



Episode 299 – Jigoro Kano | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey everyone thanks for coming by this is [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com) episode 299 and today were going into our biggest ever profile episode, today were going to talk about the man that started rank and the man who started the very first modern martial art to go into the Olympics, talking about judo, and of course I'm talking about the legendary Jigoro Kano. If you're new to the show or my voice, you may not know who I am, I'm Jeremy Lesniak I'm the founder here whistlekick, I'm the host of martial arts radio and I get to research and talk about martial arts as part of my job. I have the best job in the world and I want to thank you for allowing me to have this job. If you want to check out the stuff that we make and the reason that we can spend the time on things like this show, you can head on over to whistlekick.com or Amazon, you can find our sparring gear our ever-growing line of apparel, training accessories, we make an offer you the traditional martial artist. I want to thank anyone out there who has supported us recently, whether through purchase or sharing an episode or leaving us review or any of the other many, many things that you can do that so many of you do do to help us out here at whistlekick. You can find the show notes for this episode including a full transcript at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. This is a good one you can check out especially if you're interested in names, I'm gonna to do my best with all the Japanese pronunciation, but my Japanese is not great, I'm trying alright. Give me a little bit of leeway on this okay?



Episode 299 – Jigoro Kano | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Alright, let's get into this. Every judo practitioner and a majority of martial artists have surely heard the name Kano Jigoro. The founder of judo now that's using the Japanese custom of placing the family name what we would call the last name first. If we were to follow Western convention he'd be JOGORO KANO. Throughout this article I will refer to them in Japanese custom and call him Kano Jigoro. Kano Jigoro was a Japanese innovator and educator who introduced the Dan ranking and the use of obis or belt to identify someone's rank or expertise in martial arts. These two innovations were later applied to other martial arts such as taekwondo, kung fu and a multitude of others. The Judo martial art became a success and it was the first Japanese martial art to be recognized internationally and subsequently became an Olympic sport in 1964. Kano was born on October 20, 1860 in Mikage, Japan. He is the third son of Kano Juwasaku. His family was famous for brewing sake and they produce the brands Hakushika, Hakutsuro and Kiko Masamune. His father being an adopted son, didn't want to continue in the family business instead he decided to work in a shipping line. Marashiba then met the boy Tomita Tonijiro in a muggy mountain during a business trip. Because he saw cleverness, deviousness in the boy, he brought Tomita to Tokyo. This boy then became Kano's follower in judo many years later. When Kano's mother died when he was nine years old, his father moved the family to Tokyo. Kano's father highly valued education so he enrolled Kano in private schools. Despite his frail body and a small height, he excelled academically. In 1873 Kano was enrolled in a private British school where he hoped to find someone who could teach him jujitsu because he was frequently bullied. However, he failed to find someone even asked Norai Basei, a former government knight and family friend and Katagiri Ryuji, their villas caretaker to teach in jujitsu but both of them declined. Moreover, Kano's father insisted that he should take his study seriously and should not waste his time practicing a vulgar and dangerous martial art like jujitsu. In 1877, Kano enrolled in the University of Tokyo and newly established University from the merging of Kaisei school and the Tokyo school of medicine. He entered the faculty of letters and became friends with Kato Takagi who later became the 14th prime minister of Japan. During that summer of the same year, while he was walking along the Ning Yo Cho Street, he saw a sign saying Yagi Tenosuki, or bone setter which kinda spark some interest. See that time, most bone setters also practiced jujitsu. Yagi's house was very simple and only had one room that served as both the consultation room and the bedroom. Nevertheless, Kano persuaded Yagi to teach in jujitsu. Yagi who was in his 50s was bewildered by Kano's request then Kano's explained that he really wanted to learn jujitsu to develop his frail body. Yagi was convinced with his reasoning really saw the passion in him and was delighted that Kano wanted to study the martial art. He told Kano that he was certified jujitsu from Tenjun Shinyaru, but he had no dojo and he'd already retired from teaching jujitsu. Fortunately, though Yagi, had a friend named Fukuda Hachinosuke who studied in the same school and it was to him that he recommended Kano. Fukuda accepted Kano as a student and practiced in his small Dojo. Kano practiced jujitsu everyday. There were times that trainings were canceled due to Fukuda's illness but that didn't stop kano from training. His follower tomita Sonijiro became Kano's partner in practicing jujitsu during these days. What motivated kano to learn jujitsu was one of the students brutally punched him for the simple reason that he didn't like Kano at that moment, he didn't retaliate because he knew he had no match for the attacker primarily because of his weak physique. So here we see even though Kano



Episode 299 – Jigoro Kano | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

started training he's not quite ready he still being bullied and this is an archetype story that goes back well over 100 years. The same stuff that so many people deal with now, was going on then.

The way Fukuda taught his students was more in practice than in theory. He would briefly explain the techniques and then let the students practice freely and learn through actual experience. Once the student became proficient with the techniques, Fukuda would only teach kata or movement patterns. It was very challenging because there were no special mats like the ones we have today but only ordinary straw mats that provided very little safety back then their training clothes had short sleeves and the trousers were quite short. It was inevitable to be scratched with these clothes on the straw mats as Kano trained vigorously. Because of this he plastered the wounds and used a strong-smelling poultice. He was teased by his schoolmates who called him sticking plaster kano, he didn't mind this but what made him anxious was his senior student named Fukushima Konkichi, went to the same dojo. See Fukushima weighed 90 kg, while Kano was only 50 kg. Fukushima is not only big and strong but he was also excellent at jujitsu. He sometimes replaced their masters as a substitute teacher. Now at first, Kano saw no means of defeating this guy. However, he took it as a challenge and he didn't stop thinking and researching, he researched European physical education, sumo wrestling techniques and European boxing and gymnastics. Researching back in these days was really difficult especially when you're looking at jumping languages but Kano was so enthusiastic and read more and more books in English until one day he finally found a technique that he thought could topple Fukushima. Kano being an analytical, person carefully watched the moments of Fukushima during one of their training sessions then he politely asked Fukushima to have a match with him. Kano started by keeping a distance from Fukushima about 6 feet pretty far out when you're talking about jujitsu, Fukushima asked Kano why he was doing this and Kano just said he was waiting for him. Fukushima got irritated so he took a step forward and quickly dove down on Kano. Kano immediately used his newly devised technique and Fukushima's body flew in the air, he fell so badly that he hurt his back. When he got up, he humbly asked Kano about this movement. Kano proudly said that he was considering calling it Kataguruma shoulder wheel which is now included in the traditional 40 throws of Judo. When US Pres. Ulysses S Grant visited Japan on August 5, 1879, Shiwazawa Aichi, a well-known businessman and philanthropist arranged a jujitsu demonstration in his summer residence in Asiyama. Kano is one of the people who was invited to this jujitsu demonstration. Fukuda Hachinosuki and Iso Mataemon Masatomo were also there as well as his best friend Godai Riyosaku. Kano and Godai performed Randori or freestyle practice. According to Kano, it was perhaps the best day of his life during his stay at the Fukuda dojo. Sadly, in that same month Fukuda's body gave up from illness and passed away at the age of 52. At that time there was no decision who would replace Fukuda as the master of the dojo. Since Kano was the only one who had good knowledge of both Randori and kata, he was asked by Fukuda's wife to serve as the new dojo master. It was basically impossible for Kano to decline Mrs. Fukuda's sincere request, so he accepted it eventually even though he knew he wasn't equipped to take such a huge responsibility and with the promotion, Mrs. Fukuda also gave him the dojos manuscripts. Kano's desire to improve his skills in jujitsu didn't stop when Fukuda passed away he enrolled in Tenjin Shinyo Ryu, a famous school jujitsu founded by Iso



Episode 299 – Jigoro Kano | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Mataemon Masatari. At that time the headmaster was Iso Masatomo who is 62 years old. Iso was a well-known expert in kata but not so much in randori. Iso appointed two of his best students named sato and muramatsu during the randori training sessions so kano was able to improve his randori skills. Because he had drastically improved the skills by training hard, not to mention his solid experience in the Fukuda dojo, he was eventually assigned to be an assistant instructor in Tenjin Shinyo ryu. There is also time when Kano had a chance to perform in randori with the students of yoshin ryu room one of the schools that emerged from tenjin shinyo ryu. He was amazed by the skills of the ocean practitioners particularly with tatsuka hikosuki. Kano then realized that his skills weren't enough to defeat a jujitsu practitioner as brilliant as tatsuka, so he trained smarter, not just harder. He did this by combining the knowledge of different Ryu or schools to come up with better techniques.

I'm gonna go off script for just a moment here because there's something I want to make sure everyone's hearing, everyone's understanding. We've got several examples now of where Kano approached a martial arts challenge intellectually. He didn't just go in and train hard, he didn't just get stronger. From his early days as an academic, as a good student, he recognize the value of his intellect as part of his martial arts training and that's something that I don't think a lot of people are willing to accept for themselves. Martial arts is not just the physical piece, we talk about that on the show martial arts is also mental and however you wanted to define that. The ability to look at martial arts through more than simply physical practice but also intellectual practice .at the very least comes up as an important element here in the story. Now back to the script I have. The master iso died in 1881. Iso had several ministries that Kano studied, he also consulted some masters of the old schools in Tokyo as he wanted to improve his jujitsu skills. Determined to increase his knowledge, he bought many jujitsu books from the bookshops that were sold at ridiculous prices. In the same year, Kano graduated from Tokyo University but pursued graduate school afterwards. He also got to know Ikabu Sunatoshi at Kitaro, who is around 48 the time. Kano weren't throwing techniques from Ikabu which he deemed better than what he learned from his previous schools. In January 1882, Kano got a part-time job as an instructor in Gakushin while he was still graduate school. A month after he established his own school which he called Kano Academy. Kano realized in just a few weeks that he needed more space, as the number of students grew so he rented rooms at a Buddhist temple called Ai Shoji where he also resided. Eventually the head priest of the temple told Kano to stop using the rooms as a dojo because the rooms had taken damage already. And on June 5, 1882 Kano founded the Kotokan judo in this temple. Kano finished his graduate school in July 1882 and he was hired as a full-time instructor Gakushin in August 1882. His first salary was ¥80 a month which was substantial at the time. However, he also needed to support the basic needs of his student servant Tomita and he needed to buy expensive foreign books for his studies. Therefore, he could not afford to build his own dojo with the money alone. So Kano got a part-time job from the Ministry of education by translating an English book in the Japanese. Kano spent many sleepless nights just to finish the translation he was paid one yen per page and used this money to build his own dojo with 12 tatami or mats and this was the very first Kotokan dojo. At gakushin, since the students were of in elite social status the teachers were forced to visit the students homes whenever



Episode 299 – Jigoro Kano | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

summoned to render extra service. Teachers were treated as servants. Kano didn't approve of this, so became a principal he was able to implement his ideas and methods that he acquired from the European and American models, he believes that teachers should command respect. In 1883 Ikobu issued a teaching license to Kano the very first that he received. Even though we are ready had a license, Kano found it difficult to find students at least at first because of his young age and his insufficient training facilities number 12 mats. Ikobu visited Kano in his classes and exchange knowledge and techniques. At first Kano was usually defeated by equable but eventually Kano improved his skills and defeated him more frequently. Kano told him that one should break the opponents posture first before applying the throw. And it was then that Ikobu told him, you're right I'm afraid I have nothing more to teach you. Ikobu bestowed all the books and manuscripts of the Kitoru to Kano shortly afterwards because he wanted Kano to succeed him. Kano had the utmost respect for ikobu and he retained some of the old techniques that are now called the ancient forms, Kushiki no kata, even after Ichabod died in 1888. The term Juno was originally coined by Torata Kan emon, the fifth headmaster of the kitoru. Kano revived the term in 1884 Which Means Gentle Way or way of softness, he also interpreted as the quote most efficient use of energy. The way Kano created judo was by combining the different techniques from ancient schools such as Chiba [00:15:41.46], Tenjin shinyo Ryu, Tota ryu, Sekuguchi Ryu and kito ryu. He explained in 1888 that he only preserved the few basic elements from these schools so it's just called kotokan judo. It does not have any origin of place unlike the others and that makes it unique. Judo was then introduced to public schools starting in 1906. The kotokan had a series of transfers as the number of students grew considerably. After the 12-mat dojo in 1882, they moved to a larger space with 60 mats in April 1890. Four years later they transferred again to a larger space in Tamazaka Cho, in November 1897 they moved to 207 Matt space then to a 314 met space in January 1898. More than three decades after that on March 21, 1934, the Kotokan transferred again to a larger space with 510 mats. Then in 1958, the Kotokan transferred to its largest by far 1200 Matt facility with eight stories. Now that is a dojo. In March 1922, Kano established the Kotokan cultural Association, kotokan bunkankai and its first meeting was held at Seokan hotel in Tokyo on April 5, 1922. Its first public lecture was held at the YMCA Hall and Kando, Tokyo. The Association's objective is to be contributory to the society through the principles of kotokan judo. As Kano taught the most basic principle of judo is "the most efficient use of energy where most efficient means to avoid waste and to uphold virtue and energy to both physical and mental power" he also mentioned that Judo was not merely martial art but it's principles can be applied to all aspects of human affairs.

Kano tirelessly promoted judo all his life the earned through his job as an educator. In January 1891 Kano accepted the offer of ministry of education as counselor. Though he didn't dream of really being one it's just something that kinda happen and just several months later in August of the same year he left the position to become a Dean at the fifth higher normal school which is now Kumamoto University. Kano married Takazoe Sumako in his early 30s and they had six daughters and three sons. Takazoe was the daughter of a former diplomat and Chinese literature scholar Takazoe Shinichiro. In January 1898 Kano worked again for the ministry of education, is the director of primary education. He left for Europe



Episode 299 – Jigoro Kano | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

in August 1899 to study for about a year and upon his return to Japan in 1901, he served as the president of Tokyo higher normal school until 1920. He also founded the Nata middle high school at Kobe Japan which later became one of the top schools because of its extremely difficult entrance examination. Kano was also a member of the international Olympic Committee the IOC for over 20 years. This started when he was requested by the Ministry of education to represent Japan in the 1912 Olympics. Aside from that he cofounded the Japan amateur sports Association and served as its first chairman. He was very active in the IOC he was a significant figure in promoting the Olympic sports among the young Japanese. Kano was also one of the organizers in the far eastern championship games held in Osaka in May 1917 and he represented Japan at the Antwerp Olympics in 1920. He was not active in the far eastern championship games in Osaka in May 1923 or in the 1924 Olympics in Paris but he was already active from the 1928 to the 36 Olympics were held in various countries. As Kano was one of the most respected figures in Japan with regards physical education and could be considered an authority in Japan's participation in the Olympics, he did not try to make Judo an Olympic sport. He said in his letter to Gunji Koizumi in 1936, this is a quote, "I've been asked by people of various sections as to the wisdom and the possibility of judo being introduced at the Olympic Games. My view on the matter at present is rather passive. If it be the desire of other member countries, I have no objection but I do not feel inclined to take any initiative. For one thing judo in reality is not a mere sport or game. I regard it as a principle of life art and science. In fact it is a means for personal cultural attainment. Only one of the forms of judo training the so-called randori can be classed as a form of sport. In addition the Olympic games are so strongly flavored with nationalism that is possible to be influenced by it and to develop contest judo is a retrograde form as jujitsu was before the kotokan was founded. Judo should be as free as art and science from external influences, political, national, racial, financial or any other organized interest and all things connected with it should be directed to its ultimate object the benefit of humanity." Kano's health started to deteriorate in 1934 as he suffered from kidney stones. Still, he managed to attend some important events in kotokan, and in the Olympics in the last Olympics that he attended was in Berlin in 1936. He died on May 3, 1938 in the middle of the sea in the liner, Hikawa Maru, during a business trip as a member of the IOC. Pneumonia was the cause of death officially listed, but there was an allegation that he was maybe poisoned or suffered from food poisoning but there's no evidence to support this. Before his death Kano promoted Mifune Kuyozo to 9th dan in 1937. Mifune was considered by many to be the greatest judo technician ever after Kano. Around three decades later judo was officially introduced in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. The greatest legacy of Kano was not actually the martial art itself but is idealism that change the manner of fighting in Japan and in this regard, he was compared to the Marquess of Queensbury of England. It was beautifully written by the journalist Mark Law in his book the pajama game: a journey into judo. Dr. Kano's kotokan rules for his version of jujitsu brought a new safer kind of fighting to Japan in the same way that the Queensbury rules introduced some two decades earlier in 1867 did for boxing in England. But the Marquess of Queensberry and Dr. Kano transform their sports making them cleaner and safer. One man took the grappling out of boxing the other took the boxing out of grappling. One worked with a padded fist the other with a padded floor. In the latter years of the 19th century, the martial histories of Eastern and



Episode 299 – Jigoro Kano | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Western civilization had reached a point at which two men at opposite ends of the globe produced within a few years of each other the rules which were to herald unarmed combat's own age of Enlightenment.

There is certainly a lot there in the history of Jigoro Kano, Kano Jigoro, Dr. Kano whatever you choose to call him. His contributions to the martial arts cannot be overstated. Here's a man who, as far as I'm concerned, ushered in the modern era of martial arts. The approach that so many of us look to the importance beyond the physical. For me, the intellectual element of martial arts so many things that I look to as important started with Kano. And this is where I'd like to hear from you, whether or not your general practitioner, I want to know your thoughts on this man. You can email me jeremy@whistlekick.com, you can make a comment on the show notes page whistlekickmartialartsradio.com or you can find us on social media @whistlekick. Always love hearing from listeners and if you have a suggestion for a future episode, whether that be a guest request or topic for a Thursday show, please fill out the form at the podcast website and we'll go ahead and see what we can do. I want to thank you for your time today, thank you for listening. Until next time train hard smile have a great day.