

The Training Session

By Amos Gil'ad

When planning a training session, two aspects have to be dealt with:

1. The **structure** of the session
2. The **content** of the session

The essence of all coaching is improving the state of the trainees from its present, “initial” state to some more advanced (hopefully better) state. Both the initial state and the state aimed for bear on what the session’s structure and content should be. Of course, there is more than one way as “many roads lead to Rome”, but between those roads there are patches of rough ground, which could delay the voyage, and even traps and pitfalls which might set you back, so that instead of approaching the sought-for state, you actually get farther away. What follows are guidelines, intended to enable you to choose the road best for you, your trainees and your objectives.

The Structure

First, we need to set down the duration of the session. This would be between 45 minutes and 2 hours. Less than 45 minutes would be inefficient: Too little time devoted to content versus the time needed to get there, organize the dojo and/or mat, change, opening ceremony, warm up, roll call, and at the end cool down, finishing ceremony and finally, getting back home. More than 2 hours would mean that the intensity of training would be too low, and too much fatigue caused.

Children should have sessions of 50-60 minutes duration, to keep their interest up. By the time they are 14 years old, 90-120 minutes are OK. Remember: there is an inverse relation between duration and intensity: Intense sessions should be short, long sessions should be of low/medium intensity.

We usually regard the session as consisting of an opening, main and concluding part. I shall deal with the main part last.

The Opening Part:

The opening part consists of the opening ceremony:

- Lining up, seiza, bow (to mark a dividing line between everyday life and training)
- Some initial words of the coach (to tell the trainees what we’re going to do and why) and of warming up.

The “classical” way of warming up starts with some jogging (to get heart rate and arousal level up), then some fast and short stretching, proceeding to moves similar to what we are going to do in Judo; generally, the warm up should proceed from low to medium intensity and from general to specific motions. This should take some 15-20 minutes. Years ago, at a coaching seminar, Anton Geesink showed us a different way: He wanted to do away with warm up altogether and start right away *with newaza randori*: The idea being to use more of the session’s time for Judo proper. I tried it, and modified it by adding some stretching at the beginning (mainly, rotating the head) for a minute or so, and then proceeding to groundwork. This is nowadays my regular way of starting a session: it saves some 15 minutes, which for a 90-minute session means 17% more efficiency! I revert to the “classical” warm up only if I intend to devote the session to hard randori (mainly tachiwaza), for example, when being a short time before an important competition.

By the end of a “classical” warm up, the heart rate should be 130-140; after newaza randori, it will be slightly higher: 150 would be typical.

The Closing Part:

Many coaches, otherwise knowledgeable and efficient, overlook and neglect this part of the training session. There are 3 purposes for the closing part to fulfill:

First, it should (obviously) mark the dividing line between Judo training and ordinary life – just as the opening ceremony did. Second, the coach should review what has been done and *tie it in with what is to be done next time*.

These two purposes are fulfilled by a proper closing ceremony, with a line-up, seiza, coach's address, perhaps mokuso and final bow. But before the closing ceremony comes the *cool-down*.

There are several (not so well-known) physiological and psychological reasons for a cool-down. It is beyond the scope of this article to elaborate on them. Suffice it to say that recuperation is enhanced and speeded up if we :

- Reduce the arousal level
- Reduce the level of lactate

This is the effect of a proper cool-down.

Some light games, a light jog around the mat followed by a short walk, slow and easy stretching are usually sufficient for the first purpose (reduction of arousal). If the main part had some hard, contest-style randori, the trainees will have accumulated lactate in the working muscles. If we exercise those muscles again, but at low intensity, the contract-relax cycle will pump the local lactate accumulation out of the working muscles into the general blood pool, and the energy needed will be supplied by a breakdown of the lactic acid. Therefore, after a session of hard randori I recommend: do uchikomi on the move, going from one end of the mat to the other, jogging back and continuing uchikomi, with one partner being tori for 4 or 5 minutes, and then change roles. During this uchikomi, the partners should be able to talk. This is most important: If the effort is low enough to make conversation possible, it is aerobic and lactate will be eliminated; if the effort is such as to preclude talking, it is anaerobic and lactate will not be eliminated! Note: they do not *have* to talk, they just should be *able* to do so.

The Main Part:

The main part usually deals with several subjects. It is also possible to devote the main part to one subject only – typically, when we deal with a group of intermediate and/or advanced trainees, we might want to devote all of the main part to randori. Whether our main part is a single-subject or a multi-subject one, the coach should have a clearly defined objective for the session in mind. The various subjects are then chosen to serve this objective.

Besides the fact that the objective determines the *content* of the main part, it also determines the *intensity*, and thereby the *duration*, of the main part (and of the whole session).

“Broadening the technique repertoire” is such an objective. For a beginners group it would be the most common objective; but advanced, and even elite groups will also have training sessions with this objective in mind – typically, at the beginning of the preparatory period. Typical subjects for this objective would be: “Acquiring a new technique” (low intensity); “Improving/polishing known technique” (medium intensity); “Exploring combinations/counters” (medium to high intensity).

“Improving sport-specific fitness” is another possible objective. This would not usually be a fitting objective for beginners (who receive an adequate stimulus in this direction by the very fact of doing Judo), but rather for intermediate and higher groups. Subjects would be – “Improving explosive strength in a specific technique” – a high-intensity theme, “Improving anaerobic endurance” (typically, by short, intense, contest-style randori, i.e., also high if not maximal intensity), “Improving aerobic endurance” (medium intensity – but high volume!), “Improving flexibility” (Possibly PNF exercises adjusted to simulate parts of Judo techniques – low intensity).

“Recuperation” is an often-overlooked objective. It is called for when an advanced group has had high, or maximal, intensity sessions and needs to recover from the stress involved. Here the main part would include “fun/games”, “theory”, low-intensity jogging, massage and stretching etc.; all low intensity, and not too long duration.

“Testing” is needed at the end of a mesocycle, to determine whether the objective of the cycle has been attained. Rank gradings are also tests – technique tests. Fitness (also known as “motor tests”) are usually of high intensity; technique tests of medium or low intensity (but can be quite stressful).

Coaching theory tells us that, if we have included several subjects in the main part, there is a definite order in which these should be presented:

- *Technique acquisition* and *Speed training* should precede all other subjects in the main part; which implies that you cannot have both in the same session! But, it is very seldom that we see pure speed training in Judo: what goes for speed training is really speed-endurance training, and that may come after technique acquisition.
- *Maximal strength, Power (Speed-strength)* should come after technique acquisition, speed training, speed-endurance and technique polishing; but precede other subjects.
- *Strength endurance* and *Anaerobic endurance* come next.
- *Aerobic endurance* should be the last subject in the main part.

Some coaches begin the main part with an extended series of uchikomi; while I do not intend to discuss the pros and cons of uchikomi in general, it should be obvious that placing such long, drawn-out uchikomis at the beginning is a mistake: whether intended for automatizing technique or for improving specific endurance (or just “because it is done”) – these long series have the character of either aerobic or anaerobic endurance, therefore should be placed at the end of the main part, certainly not at the beginning!

When planning sessions for children, remember to have *many* subjects – to ensure variety and prevent boredom - include *fun and games* and keep the subjects short.

Documentation:

Proper session planning includes *writing* the plan up before the session; amongst other advantages, it helps to prevent your forgetting details! The written plan guides the coach during the session, and again, ensures against oversights in the execution of the plan.

The plan should include the headings of the several subjects, their planned duration and possibly their intensity. Including the content of each subject is, in my opinion, overdoing it.

You may plan for 3 or 4 sessions ahead, but then you need to check the plan immediately before the session for possible amendments in the light of what happened in the previous session/s! This is why many coaches write down the plan at the very

last moment. As this leads, after some time, to not writing it down at all, I have taken to preparing several different plans for each session objective, and only choosing between them at the last moment.

Now comes a very important part of documentation:

After the session is over, compare what was actually done with your plan, and write that down. Keep this for future reference. We all make mistakes: this way, we have a better chance of identifying those mistakes and preventing their recurrence. A well-kept binder of session plans, with reports of their execution, can be an excellent aid for future planning. Use it to repeat your successful sessions and to evade your bloopers. And again: include the essentials, but no more than that.

I have developed a form for both planning and reporting. I have it at mat-side, together with a stop-watch which runs continuously from the beginning bow to the conclusion. Intensity is planned as estimated heart rate: Intensity 1 is for HR 105-115, Intensity 2 for HR 116-125, Intensity 3 for HR 126-135 and so on. The plan looks like this:

Date:			Group:		
Objective:			Planned intensity:		
S.W.	Dur.	Subject	P.I.	A.I.	A.D.
Total Load:			Mean Intensity:		
Notes:					

Under S.W. I write down what the stop-watch should show at the beginning of each subject; “Dur.” is the planned duration of the subject (so “SW” is really the accumulation of “Dur”); but while I’m coaching I don’t want to do sums, I just glance at the plan and the stop-watch to know where I am); “P.I.” its planned intensity, and “A.I.” the actual intensity; “A.D.” the actual duration. The product of A.I. and A.D. is the load which that subject imposed on the trainees, and the sum of all products is the “Total Load”. Dividing total load by total duration gives the mean intensity, which may be compared to the planned intensity.

For the use which I make of the figures for load, intensity and duration see my article on “Periodisation” on the IJCA website.