

## The Psychological Qualities of the Judo Referee

(Adapted from WEINBERG: "Psychology of Refereeing" Chapter 1)

### **The Challenge for the Judo Referee**

The good Judo Referee will be mindful that the result of any contest should always be decided by the skills and tactics of the competitors. Good refereeing will impact positively upon this, supplementing and rewarding the abilities of the competitors. However, substandard refereeing will impact negatively on this, detracting and interrupting the abilities of the competitors. Ultimately, substandard refereeing causes frustration for the competitors, the coaches and the spectators. Poor decisions or lack of control, by the Referee may lead to criticism and complaint from these people (competitors, coaches, and even spectators). In contrast, very few people are even aware of the Referee when the contest is officiated correctly and confidently.

### **The Function of the Judo Referee**

The main function of the Judo Referee can be succinctly summarized by the following four responsibilities:

1. To ensure that the contest is officiated in accordance with the established rules and regulations
2. To intervene as little as possible and only when necessary
3. To establish and maintain a good control of the contest
4. To demonstrate consistency and impartiality towards the players

### **Physical and Psychological Demands**

Research indicates that there is a close relationship between the psychological skills and the physical skills of Referees. Hence, whilst the success or failure of a Referee will be influenced by his/her physical abilities: positioning, posture, mobility, hand-signals; success or failure of a Referee will also be influenced by his/her psychological attributes: confidence, concentration, control. Once again, based upon research, experienced Referees in a variety of sports have identified that a good command of psychological skills can contribute up to 70% of a Referee's success.

It is a common misconception that psychological skills are innate: the Referee is either 'born with them', or NOT 'born with them' – that psychological skills are either 'natural', or 'unattainable'. However, research evidence shows that psychological skills can be practised and developed, just as physical ones can.

## *So... What are these important Psychological skills and how does the good Judo Referee acquire and develop them?*

### **Consistency**

Players, coaches, and spectators expect consistent and predictable standards and application from Judo Referees. The assessment and decisions of the good Judo Referee should be the same in similar situations, and applied with impartiality towards both players. The good Judo Referee should have a thorough knowledge of the current (IJF) refereeing rules and interpretations. Whilst situations and circumstances will frequently change during the contest, the same rules and interpretations should be consistently applied throughout.

### **Communication**

Communication is the quality of being able to engage effectively with 'others' (players and coaches) during the contest. This encompasses both verbal and non-verbal communication. Whilst the good Judo Referee isn't seeking to 'win a popularity contest', alienating players and/or coaches is never a good strategy!

Good communication incorporates the following:

- a) Clear and consistent language and tone
- b) Assertive but not aggressive posture and facial expressions

The application of these good communications skills will, usually, increase cooperation and respect from the player and coach, and reduce the likelihood of argument or dispute regarding refereeing decisions.

The good Judo Referee should always aim to communicate with courtesy and respect, whilst not allowing this to be misinterpreted as becoming too 'friendly' and (potentially) leading to questions or concerns about favouritism.

### **Decisive Thinking**

The decisions of the good Judo Referee should be made as quickly as possible after the action. Whilst it is always important to gain a good 'picture' of the visual data (what happened), and whilst rushing the decision may increase the likelihood of error, hesitating for too long gives both the players and the coaches the impression of uncertainty, and is likely to increase the potential for criticism and complaint. A clear and confident decision gives the impression that the Judo Referee is certain about what he/she has seen, and helps to reinforce that decision.

### **Emotional Stability**

Competition judo often creates an emotional and engaging environment, as the action moves along quickly and is constantly changing. It is, therefore, not surprising that emotions frequently run high for players, coaches and spectators. The good Judo Referee will remain calm and confident, regardless of what is happening on or off the mat area. Although it is not possible to control the emotions of others, the good Judo Referee will aim to control his/her own emotions without being influenced by the situation or circumstance.

This idea of being able to remain emotionally stable and relaxed is extremely important for Judo Referees. Many inconsistencies in the course of the contest are often connected, directly or indirectly, with emotional fluctuations (intrusive thoughts or distracting feelings) of the Referee.

Another important aspect of emotional stability is not being frightened of making (honest) mistakes of interpretation. The good Judo Referee will not allow the possible negative consequences of any (honest) mistake to interfere with, or impinge upon, the overall focus on refereeing.

### **Confidence**

The good Judo Referee will have a balanced sense of self-confidence in their ability and suitability as a Referee. The Judo Referee who has confidence in himself/herself is less likely to lose control of the contest, even when under increased pressure. The Judo Referee who remains calm and confident whilst asserting his/her authority, regardless of the situation or circumstance, often reduces the potential for 'minor' incidents escalating.

Being confident does not mean the absence of doubt or uncertainty, but it does mean that the good Judo Referee does not allow these doubts or uncertainties to intrude upon, and undermine, the effectiveness of their overall performance. The ability to not worry about events that are beyond their control, but to remain calm and confident in their overall performance is an essential quality in gaining and maintaining confidence.

### **Experience**

Effective Judo refereeing, as stated previously, requires a thorough knowledge of the current (IJF) refereeing rules and interpretations. Once this knowledge has been acquired, practical experience in applying these rules and interpretations on a regular basis will enhance the ability of the good Judo Referee to function with more spontaneity and autonomy in the various contest situations that arise, thereby reducing the time required to 'process' and interpret the visual data (what happened), and formulate an accurate decision.

The good Judo Referee is able to give more attention and focus to what is happening, and is less likely to be distracted by extraneous thoughts or external influences. Experience is an essential and central element in maintaining the overall refereeing performance.

### **Motivation**

The good Judo Referee should be enthusiastic and passionate about their refereeing responsibilities and opportunities. The ongoing commitment, dedication, and perseverance required to maintain a high standard of refereeing are clearly linked to the overall motivation of the Referee to continue to progress and improve. The Referee who begins to lose his/her motivation to officiate will soon lose the commitment towards this hard work and perseverance required of him/her. This sense of motivation to Referee is closely connected to a positive mental attitude as an essential aspect of his/her psychological preparation for refereeing.

## Reflective Analysis

Whilst over-analysis of refereeing performance (which is our human nature) can often result in an over-emphasis on negatives ('What did I get wrong?'), reflective analysis of performance is a useful attribute for the good Judo Referee. A balanced reflective analysis should include considering the positive aspects, as well as identifying situations that didn't work so well: 'What did I do well?' and 'Why did it go well?' Plus: 'When didn't it go as well?' and 'What could I do better next time?' Addressing these (or similar questions) will assist the good Judo Referee to arrive at a balanced reflection of their overall performance, reinforcing the positive aspects and developing appropriate strategies for the future.

Effective reflective analysis should include both physical aspects: positioning, posture, mobility, hand-signals – as well as psychological aspects: confidence, concentration, control. Seeking input from another respected Judo Referee may be a valuable adjunct to this reflective analysis.

**JA Referee Committee**  
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