



Review Article

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Past, Present, and Future of Judo in South Africa: A Narrative Review

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Abstract

Background and Study Aim: Judo, a martial art originating from Japan, has a rich history and dynamic presence in South Africa. This narrative review aims to explore the evolution of Judo in South Africa, tracing its introduction, growth, challenges, and prospects.

Hypothesis/Purpose: The purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive overview of the development of Judo in South Africa, particularly in the context of its socio-political environment, and to identify factors that have influenced its growth and status.

Study Design: Narrative review.

Material and Methods: This review involved a detailed examination of historical records, organizational documents, and literature on the development of Judo in South Africa. Key sources included publications from the South African Judo Federation, governmental reports, and academic articles.

Results: Judo was introduced to South Africa by Japanese immigrants and enthusiasts in the mid-20th century, leading to the establishment of the South African Judo Federation in 1955. Despite significant developments during the early years, including the creation of training centers and competitive events, the apartheid era presented substantial challenges due to racial segregation policies. The post-apartheid era brought renewed vigor and inclusivity, with increased governmental and organizational support aimed at promoting diversity and access. Presently, Judo in South Africa enjoys robust organizational support, regular national and international competitions, and grassroots development initiatives, although challenges such as funding and access to quality training facilities remain.

Clinical Relevance: Understanding the historical and socio-political context of Judo in South Africa can inform strategies to overcome current challenges and promote the sport's growth.

What is already known on this topic: Judo has a significant history in South Africa, with its development influenced by both the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. Sport has experienced periods of both growth and challenge, particularly related to issues of inclusivity and access.

What this study adds: This study provides a detailed narrative of the evolution of Judo in South Africa, highlighting the impact of socio-political changes and identifying key areas for future development. It emphasizes the potential for significant growth through strategic focus on youth engagement, community programs, and enhanced training methodologies.

Keywords: Judo, South Africa, Martial Arts, Judo South Africa (JSA), Apartheid

Introduction

Judo, a modern martial art and Olympic sport rooted in the ancient traditions of Japanese jujutsu, was founded by *Jigoro Kano* in 1882 [1]. Its philosophy emphasizes not only physical prowess

but also mental discipline and moral education, encapsulated in its principles of “maximum efficiency with minimum effort” and “mutual welfare and benefit” [2]. Since its inception, Judo has spread



globally, becoming a popular and respected sport in many countries, including South Africa [3]. Judo has more than 200 National Olympic Committees globally and is one of the most widespread Olympic sports in history [4]. The introduction of Judo to South Africa can be traced back to the mid-20th century, largely due to the efforts of Japanese immigrants and enthusiasts who sought to promote the sport within their new communities [5]. The establishment of the South African Amateur Judo Association (SAAJA) in 1955 marked a significant milestone, providing a formal structure for the sport's development and enabling more organized training and competition [6]. During the apartheid era, sports in South Africa, including Judo, were deeply affected by the country's racial segregation policies [7]. These policies hindered the inclusive growth of the sport, as facilities and opportunities were disproportionately allocated. Despite these challenges, passionate practitioners from diverse racial backgrounds continued to engage with sport, including judo, often in informal settings, maintaining the sport's presence and fostering a spirit of resilience and unity [8].

The post-apartheid period ushered in a new era for Judo in South Africa, characterized by increased inclusivity and support from both governmental and non-governmental organizations [9]. Efforts to promote diversity and access have been instrumental in revitalizing the sport, leading to greater participation and success on international stages [10]. Today, Judo in South Africa enjoys a structured framework with regular national competitions, dedicated training facilities, and initiatives aimed at grassroots development [11]. However, the sport still faces several challenges, including insufficient funding, limited access to quality training facilities, and the need for more extensive outreach programs, particularly in underprivileged areas [12]. Addressing these issues is crucial for the sustained growth and development of Judo in South Africa [11]. This narrative review aims to explore the past, present, and future of Judo in South Africa, highlighting its historical context, current state, and potential for future growth. By understanding the evolution of Judo within the unique socio-political landscape of South Africa, this review seeks to provide insights into the sport's enduring significance and potential trajectory.

Historical Background

Judo's journey in South Africa is a compelling narrative that intertwines with the nation's broader socio-political landscape. This section delves into the key historical milestones that have shaped the sport's development from its introduction to the present day.

Judo South Africa

The roots of Judo in South Africa can be traced back to the mid-20th century when Japanese immigrants and martial arts enthusiasts brought the sport to the country [13]. Alec Butcher, an immigrant from Britain, formed part of these pioneers, alongside Jack Robinson, these early pioneers, driven by a passion for Judo and its principles, began practicing and teaching the sport within their communities [6]. The sport of judo established itself as a national federation. The exchange of cultural practices played a significant role in the initial spread judo established Judo, with local South Af-

ricans gradually becoming involved and intrigued by this new martial art [6].

Establishment of Judo Federation in South Africa

A significant milestone in the history of Judo in South Africa was the establishment of the South African Amateur Judo Association (SAAJA) in 1955 [6]. The formation of this governing body provided a formal structure for the sport, facilitating organized training, competitions, and the establishment of dojos (training centers) across the country. The formation of SAAJA gave rise to the establishment of a rival group, led by Jack Robinson, the South African National Amateur Judo Association (SANAJA), sometimes called South African National Amateur Judo and Jujitsu Association [6]. Both organizations played a crucial role in promoting Judo, standardizing training methods, and fostering a sense of community among practitioners. In the 1970's and 1980's, the two organizations merged to form South African Judo Union. The federation's efforts laid the foundation for the sport's growth and development in subsequent decades. In 1992, SAJU merged with a black judo federation called South African Judo Association (SAJA) to form Judo South Africa, the current and only recognised national judo structure running judo in the country (Sport and Recreation South Africa, 2021).

Judo During the Apartheid Era

The apartheid era, characterized by institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination, posed significant challenges for the development of sports in South Africa, including Judo [14]. The apartheid policies restricted access to sporting facilities and opportunities based on race, severely limiting the inclusive growth of Judo. Despite these obstacles, the resilience and dedication of practitioners from all racial backgrounds kept the spirit of Judo alive [15]. Many judokas trained in isolated or informal settings, maintaining their commitment to the sport and its values of discipline, respect, and perseverance [8]. During this period, the South African Judo Federation faced the difficult task of navigating the complex socio-political environment [16]. While some progress was made, the full potential of Judo in South Africa remained constrained by the broader limitations imposed by apartheid. Nevertheless, the perseverance of the Judo community during these challenging times laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and dynamic future.

Post-Apartheid Revival and Growth

The end of apartheid in the early 1990s marked a new chapter for Judo in South Africa. The post-apartheid era brought increased governmental and organizational support for sports, emphasizing inclusivity and access. Efforts to promote diversity within Judo led to a revitalization of the sport, with a surge in participation from previously marginalized communities. The establishment of more training facilities and the organization of national competitions provided new opportunities for judokas to develop their skills and gain recognition [12,14]. This period also saw South African judokas making their mark on the international stage. Athletes from the country began to compete more frequently in international competitions, achieving notable successes and enhancing South Africa's

reputation in the global Judo community. The support from both governmental bodies and private sponsors played a crucial role in this resurgence, helping to elevate the standard of Judo in South Africa [12]. The historical trajectory of Judo in South Africa is a testament to the sport's resilience and adaptability. From its introduction by passionate pioneers to its formal establishment and the challenges of the apartheid era, Judo has grown into a prominent and respected sport. The post-apartheid revival has set the stage for a promising future, driven by a commitment to inclusivity, development, and excellence. Understanding this historical background provides valuable insights into the current state and future potential of Judo in South Africa [14].

Present State of Judo in South Africa

Judo in South Africa today is marked by a blend of seasoned practitioners and emerging talents, supported by a structured organizational framework and a series of ongoing initiatives aimed at promoting the sport across diverse communities. This section examines the current organizational structure, competitive landscape, grassroots development efforts, and the challenges that persist in the present context [12].

Organizational Structure and Governance

Judo South Africa (JSA) remains the central governing body for Judo in South Africa, responsible for overseeing the sport's development, organizing competitions, and ensuring adherence to international standards [17]. The JSA is affiliated with the International Judo Federation (International Judo Federation) and the African Judo Union (AJU), which helps align South African Judo with global practices and facilitates international participation [6]. The federation's governance structure includes regional affiliates, which play a crucial role in implementing national policies and promoting Judo at the local level.

National and International Competitions

South Africa hosts a variety of national judo competitions, including the South African Judo Championships and various regional tournaments. These events provide platforms for judokas to showcase their skills and gain competitive experience. Additionally, South African judokas participate in international competitions, including the African Judo Championships and the World Judo Championships. The participation in these events has led to notable successes, with South African athletes earning medals and recognition, which in turn helps to raise the profile of Judo in the country [18].

Grassroots Development and Training Facilities

Grassroots development is a key focus for the JSA, with numerous programs aimed at introducing Judo to young people and underrepresented communities. Initiatives such as school-based Judo programs, community outreach projects, and partnerships with local sports organizations are integral to these efforts. These programs are designed to promote physical fitness, discipline, and self-confidence among participants, while also identifying and nurturing young talent [19]. Training facilities in South Africa range

from well-equipped dojos in urban centers to more modest setups in rural areas. The JSA has been working to improve the quality and accessibility of these facilities, recognizing that adequate training environments are essential for the development of high-level athletes. However, disparities in resources and access remain a challenge, particularly in underserved regions [20].

Current Challenges

Despite the progress and successes, Judo in South Africa faces several ongoing challenges. Funding is a significant issue, with limited financial support affecting the ability to maintain and upgrade training facilities, provide adequate equipment, and support athletes in their competitive endeavors. Additionally, there is a need for more qualified coaches and referees to ensure that training and competitions are conducted at the highest standards [13]. Access to quality training facilities is another critical challenge, especially in rural and underprivileged areas. Efforts to expand the reach of Judo through grassroots programs are often hindered by logistical and financial constraints. Furthermore, while there has been progress in promoting inclusivity, more work is needed to ensure that Judo is accessible to all segments of the population, regardless of socio-economic background [19]. The present state of Judo in South Africa reflects a sport that is evolving and growing, buoyed by a dedicated organizational structure and a passionate community of practitioners. While there are significant achievements and promising initiatives, addressing the persistent challenges of funding, accessibility, and inclusivity is crucial for the sustained growth and development of Judo in South Africa. By building on its current strengths and tackling these issues, Judo in South Africa can continue to thrive and contribute to the physical and social well-being of its participants.

Future Prospects of Judo in South Africa

The future of Judo in South Africa holds significant promise, driven by strategic initiatives aimed at addressing current challenges and leveraging opportunities for growth. This section explores key areas such as strategic planning, youth engagement, community programs, enhanced training methodologies, and the potential for international success.

Strategic Plans for Growth

Judo South Africa (JSA) is focusing on strategic plans to foster the growth and development of Judo across the country [22]. These plans include increasing funding through government grants, corporate sponsorships, and partnerships with international Judo bodies [22]. By securing more financial resources, the JSA aims to improve infrastructure, support athletes, and enhance the overall quality of Judo training and competitions in South Africa [6].

Youth Engagement and Community Programs

Judo South Africa membership is largely constituted by youth, it therefore imperative to engage the youth for the future of Judo in South Africa [12]. The JSA has been implementing various initiatives to attract young participants, including school-based Judo

programs, community outreach activities, and youth tournaments (JSA website, n.d). These programs are designed to introduce children to sport, promote physical fitness, and instil values such as discipline, respect, and perseverance. By focusing on youth engagement, the JSA hopes to build a strong foundation of young judokas who can grow and excel in the sport [2].

Enhancing Training Methodologies and Facilities

Improving training methodologies and facilities is crucial for the development of high-level athletes [1]. JSA is investing in coach education and development programs to ensure that coaches are well-equipped with the latest training techniques and knowledge. Additionally, efforts are being made to upgrade existing training facilities and establish new ones in underprivileged areas. Access to state-of-the-art training environments will enable judokas to train more effectively and compete at higher levels [19].

Potential for International Success

South African judokas have already made their mark on the international stage, but there is potential for even greater success [21]. By providing athletes with better training, support, and competitive opportunities, the JSA aims to increase the number of South African judokas who can compete and win at international events such as the World Judo Championships and the Olympic Games. Achieving international success will not only boost the profile of Judo in South Africa but also inspire more people to take up the sport [18,24].

Conclusion

The prospects of Judo in South Africa are bright, with strategic plans and initiatives in place to address current challenges and promote growth. By focusing on youth engagement, enhancing training methodologies, improving facilities, and aiming for international success, the South African Judo Federation is working towards creating a thriving Judo community. These efforts will not only elevate the standard of Judo in South Africa but also contribute to the sport's role in promoting physical and social well-being across the nation. Judo in South Africa has a rich history marked by resilience, growth, and a commitment to the sport's core values of discipline, respect, and mutual benefit. From its introduction by Japanese immigrants in the mid-20th century to its formal establishment through the South African National Amateur Judo Federation in 1955, Judo has navigated significant challenges, particularly during the apartheid era. Despite the constraints of segregation, dedicated practitioners kept the sport alive, setting the stage for a more inclusive and vibrant future. In the post-apartheid era, Judo has experienced a revival characterized by increased inclusivity, support from governmental and non-governmental organizations, and success on the international stage [22-24].

The present state of Judo in South Africa reflects a well-organized sport with a robust governance structure, regular national and international competitions, and ongoing grassroots development initiatives. However, challenges such as funding constraints, limited access to quality training facilities, and the need for more

qualified coaches and referees persist. Looking ahead, the future of Judo in South Africa appears promising. Strategic plans focusing on securing more funding, enhancing training methodologies, and improving facilities are essential for sustaining growth. Youth engagement and community programs are pivotal in nurturing the next generation of judokas, while efforts to achieve greater international success will further elevate the sport's profile. By addressing these challenges and capitalizing on opportunities, Judo in South Africa can continue to thrive and contribute significantly to the physical and social well-being of its participants. The sport's journey, marked by its adaptability and commitment to inclusivity, underscores the potential for Judo to play a transformative role in South African society, fostering a new generation of athletes who embody the values of perseverance, respect, and mutual welfare.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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