

# Menden Judoki In Myanmar, 4,364 km away from Japan. vol.22

Photo1. For the first time in Myanmar judo history, the athletes who won a medal in the mixed team event.



Chapter 1: Thailand SEA Games 2025	3
Chapter 2: How Should We Interpret This Result?	5
Chapter 3: Why Was Preparation So Difficult?	8
Chapter 4: Three Years of Steady Progress Despite Everything	11
Conclusion	16

Photo 2: The airplane that brought me to Myanmar for the first time. The photo was taken by the son of the President of the Myanmar Judo Federation.



Three years have passed since the day I arrived in Myanmar in 2023.

During these three years, I have stood at many competitions, worked closely with many athletes, and faced countless unexpected situations.

Gaps in competitive level, differences in systems and environments, and disparities in culture and values—

in addition to changes in the political situation and natural disasters—events that I had never experienced in Japan became part of everyday life here.

The SEA Games 2025 were the stage where the accumulation of these three years was tested in the clearest possible way.

In international competitions where results are everything, simply standing on that stage was both a milestone for us and a subject of severe evaluation.

In this article, alongside a report on the SEA Games 2025, I will describe—based as much as possible on facts—why we arrived at this result and what lay behind it.

I believe that calmly organizing realities that cannot be reduced to simple words like “success” or “failure,” both as a coach and as one directly involved, is my way of being sincere about these three years.

## **Chapter 1: Thailand SEA Games 2025**

The Thailand SEA Games 2025 is a multi-sport international competition involving countries from Southeast Asia and is often described as the “Olympics of Southeast Asia.”

In judo as well, it represents the highest regional stage where each nation competes with its national representatives. For the Myanmar judo team, it was an extremely important tournament that clearly indicated our current position.

At this competition, the Myanmar judo team won a bronze medal in the mixed team event.

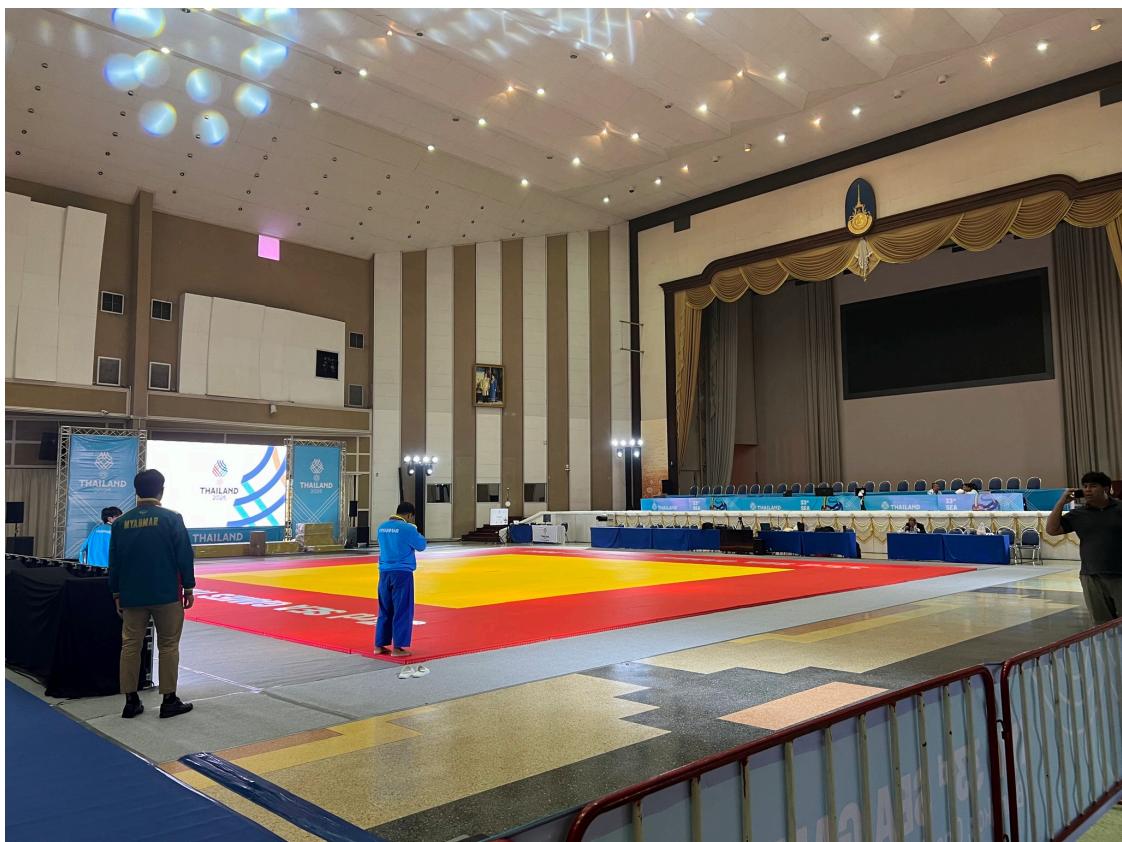
This was the first team-event medal in Myanmar judo history and represents a historic achievement.

Although Myanmar had previously accumulated respectable performances and placements in individual events, achieving a result as a team had long been a challenge. In that sense, this outcome should clearly be regarded as a success.

Team events test not only individual ability, but also the overall level of the squad, strategy, and mutual trust among athletes.

Given Myanmar's domestic situation, economic constraints, limited judo population, insufficient training environment, and lack of international competition experience, achieving a tangible team result demonstrates that years of accumulated effort have finally taken visible form.

Photo 3: The judo competition venue.



## **Chapter 2: How Should We Interpret This Result?**

At the SEA Games 2025, the fact that the Myanmar judo team won medals in individual events—and, in particular, earned its first-ever medal in a team event—constitutes a clear success. As both a coach and a person directly involved, I have no intention of treating this ambiguously. When viewed in the context of Myanmar judo's history, this result carries undeniable significance.

A total of 13 athletes competed in this tournament, and 12 of them returned to Myanmar with medals. This is not merely a numerical achievement. For each athlete, it marked a major milestone in their competitive career, leading to concrete outcomes such as promotions, rank advancements, financial rewards, and recognition from their families and communities. These are tangible consequences that arise from competitive success and hold important meaning beyond the results themselves.

However, as mentioned earlier, the SEA Games are also a stage where results are judged very strictly. In Myanmar, there exists an extremely simple evaluation standard: “gold medal or everything else.” Background factors and processes are often not fully considered, and as a result, there were significant differences in how this achievement was evaluated and perceived.

That said, differing evaluation standards do not change the intrinsic value of the achievement itself. Myanmar judo remains in a developmental stage in terms of athlete population, international experience, and overall environment. Under such circumstances, achieving a team result cannot be explained by luck or coincidence alone—it

was made possible by daily accumulation of effort and growth as a team.

At the same time, it is also clear that this is not a stage at which we can afford to be satisfied. Reflecting on the matches and the tournament as a whole, there were many moments where differences in ability and experience compared to other countries became apparent. Alongside matches we were able to win, there were also matches that clearly revealed our challenges, reinforcing the need to accurately understand our current level.

For a coach, what matters is neither underestimating nor overestimating the result. The key is how to position this outcome as a “passing point” and how to connect it to the next stage. Because it was a success, we must calmly analyze why it succeeded, while also organizing why our limitations became visible.

Through this SEA Games, the level that Myanmar judo should aim for next has become much clearer. While achieving a result in the team event builds confidence, it also demonstrates that comprehensive strengthening—including preparation, environment, and organizational structure, not just competitive ability—is essential to aim for a higher level in the future.

Photo 4 Athletes and a Myanmar coach who won the bronze medal in Nage-no-Kata.

The athletes on the left and in the center are brothers, who worked together as a pair to achieve the bronze medal.



Photo5 Final results table of the judo competitions.

A table titled "JUDO MEDAL STANDINGS" for the 33rd SEA Games Thailand 2025. The table lists the top 8 countries based on their medal count. The data is as follows:

Rank	Country	Gold	Silver	Bronze
1	THAILAND	4	3	3
2	INDONESIA	4	2	1
3	PHILIPINES	2	3	2
4	VIETNAM	1	3	8
5	MALAYSIA	1	-	1
6	MYANMAR	-	1	3
7	SINGAPORE	-	-	3
8	LAOS	-	-	2

From 33rd SEA Games Thailand 2025 Official Site

## **Chapter 3: Why Was Preparation So Difficult?**

Preparation for the SEA Games 2025 was far from smooth. Looking only at the results makes this difficult to see, but behind them lay multiple challenges rooted in factors beyond competitive ability, as well as environmental and structural constraints. In this chapter, I will organize these issues from a structural perspective rather than attributing them to individuals.

One major factor was the extremely limited opportunities to participate in international competitions and overseas training camps. Due to worsening circumstances and various restrictions, planned trips and international tournament participation were often canceled or forced to change at the last minute. As a result, athletes entered this competition without sufficient experience under international standards.

Domestic strengthening efforts also faced constant constraints in terms of training environment, human resources, and access to information. Systems related to competition and athlete development had not been updated for long periods, and support structures and institutional frameworks that are taken for granted in Japan or leading countries were not fully in place. Consequently, the field was repeatedly forced into reactive responses, making it difficult to steadily advance long-term plans.

Photo 6: Judo uniforms drying in a semi-outdoor training facility with rain leakage.



In addition, during the preparation period, there were changes in management and operational structures. For example, athlete selection criteria were unilaterally altered, increasing the distance between decision-making at the federation level and the on-site staff. This affected information sharing and decision-making speed. I recognize this not as an issue of specific individuals, but as an organizational challenge stemming from unclear role divisions and responsibilities.

Differences in understanding regarding contracts and evaluation standards also made preparation more difficult. While competition results tended to be emphasized strongly, the processes and constraints leading up to those

results were not sufficiently shared. Under such conditions, it was not easy for the field to maintain a long-term perspective.

Even in these circumstances, we made every possible effort to prepare. However, international competitions are not decided by competitive ability alone. Experience, preparation time, and organizational management all play significant roles. The SEA Games once again confronted us with that reality.

That said, the fact that these challenges became clearly visible is not meaningless. By identifying why preparation did not proceed as planned and where the bottlenecks lay, the points that must be improved going forward have become more concrete. I believe this process of clarification itself serves as an important starting point for future strengthening and system-building.

Phot7 news about Myanmar situation

**TBS NEWS DIG** Powered by JNN

ニュース 深掘りDIG 深掘り特集 LIVE・動画 配信中 天気防災 地域

新着 国内 国際 経済 スポーツ 天気 エンタメ 地震・災害 話題・グルメ 募らし・マ

“1200万人以上が深刻な飢餓に直面”軍政下で内戦激化のミャンマー 国連が人道危機の悪化に警鐘…国際社会に支援呼びかけ



AFP

TBS TBSテレビ 国際 2025年12月12日(金) 14:48

軍事政権下で内戦が長期化しているミャンマーをめぐり、国連のWFP=世界食糧計画は、紛争の激化と避難民の増加で「1200万人以上が深刻な飢餓に直面する」と発表しました。ミャンマーでは、2021年の軍事クーデタ…

## Chapter 4: Three Years of Steady Progress Despite Everything

As described in the previous chapter, strengthening activities in Myanmar were carried out under many constraints and uncertainties. Not everything progressed according to plan. However, this does not mean that the past three years were a period of stagnation. Even under limited conditions, there were elements that were steadily built up.

First, Hiranuma Dojo was established as a base for athlete development, and it has since grown into an organization with multiple branches actively operating. Creating an environment where children can regularly practice judo and train consistently is far from commonplace in Myanmar. Step by step, we worked to build that foundation, which I believe represents a significant step forward.

Photo 8: Young athletes training at Hiranuma Dojo.



As a result of these development efforts, young judo athletes have begun winning medals at both domestic and international competitions, producing outcomes that connect directly to the next generation. Rather than focusing solely on short-term strengthening, initiatives with a long-term perspective are gradually taking shape.

In parallel, continuous efforts were made to improve the training environment. With the cooperation of JUDOs and Japanese expatriates stationed in Myanmar, large quantities of judo uniforms and tatami mats were donated from Japan. As facilities improved, athletes' awareness and the quality of daily training also changed, bringing practice closer to international competitive standards.

Photo 9: Transporting donated judo uniforms with the support of JUDOs and Japanese residents in Myanmar.



From the perspective of human exchange, several coaches were invited from Japan to Myanmar to conduct local instruction and joint training sessions. The involvement of external coaches provided new stimulation for both athletes and local coaches, broadening their perspectives. Furthermore, the realization of training trips to Japan offered athletes a valuable opportunity to experience international standards firsthand.

In addition, in cooperation with the Embassy of Japan in Myanmar, Hiranuma Dojo successfully organized the Junior Judo Japan Cup Myanmar. This tournament was not merely a competition, but an initiative aimed at restarting international judo exchange that had long been interrupted. With the support of many stakeholders, we were able to

Photo 10: Group photo from the Junior Judo Japan Cup Myanmar.



present one concrete model of grassroots-level international exchange through judo.

These initiatives did not all directly translate into SEA Games results. However, building foundations in athlete development, environment, and international exchange is indispensable from a long-term perspective. What we have done over these three years was preparation for the future—an investment toward what comes next. I believe that these accumulated efforts will lead to future results.

## **Chapter 5: How My Perspective as a Coach Changed Over These Three Years**

Looking back on my three years in Myanmar, I feel that my perspective and role changed more profoundly than my competitive achievements alone. Compared to my time coaching in Japan and Canada, it would not be an exaggeration to say that my approach to judo itself has transformed.

Initially, my thinking followed a relatively simple extension of coaching: conduct good training, improve technique, and connect that to results. In reality, however, there were far too many issues that existed before competition itself, and there were many moments when simply standing on the tatami as a coach was not enough to move things forward.

Over these three years, I learned that passion and intent alone are insufficient to develop people. To share ideas and visions, it is essential to put them into words, convert them into documents, and present them as concrete plans. Moreover, rather than carrying everything alone, it became necessary to delegate responsibilities, involve others, and move the whole system together.

During this period, I became increasingly conscious of my responsibility not only as a judo coach, but also as someone responsible for creating and maintaining an environment. I experienced firsthand how factors such as organization, systems, information flow, and evaluation directly affect results.

Viewing Japan from the outside also allowed me to newly appreciate the high level of completeness of Japan's sports systems and development environments. At the same time, I came to understand through experience that these systems are not self-evident, but are built upon countless accumulated efforts.

Knowing something and being able to act on it are not the same. Thinking, deciding, executing, and taking responsibility for the results—living in an environment that demanded this unity of knowledge and action significantly sharpened my values and judgment criteria.

I once heard that UNIQLO has a philosophy of deliberately assigning people work and responsibility two to three levels above their current capacity—what they call “letting someone wear big clothes.”

For me, these three years in Myanmar were precisely a time of continuously wearing those “big clothes.” It was not easy, but struggling, thinking, and acting within them shaped who I am today.

## Conclusion

The three years since coming to Myanmar were by no means easy. Unexpected events piled up, and there were many occasions when things did not go as planned. Sometimes plans were completely reset; at other times, what had been built up seemed to waver in an instant. As both a coach and a human being, I was repeatedly forced to make difficult decisions.

Even so, the time spent continuing to face judo in this country has been an irreplaceable experience for me. Through engaging with athletes, discussing with coaches, and confronting organizational and institutional barriers, I learned through experience that a coach’s role extends far beyond simply “making athletes win.”

The SEA Games 2025 were the stage where those three years took shape in one visible form. Winning the first-ever team medal was a clear success and a result that will remain on record. At the same time, that outcome also exposed many challenges and limitations. Standing while holding both success and unresolved issues is the current reality of Myanmar judo.

There are perspectives that can only be seen because results were achieved, and responsibilities that must be carried precisely because results were achieved. This achievement is not an endpoint, but merely an entrance to the next stage. How we interpret its meaning and connect it to what comes next is what will be questioned from here onward.

This record is neither a summary nor a conclusion. By organizing what has been accumulated and putting into words what was lacking, it is written as a passing point toward the future—not for looking back, but for moving forward. The story is not yet over.

Over these three years, I met people through judo, faced differences in culture and values, and at times stood between nations, continually thinking within the gap between results and reality. Both the successes and the lingering frustrations have shaped who I am today. Each of them will serve as a reference point for future decisions and actions.

I hope that this experience will hold some form of meaning not only for my own future path, but also for the future of Myanmar judo. Carrying the lessons and resolve gained here in my heart, I intend to continue facing judo sincerely—regardless of changes in position or place.

After three years, onward.

Not stopping our steps, but carrying what we have built, we take another step forward.

Photo 11: Coaching children's judo during a time when judo uniforms were not yet available.



#### References

1. 33rd SEA Games Thailand 2025 Official Site , <https://www.seagames2025.org/>
2. 2. TBS NEWS DIG powerd byJNN , “1200万人以上が深刻な飢餓に直面” 軍政下で内戦激化のミャンマー 国連が人道危機の悪化に警鐘…国際社会に支援呼びかけ, <https://newsdig.tbs.co.jp/articles/-/2344845,2025/12/18閲覧>
3. 認定特定非営利活動法人JUDOs ミャンマーより めんでん柔道記 No.4 <https://judos.jp/myanmar4/> , No.13 <https://judos.jp/myanmar13/> , No.16 <https://judos.jp/myanmar16/> , No.17 <https://judos.jp/myanmar17/> , no.21<https://judos.jp/myanmar21/>

## **Yamato Hiranuma**

Born in Hokkaido, Japan (1997). Head Coach of the Myanmar National Judo Team since 2023.

Graduated from Chuo University, Faculty of Commerce (Accounting). Former corporate judo athlete and member of the Hinomaru Kids Sports Association. Served as Assistant Coach for the Canadian National Judo Team before assuming his current role.