

Profile for Stuart Appleby

I started my Judo career whilst at school, as a relative latecomer at age 14. Because I lived near to it, I started going to the club in Colchester. When I left school at age 16 and started both a job and a part time college course, I thought that I should concentrate on my studies and professional activities, so stopped doing Judo for 10 years.

Having returned to the sport, I now realise that I stopped at a critical time; those 10 years would have been vital for my development both as a person and as a sportsman, and I would encourage others to continue with their sport, whatever it might be. My idea of concentrating on studying was laudable, but I now know that you can learn as much by doing something else as you can by being so focused on college and work. Having a variety of interests can bring you to each one fresher than if you have just a few, also of course you gain wider experience.

After 9 years of no judo and no sport, I started to realise that I should do something. I was working in France at the time and for some reason, perhaps because I wandered past the club in Antibes, I was reminded about Judo. Shortly thereafter I returned to England and found a job in Sheffield. Once I had found somewhere to live I made enquiries and found that there was a Judo club in the city. I tracked the club down and was a member there for the next 5½ years. Whilst at Sheffield Judo club I met some interesting people, some of whom have resurfaced in later incarnations. As a club, we mounted some foreign expeditions; because we had a member who had a relative in Northern Ireland, we went to Belfast, and walked around places as tourists, whilst in the next street there were armoured Landrovers and gun wielding soldiers. Another trip was to Barcelona for the Olympics, another was to Poland, where we had some difficulty making the locals understand that we wanted to practise Judo; we found a club in Warsaw where the head coach was an Olympic medallist from the 1970's. The other trip I made with them was to Israel, apart from the odd misadventure getting there, we had the great fortune to find out about the Palestinian Judo club in Jerusalem. We practised there one evening and saw the sights of the town during the day. The next day we went to the tourist office and asked them about Judo clubs in the town, they only told us about the Israeli one (an interesting comment on Israeli/Palestinian relationships). We went to the Israeli club and found by complete chance that we had turned up on an evening when a Russian expert was giving a master-class. In 1994 I had the chance of going to New York for a fortnight, inspired by the Sheffield Club foreign trips I took my suit and found a couple of clubs to practise at; interestingly (or not) at a subsequent competition I met a member from one of the New York clubs, so we realised there is a small Judo world. Also in 1994 my work in Sheffield dried up so I had the opportunity to go elsewhere. I had a couple of months working in Devon, found two clubs nearby, and then tidied things up and left Sheffield and the UK.

Being made redundant was neither a shock nor disappointing, I looked upon it as a gift. I had wanted to go to Hong Kong while it was still part of the empire and late 1995 was as good a time as any to go. I had done some preparation, but at the end of the day, I had no job, no accommodation, no friends or contacts and not much money. I arrived on the Wednesday and found somewhere to stay, I then began to go about finding a job, simultaneously I made enquiries about Judo clubs and found one on Hong Kong Island practised on Friday evening. Naturally, I turned up that first Friday and found that I was the only white man there. It was and still is a wonderful club, I was very happy there for the three years I spent in Hong Kong; I was welcomed into

the club and came to view them as my 'family'. I have been back since I left and would encourage anyone to pay them a visit. During my time in HK I travelled around south-east Asia and generally had a suit we me. I found judo clubs in the towns I visited in Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia. Whilst in Hong Kong I attained my first dan black belt – a very proud moment. I flew home on one trip and had to spend a few days in Moscow, as you'd expect I tracked down a club at the university. The Hong Kong club is quite competitive, the coaches are of a high standard (national level players) and often we would enter local competitions. I know that some of my opponents were alarmed to have to fight a white man, even so I did manage to win a few trophies. All good things have to come to an end and after three years my work dried up again, so I came back to England – overland the whole way; this gave me the chance to find a club in China to practise at, as well as renewing my acquaintances at Moscow University and finding a club in St. Petersburg.

I returned to the Ipswich area and since 1999 have been practising at both Ipswich and Colchester on a regular basis. During my time in Asia I was not aware of Veteran competitions (and was not eligible anyway), since being here I have begun to take part in age and weight banded events and have competed at local, national, multi-national and world events. I am proud to say that I have represented my country on the world stage, and would like to think that I will do so again.

There is more to Judo than competitions, although they are good markers of areas of where we need to improve our skills. Recently I have started to help more on the coaching front, now being a club coach. I am also an area referee, this means that on some events I have one of the best views in the building of the competitions, the flip side is that I have to make decisions as to who has won and whether to throw was in for scoring purposes.

Judo is a great sport, we can participate at various levels and whilst you are injury free it is possible to maintain an active involvement for many years. I would encourage anybody to give the sport a try; Judo is large enough to accommodate anyone, irrespective of age, gender or fitness, you don't even need great strength, technique is more important.

See you on the mat sometime!