

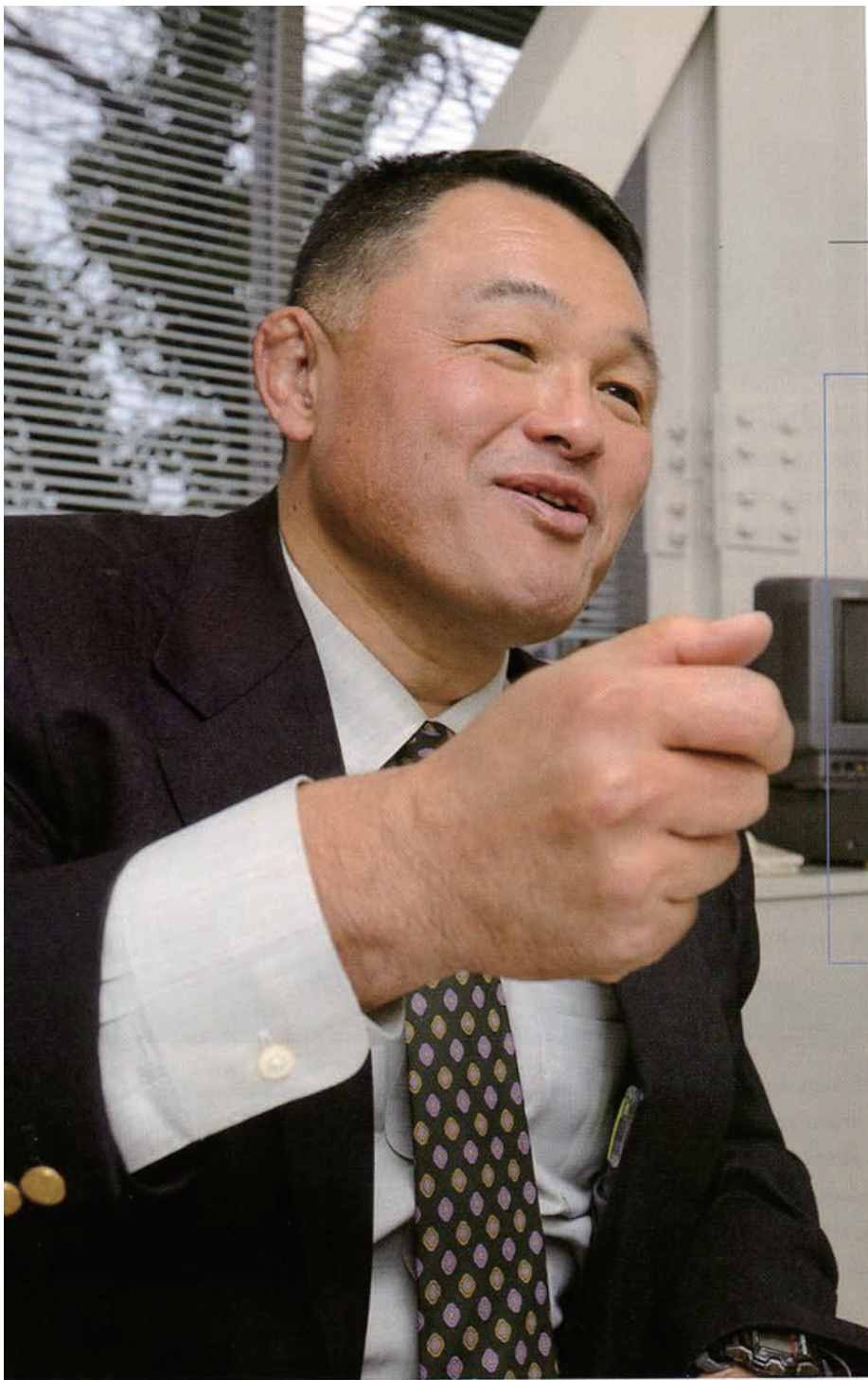
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Wide View

As a judo competitor, Yasuhiro Yamashita achieved many great feats, including winning a gold medal at the Los Angeles Olympics and recording a remarkable string of 203 wins without a loss. Now, while teaching at Tokai University, he is also working to promote youth education and international exchange through judo. Two MC employees talked with the celebrated athlete about his approach to judo as a competitor, his experiences as a leader and his objectives as a practitioner of judo.



Koichi Hara
Processed Food B Unit
Food (Products) Division



Atsuhiko Tanizaki
Senior Manager
Human Care & Media Division

Interviewers

Yasuhiro Yamashita

Professor at Tokai University

“You are a true practitioner of judo if you can incorporate its teachings into your daily life.”

Returning to judo's origins

Tanizaki: Judo has really become an international sport these days.

Yamashita: Yes, the International Judo Federation now has members from 199 countries and regions.

Tanizaki: Why do you think judo has spread so quickly?

Yamashita: Part of it is due to the tremendous efforts of judo's founder, Kano Jigoro. Toward the end of the 19th century, Master Kano established judo by combining elements from various styles of *jujutsu* (a traditional Japanese martial art). Even in his youth, Master Kano's focus extended beyond Japan. He was skilled in foreign languages and even wrote his diary in English. He sought opportunities to travel abroad and put on judo demonstrations, while continuing to spread his philosophy of judo, which was embodied by his two mottos, "Maximum Efficiency with Minimum Effort" and "Mutual Welfare and Benefit". Based on his belief in the educational value of sports, he supported the development of various sports, including track and field and swimming. Master Kano was also instrumental in promoting Japan's early involvement with the Olympics.

Hara: After becoming an Olympic sport, judo has quickly gained popularity around the world, but some people believe that judo has begun to stray from the ideals of its founder.

Yamashita: Yes, some people in the judo community share this view, but I wonder, is the current state of judo in Japan really so great? Are we really in a position to criticize how it is practiced elsewhere? There are many people abroad who are pursuing the true spirit of judo with remarkable dedication. So I think we must first look at ourselves and consider what we should be doing here in Japan. I believe this is the only way to influence the development of judo.

The Japan Judo Federation launched the Judo Renaissance in 2001, and through this plan, it has sought to educate people through judo by returning to the principles of Master Kano. Why did Master Kano choose the name "judo"? The "do" has special importance as it signifies "a way of life". The secret of judo is in "maximizing efficiency" and leveraging the strength of your opponent. It's about respecting your opponent and raising each other's abilities. If you are thrown or pinned, you stand up and resume your training. It's also important to incorporate these values into your daily life. This may mean giving up your seat to a senior citizen or helping someone in trouble. And when faced with failure, you bounce back and seek out a new objective, both for the benefit of yourself and for society. If you can incorporate this ethic into your daily life, then you are a true practitioner of judo.



Profile • Born in Kumamoto in 1957, Yasuhiro Yamashita earned a master's degree in physical education at Tokai University. In addition to taking the gold medal in the open category at the Los Angeles Olympics, Yamashita won the All-Japan Judo Championships nine years in a row and recorded a remarkable string of 203 wins without a defeat. He was awarded Japan's National Prize of Honor in 1984 and retired from competitive judo in 1985. He served as the head coach of Japan's national judo teams at the Atlanta and Sydney Olympics and also served as the Education and Coaching Director of the International Judo Federation. Now a professor in the physical education department at Tokai University, Yamashita also serves as the director of NPO Solidarity of International JUDO Education and the chair of the Kanagawa Prefectural Physical Education Association.

Tanizaki: So the "renaissance" is about getting back to the origins of judo. With today's tough economic environment, we are also looking to return to our roots as a general trading company.

Yamashita: Yes, I see the similarities. But even as we stress the need to return to the fundamentals in judo, I understand that athletes competing in the Olympics or the World Championships are naturally going to be concerned about finding ways to win. When I was involved in competitive judo, I also focused on winning, and as a competitor, you can't really afford to lose your passion for winning. So for people involved in competitive judo, I think it is not really a martial art so much as a sport that incorporates elements of martial arts.

Hara: I have practiced *kendo** for many years. In competitions, I am tempted to stray from the ideal movements of *kendo* as a martial art in order to quickly score points. I always feel torn by these contradictory impulses.

Yamashita: Personally, I regard competitive judo as being separate from true judo, and I think it's important to clarify through rules what elements are essential for judo to be judo. For example, after the Japanese team dominated the Athens Olympics, rival teams fought back by adopting irregular stances, grabbing for legs and employing other techniques that prevented Japanese competitors from practicing judo in the normal way. This sparked an outcry from judo experts worldwide. They said, "This is not judo; it is merely wrestling in judo uniforms. If judo continues down this path, it may well cease to exist." After this outpouring, the rules were changed and today competitors are not allowed to suddenly grab an opponent's trousers or to assume an abnormal stance.

Spreading the spirit of judo

Tanizaki: As a competitor, you always maintained proper form and sought to win matches outright by scoring full points.

Yamashita: I was striving for a seamless style of judo. I wanted to consistently capitalize on any opening given to me by my opponents. I never sought to perform eye-catching moves. Some competitors say they want to thrill the audience with their judo, but I don't really share this view. Personally, I don't think throwing your opponent in some spectacular way is as important as just giving it your all—that's the real key. Forgetting everything else and laying it all on the line—I think this kind of dedication is what really moves spectators.

I was also very conscious of my role as a representative of Japanese judo, especially when competing overseas.



Discussing the spirit of judo with students from across Asia



Photo by Shinichi Yamada/AFL0

At the 1985 All-Japan Judo Championships, grappling with Hitoshi Saito (right), in what would be Yasuhiro Yamashita's final contest in competitive judo

Naturally, I was very focused on winning, but winning was certainly not everything. Knowing that my actions would reflect on Japanese judo, I always tried to compete with honor and to maintain good form. I hope I appeared gracious and reflected some of the pride of Japan's samurai traditions.

Tanizaki: Your approach to judo reminds me of Shoji Komei ("Integrity and Fairness"), one of our Three Corporate Principles. While it's true these are very fundamental values, I think it's important to constantly question whether you are really living up to these ideals in your daily life.

Yamashita: A spirit of fair play is absolutely essential in any sport. I am the chair of the Kanagawa Prefectural Physical Education Association and we are working to prevent bullying

"Giving it your all—that's the key"

through sports. When the strong bully the weak or the many bully the few, this runs counter to the spirit of fair play. I'd like adults and children alike to consider how they can incorporate the spirit of play fair into their everyday lives.

Hara: I understand you are also focusing efforts on the activities of a non-profit organization (NPO).

Yamashita: Yes, there are many places around the world that do not have a good environment for practicing judo. For example, many areas do not even have proper uniforms. So our NPO gathers uniforms with the help of student volunteers across the country. It then supports students of judo around the world by providing uniforms and teaching materials, and by dispatching instructors. We've received letters from people who had been practicing judo in t-shirts and shorts, and they've told us how they discovered the true form of judo after receiving uniforms through our organization.

While promoting the spread of judo, I also hope to communicate the true nature of judo and Japanese culture to the world. Judo begins and ends with a bow; by teaching the spirit behind Japanese martial arts in this way, I think we can also promote greater understanding of Japanese culture worldwide.

**Kendo*: a Japanese martial art that resembles fencing



Giving advice on judo techniques to local instructors at the Japan Cultural Institute in Paris



At the opening ceremony of the China-Japan Friendship Judo Hall in Tsingtao, which was established with support from NPO Solidarity of International JUDO Education

Hara: So you are fostering international goodwill while helping others enjoy sports—that's really great!

Hone your appeal as an individual

Tanizaki: You mentioned how bowing is part of judo, but I'd like to ask your opinion about athletes who celebrate victories, such as by pumping their fists in the air. I teach karate to elementary school students, and in karate, you are penalized if you celebrate in this way. This seems to be harder for parents to understand than children. Just the other day, I was at a competition where the results were overturned after a penalty for celebrating, and this sparked a big uproar.

Yamashita: When parents come rushing over to complain, this really represents an opportunity—it gives you a chance to have a discussion about the true nature of karate and martial arts and how they can shape one's life. This is important, because you can't expect the children to fall in line unless you can first convince their parents.

In judo, competitors are not penalized for celebrating victories, but it is a controversial issue. Personally, I don't think we can condemn spontaneous expressions of joy after a victory. But I have to admit that I too raised my fist when I won gold at the Olympics.

That said, it is much better form to bow to your opponent first and then celebrate afterward. If you can control your emotions like this, then you'll be able to keep your cool as a regular

member of society too. So when competitors spontaneously celebrate a victory, I think it's best for judges to warn them and have them bow first.

Tanizaki: Since retiring from competitive judo, you've headed up various organizations so I'd like to ask what you feel it takes to be an effective leader.

Yamashita: I suppose it's mainly about honing your appeal as an individual so others will want to work with you and give you their best efforts. I believe that people can continue to grow throughout their lifetimes and that passionate individuals have the power to spark passion in the hearts of others. I feel the ideal situation is when each member of an organization can perform his or her role with real enthusiasm.

In sports, it's common for the mood to suddenly become tense when the instructor arrives. I really detest this. I'd like to be the kind of person that makes everyone perk up and shine whenever he appears, whether at the office or in the training hall.

Hara: I have truly been energized by your words. I think your comments will greatly inspire others who are striving to fulfill their roles as leaders, as well as those who are seeking to become tomorrow's leaders. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to talk with us today.



After the Interview

I was thrilled to have this chance to speak with one of the real heroes of my generation. When Mr. Yamashita talked about "laying everything on the line" as a judo competitor and about what it takes to be an effective leader, he spoke with the confidence that comes from having reached the apex of his field. Reflecting on my own life, I realized that I need to learn from Mr. Yamashita by being more disciplined and by consistently striving to give my very best efforts.

Atsuhiko Tanizaki, Senior Manager, Human Care & Media Division

I have practiced *kendo* since I was in elementary school, so it really resonated with me when Mr. Yamashita talked about the importance of incorporating the spirit of martial arts into your daily life and not just focusing on winning. I was also moved to hear that Mr. Yamashita, who has stood at the very pinnacle of international judo, is now seeking to get back to his origins by dedicating himself to practicing judo. The business environment we face today is growing harsher by the day, but I came away from this interview with new courage to concentrate on the basics and to focus all my energy on my daily work and on living life to the fullest.

Koichi Hara, Processed Food B Unit, Food (Products) Division