

JUDO FOR RUGBY

BY

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Using judo as a cross training method is not a new concept throughout the world, but over the last couple of years it has been adopted in Britain by teams such as Bath and Leicester Tigers, as well as the England Junior Academy, who brought judo Olympic silver medallist, Kate Howey, on board to work with their young squad.

In early 2006, the British Judo Association formed a new partnership with Leicester Tigers Rugby Club. The rugby giants were in no doubt that judo could improve the performance of their squads and they have since implemented the sport at many levels. Integral to the partnership is Wayne Lakin, a British Judo World Class Start Coach, who now works equally between rugby and judo.

Judo does not only benefit the elite. It can offer a great deal to young and amateur athletes as well as coaches. This is fundamentally because judo techniques provide basic skill movements, which are transferable onto the pitch.



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It is also believed that judo can assist with reducing the dropout rate within rugby. By introducing judo at a young age, a child is introduced to physical contact in a controlled manner. As children improve their confidence on the judo mat, they embrace the physical contact on the field. This helps the transition between non-contact (TAG) and full contact rugby – a period in which the greatest dropout occurs.



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Many people have a pre-conceived notion of what they believe judo to be - but many are well wide of the mark. Most people find that judo bears no resemblance to many of the martial arts it is so often associated with. It is never the aim to strike, hurt or injure opponents when playing judo – no kicking, punching or striking of any nature is allowed, but instead it is the aim, mentally and physically, to out-manoeuvre them.



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Judo was developed in Japan towards the end of the nineteenth century and has evolved from being a martial art into one of the world's most popular sports. Since its inclusion in the 1964 Olympic Games, it has progressed rapidly and is without doubt the world's most popular combat sport. Judo is, however, much more than a sport; it is also effective as an educational system, both physically and morally.

Physical co-ordination can be seen to develop dramatically from participation in the sport. Physical strength is improved as a direct result of trying to control and dictate the movement of the opponent and, as well as enhancing power, the athlete will improve flexibility. For the same reasons the balance and posture of the athlete will also be enhanced.

Judo players and rugby athletes need similar physical characteristics and skills, which include core stability, strength, explosive speed, the ability to grip and break grips, the ability to use an opponent's body weight to an advantage, the ability to fall safely, absorb contact safely and the ability to quickly put an opponent on the ground - to name just a few.

“There is a multitude of cross benefits between the two sports,” explains Wayne Lakin. “We have seen a marked improvement in the athletes we have been working with, particularly, tackling, falling and subsequent recovery to a standing position.”

Lakin believes that overall performance could improve further if young athletes could implement these skills at an earlier stage. A particularly important period is in the ‘learning to train’ stage of the Long Term Player Development model, where young athletes are in their optimal training window and most receptive to learning new skills, which will ultimately become second nature. “At Tigers, we are working with the Academy group as well as the elite performers, but there is no doubt that young, developing athletes would equally benefit,” he said.

This is echoed by Andy Key, Head of Rugby Development at Leicester Tigers, who explains, “We are trying to create a more rounded athlete at a younger age and trying to encourage children between thirteen and sixteen years old at our EPDCs (Elite Performance Development Centres) to be multi-functional and multi-skilled, which involves using other sports such as judo to complement rugby.”



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“The objective is that we ultimately have a more rounded elite athlete at the age of sixteen when we start to select them for our Academy. It’s all part of where we need to be and is another part of the jigsaw of us developing and continuing to be seen as the leading and most forward thinking academy in the country.”

Wayne Lakin believes that just one judo class a week could significantly assist all levels of rugby athlete, “All abilities and age groups would see a benefit from adding judo into their training programme. The classes are structured to include fitness, technique and randori, which is intensive one-on-one practice with a partner. I believe that adding just one class a week would bring an advantage to their game.”

The British Judo Association has clubs throughout the country. To find your nearest club visit www.britishjudo.org.uk or call 01509 631 670.



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