

Analysis of the book *Judo: path of medals*, by Alexandre Velly Nunes

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BOOK REVIEW

Abstract

This review presents the book *Judô: caminho das medalhas*, written by PhD Professor Alexandre Velly Nunes, published in Brazilian Portuguese in 2013 by Kazuá. This work comes from the doctoral research of the author, who interviewed about 90 personages from the history of Brazilian judo in four years of studies. The objective was to present the origins of this sport in the country based on the oral history of the life of Brazilian athletes, who were medalists in World Championships and Olympic Games, and their *sensei*. I make a brief presentation of the author and summarize the contents of the book, followed by my comments and conclusion.

Keywords: Martial arts; combat sports; judo; oral life history; genealogy; book review.

Análisis del libro *Judo: camino de las medallas*, por Alexandre Velly Nunes

Resumen

Esta reseña presenta el libro *Judô: caminho das medalhas*, escrito por el profesor doctor Alexandre Velly Nunes, publicado en portugués brasileño en 2013 por Kazuá. Este trabajo deriva de la investigación doctoral del autor, quien entrevistó a unas 90 personalidades de la historia del judo brasileño durante cuatro años de estudios. El objetivo fue dar a conocer los orígenes de este deporte en Brasil a partir de la historia de vida oral de los deportistas brasileños, medallistas en Campeonatos del Mundo y Juegos Olímpicos, y sus *sensei*. Realizo una breve presentación del autor y resumo el contenido del libro, seguido de mis comentarios y conclusión.

Palabras clave: Artes marciales; deportes de combate; judo; historia de vida oral; genealogía; revisión de libro.

Análise do livro *Judô: caminho das medalhas*, de Alexandre Velly Nunes

Resumo

Esta resenha apresenta o livro *Judô: caminho das medalhas*, do Professor PhD Alexandre Velly Nunes, publicado em português do Brasil em 2013 pela Editora Kazuá. Este trabalho é fruto da pesquisa de doutorado do autor, que entrevistou cerca de 90 personagens da história do judô brasileiro em quatro anos de estudos. O objetivo foi apresentar as origens do esporte no país a partir da história oral de vida de atletas brasileiros, medalhistas em Campeonatos Mundiais e Jogos Olímpicos, e de seus *sensei*. Faço uma breve apresentação do autor e apresento o conteúdo do livro, seguido de meus comentários e conclusão.

Palavras-chave: Artes marciais; Esportes de combate; judô; história de vida oral; Genealogia; revisão de livro.

1. Introduction

In the book *Judô: caminho das medalhas* (São Paulo: Kazuá, 2013), the author researched the history of judo in Brazil through the oral life history of Brazilian athletes, who were medalists in World Championships and Olympic Games, and their *sensei*. From this, he sought to identify the genearchs in order to organize the genealogy of Brazilian judo, elaborated from the perspectives of individuals who achieved greater prominence through their competitive achievements. The book is organized in 30 chapters and four annexes that present to the reader, throughout its 244 pages, the theoretical basis, methodology and results of the author's research, culminating in the presentation of the judoistic family trees of the athletes selected to compose the study. It also has the presentation of two Brazilian Olympic champions, Aurélio Miguel, in Seoul-88 and Rogério Sampaio, in Barcelona-92, who highlight the importance of this work for the knowledge and preservation of the history of Brazilian judo.

2. About the author

The author, Alexandre Velly Nunes, holds a degree in Physical Education from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul and a Post-Doctorate from the Faculty of Human Motricity of the

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Practitioner of judo for over fifty years, the author went from apprentice in the *nage waza* and *katame waza* and training with competitive objectives, to academic studies on the forms and methods of training and search for performance and, later, to studies on how these changes occurred in the practice of judo in Brazil and in the world. Since 2008, he has researched on the history of judo in Brazil from the analysis of the life history of Brazilian athletes.

3. About the content

In the beginning of the book, the author presents the theoretical basis that supports his study. There is a brief report on the arrival of judo in Brazil indicating that it occurred mainly due to Japanese immigration, with the arrival of Kasato Maru and the first immigrants in 1908. It also presents another possibility, the arrival of *sensei* fighters, like Mitsuyo Maeda, Soishiro Satake, Laku, Shimitsu and Okura, in 1914, with the intention of spreading the practice in the country. It considers that the Japanese influence was decisive in the formatting of pedagogical processes and in the formation of the first Brazilian practitioners and *sensei*.

Then, he presents the definitions and methods that allow the identification of the genearchs of Brazilian judo. The author defined as genearch the *sensei* who acquired his knowledge of judo or jiu-jitsu before arriving in Brazil, in a position to relay them and thus contribute to the development of judo in the country. In the study, judo practitioners in Brazil were considered as a “tribe” or “family” by affinity and forming a large judoist family tree. It presents a new concept for genealogical studies: the concept of judo genealogy. Each athlete has his own judoistic family and many had some degree of judoistic kinship, thus enabling the identification of the genearchs of Brazilian judo.

The adaptation proposed by the author considered the *sensei* of the athletes as if they were their parents and so on. As a starting point, the author considered the athletes medalists in World Championships and Olympic Games, in the senior class, sought in all Brazilian participations, from the Tokyo World Championships in 1971 to Paris in 2011, and from the Tokyo Olympic Games in 1964 to the London Games in 2012, assuming that this group of athletes and their *sensei*, as well as their training venues, formed the elite of Brazilian judo. Based on these requirements, twenty-six athletes are appointed and from them it was possible to identify their “beginner *sensei*” and “high performance *sensei*”.

These designations attributed by the author emerged from the observation of the characteristics related to the skills and competencies of the *sensei*. Beginner *sensei* has a more appropriate profile to train athletes (initiation) while high performance *sensei* demonstrates greater aptitude to improve the career of them (high performance). He could note that each athlete interviewed had a beginner *sensei* and a high performance *sensei*. This finding on the training of athletes pointed to two types of training sites, named by the author of “Shaping Dojo”, characterized by small areas, educational focus and *sensei* assuming all functions, and “Sponsoring Dojo”, characterized by offering professional treatment, training areas large and multidisciplinary teams. Thus, he was able to differentiate the places of initiation in judo of athletes from the places where they were linked when they won their medals.

He uses the nomination of beginner *sensei* and of high performance *sensei* as if they were two original branches of the athletes individual tree, considering them as parents, enabling associations with other athletes. Thus, the book reaches the genearchs, mostly Japanese immigrants who arrived in Brazil between 1914 and 1968, which partially proved their initial hypothesis. With the exception of *sensei* João Graf, who started practicing judo in Switzerland, returning to Brazil with a brown graduation, meeting conditions to transmit his knowledge.



Next, he reports that the first generations of outstanding athletes in Brazilian judo were, most of them, *nikkei* (individuals of Japanese origin) and the most qualified training and competition venues were within the Japanese colony. The 1963 Pan American Games in São Paulo and the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo were considered, by the author, as references to indicate the highlights of national judo in men's category. In the women's category, the first major participation was the 1982 Pan American Championship in Chile. Even though Walter Carmona won the medal at the 1979 World Championship, it was only from the 1980s that non-*nikkei* athletes became the majority in the group of highlights of Brazilian judo.

In the final considerations the author points out that the history and development of Brazilian judo can be divided into four periods. The first between 1908-1914 to the beginning of Second World War, marked by the arrival of the ship *Kasato Maru* bringing the first fighters headed by Eisei Maeda. The second comprised from the beginning of the Second World War (1939) until the institutionalization of sport in the country, with the founding of CBJ (Brazilian Judo Confederation) in 1969. The third comprised in the early 1970s until the end of the 20th century, with the creation of regional federations and diffusion of judo throughout the country. And the fourth period starting at the turn of the century (2001), when judo in the country started to be treated as a profitable business when it was transformed into a spectacle, deviating from the precepts that originated it, but reaching great projection in the media.

Finally, the author reports that the elaboration of this study allowed him to walk the path of judo in Brazil, for the opportunity to interview many *sensei* who built the history of sport in the country. Among the interviewees, representatives of the three most prominent schools in the early days of Brazilian judo: Budokan, by Ryuzo Ogawa; the Kodokan of Dr. Okoshi, Sobei Tani, Goro Saito, Seisetsu Fukuoka, Yoshio Kihara among others and the Ono jiu-jitsu academies, where the author interviewed Manoel Aparecido Lacerda and Luiz Tambucci.

The author finishes with some suggestions for scholars who intend to follow the line of the study he has carried out. He suggests the continuity of the study in judo, increasing the range of athletes interviewed in order to search for their origins. In this way, the interviews can contribute to other types of analysis, in order to deepen or direct the study to other issues that have not been addressed, for example, describe the moment when an athlete changes from beginner *sensei* to high performance *sensei*, pointing out the factors that lead to this exchange, such as age and graduation.

5. Comments

When reporting the introduction and evolution of judo in Brazil from the oral life history of nationally renowned judo athletes and their *sensei*, the author presents a different way of telling the history of Brazilian judo (see Calleja, 1982; Virgilio, 1994; Guedes, 2001; Mesquita, 2014). In the book, the author reports that he traveled throughout the country for four years in search of his interviews, which can be considered a work of great dedication, considering the continental dimensions of Brazil.

The data of his study were also obtained from analytical historical research, through sources related to the history and evolution of judo in Brazil, classifying the methodology of his research as an oral history of hybrid life, considering that the collaborators' information was confronted with other conventional sources of history. Another form of verification was the triangulation of information between the individuals interviewed, since among them many were opponents or training colleagues and their respective teachers.

In his study, the author considered some studies on the development of judo in Brazil and in the world (Calleja, 1982; Pfister, 1996; Iatskevich, 2001; Virgilio, 2002; Geesink, 2005; Sikorski, 2005; Thibault, 2011), as well as studies on the methodology of oral life history that guided him in the choice of interviewees, such as the work of the French, the so-called school projects from Chicago and the so-called neopopulists of oral history in Britain and also in America (Poirier, Clapier-Valladon, & Raybaut, 1999; Rubio, 2004, 2006; Meihy, 2005).

In the theoretical basis of his work, the author makes some criticisms of the spectacle status that judo has presented, with high prizes being distributed, ranking of athletes and a world championship circuit. He considers the media exposure that attracts new followers a positive aspect



but reports that the philosophical precepts advocated by Jigoro Kano are being neglected, with the risk of being forgotten. However, the author himself considers for his study only high-performance athletes, initially contradicting the considerations he makes about the valorization of judo as an educational method.

Regarding the initial composition of the group of interviewees, the author defined only medal athletes in World Championships and Olympic Games, considering these events as the peak for high-performance athletes. I understand that for academic research it is necessary to impose boundaries, choosing an emphasis within a broader subject. At this point, I consider the author's decision to be correct when choosing the medalists for these events, despite understanding that all Brazilian athletes in the Olympic Games could be considered, considering that the classification for this event specifically, in Brazil, is highly valued.

5. Conclusion

I have been working for more than 20 years in judo, a martial art in which I graduated Ni-Dan. As a doctor degree student and researcher on the subject of martial arts and combat sports, I set out to revise this book because I understand that it presents a way of telling the history of judo in Brazil different from that found in most judo manuals of Brazilian authors (Calleja, 1982; Virgílio, 1994; Guedes, 2001; Mesquita, 2014). I believe that the original idea of building a Judo family tree contributes to understanding the introduction and development of judo in Brazil.

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