes in that category, allowing for very practical learning.

Even after his departure, athletes were still referring to his movements during practice and trying to replicate what they had seen. What he conveyed may have gone beyond mere technique—perhaps it was his attitude toward learning and his spirit of challenge that left a lasting impression.

While he was here, the selection trials for the SEA Games also took place—a major event with officials from the Judo Federation and Ministry of Sports in attendance.



He took on the role of referee for this crucial match. It was a rare and valuable experience for him, allowing him to see judo not only as a competitor or coach but also from an organizational and operational perspective.

#### **4. Beyond Judo**

Outside of practice, he actively engaged with Myanmar's culture and people. He went sightseeing with students and coaches, visiting temples and markets—experiencing an entirely different world from Japan.

He also participated in several dinner gatherings with representatives of Japanese companies in Myanmar. There, discussions ranged from international exchange through sports to corporate efforts in local business, giving him a broader perspective on the role of sports and Japanese presence overseas.

His days in Myanmar were more than just “coaching judo.” It was a personal challenge and a stimulating time for local athletes. I look forward to seeing how this brief exchange will impact Myanmar's judo community in the future.



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## **5. Message from My Junior**

First, I would like to sincerely thank Mr. Hiranuma, the Ministry of Sports of Myanmar, the Judo Federation, the coaches, and all the athletes for giving me this precious opportunity.

Through living and training with local athletes, I came to feel that judo has a mysterious power to connect people. There was a huge language barrier between us, yet their genuine passion for judo and my own feelings were able to connect through our practice. We quickly bonded and were able to train meaningfully together.

Normally, it's not easy to form deep relationships with people who don't speak your language. But through shared dedication to judo, I felt we built strong bonds. Judo transcends language and creates connections between people.

I was also fortunate to witness the SEA Games selection tournament. It's no exaggeration to say this match could change the athletes' lives. The intensity and determination each athlete brought moved me deeply. I believe this experience will be a lifelong support for them—and it gave me a new outlook on life, too.

Though my contribution was small, I hope that my stay contributed even slightly to the development of Myanmar's judo. Once again, I offer my heartfelt gratitude to everyone involved, and I sincerely wish all the best for their future success.

## 4. Conclusion

This time, I shared about how one of my university juniors stayed in Myanmar for a month as a training partner. Being able to engage in such international exchanges through judo is truly meaningful and a wonderful experience.

Meanwhile, Myanmar has recently experienced a major earthquake centered in Mandalay, resulting in the loss of many lives, and numerous people are still awaiting rescue. Our Myanmar National Judo Team is based in Naypyidaw, which was also affected by the disaster. Fortunately, all judo-related personnel and our training facilities have miraculously remained safe, and we are managing to continue our lives.

Currently, electricity has been restored, but we are still facing challenges with access to drinking water, toilets, and showers. We rely on large water trucks to bring in water or go out to purchase it ourselves.

Under such difficult circumstances, where even the basic necessities of life are not guaranteed, continuing judo practice is far from easy. However, it is precisely during times like these that we strive to unite, support one another, and apply the principle of “Seiryoku Zenyo” — the best use of energy — to get through each day with determination and resilience.