

This essay was sent to American Judo Magazine mid-June of '08, and published in the Fall '08 issue. Although it seems the shiai rules are modified somewhat as proposed herein, the timing makes the article appear more out-dated than sagacious. The concepts are the point, however. Enjoy

An Ippon by Any Other Name...or: The Magic Gi



A. Geesink at the '64 Olympics

A h... for the infamous good 'ol days, back when a throw was a throw. That was when a judo contest could inspire a person to take up the sport. It was before patty-cake grip fighting, never-ending out-of-bounds rule changes, Golden Scores, and petty penalties to punish people who wanted to win by using the game rather than playing it.

It was when judoka trained to throw for *ippon*. They did not train to see how many lesser scores they could attain. They did not seek to win by causing the other player to be penalized.

The intent here is to focus on the *ippon* throw. Way back, it required four elements. Pre-dominantly on the back, force, speed and control. If one of those was conspicuously absent, the call was *waza-ari*. Neither *yuko* nor *koka* existed. All else was *kinsa*. The problem was, not all *kinsas* were equal. Some were really close to *waza-ari*. Some were close to nothing. Plus, referees had to keep a *kinsa* count on their fingers. Agreement on the quality and number was rare. The solution was *Yuko* and *Koka*. Besides, the refs argued, now the spectator could more easily keep score. Seemed like a good plan. Arguing the logic and the result is for another time. Except for the result which watered down the criteria for *ippon* and *waza-ari*.

Watch a video of the final matches for the 1964 Los Angeles Olympic Games. Then, watch anything from the last few years. Often, *yukos* have become *ippons*. Even some *kokas*, pushed to the back, are upped two levels, sometimes three.

We first need to dispense with a referee argument that is commonly heard. "It speeds up the contest." If they mean each match will be over more quickly, what value is that? If they mean the entire event will be over more quickly, what value is that?

THE "ALMOST GOOD" CONCEPT

If a golf ball gets within three feet of the hole, let's call it in. If the basketball hits the rim, it's half a point. If the football comes to within one yard of the goal line, hits the ground, and the player then pushes it across, let's give 'em the touchdown. Fielder catches the baseball on one bounce, and you're out. It will make the games faster and more fun for the fans. Let's let the judoka knock the other player onto the butt, then if they push them back from there, let's call it *ippon*, just so long as it's continuous motion.

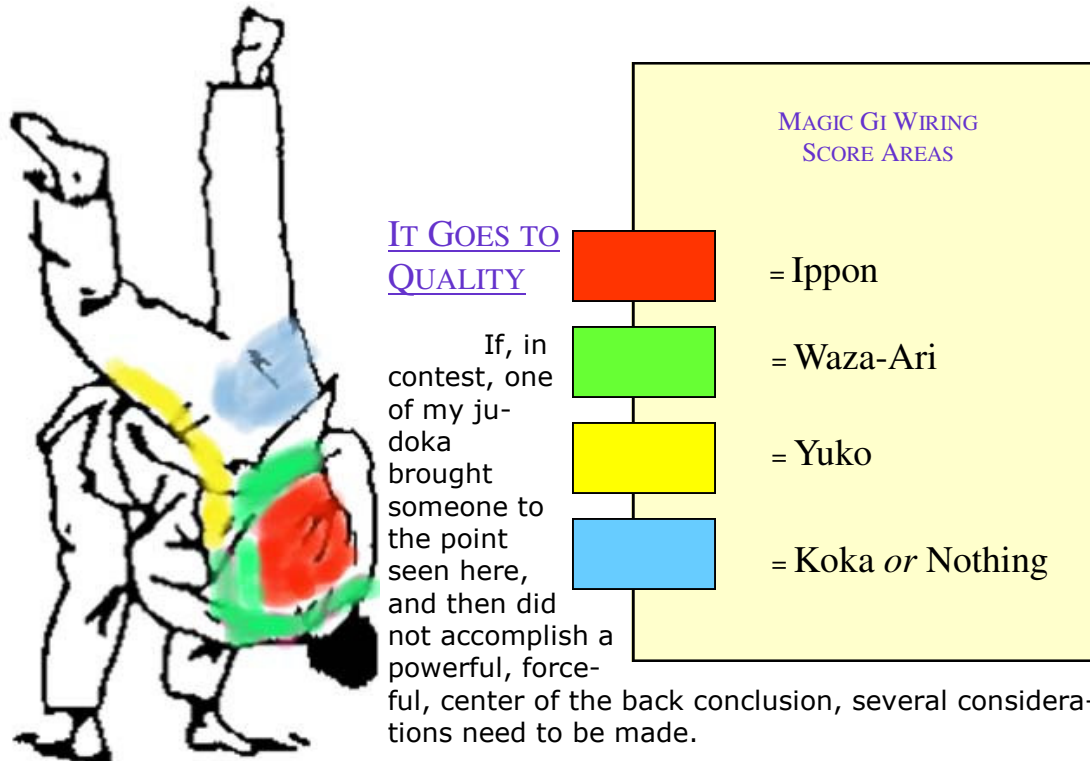
WHAT REALLY SHOULD COUNT AS IPPON - OR: "THE MAGIC GI"

Would it be really cool if we could wire the *judogi* so it gave a score?

The part that hit first, and to the extent a forceful impact was achieved, would determine the score. No more refs making that determination, and no rule of three arguments. I'd bet almost everybody who plays the game would wire the suit very nearly the same. Here's how I'd wire them. See what you think.

First, I'd remove *koka* completely. If a player can knock someone to their butt, then the next move on the ground has to be considered just matwork. No score. In taking out the *koka*, I would not turn *yuko* into *waza-ari*, nor would I then turn *waza-ari* into *ippon*. I'd keep the *yuko* only because it would be a way of counting *kin-sas*.

The magic gi is still a ways into the future. To accomplish this scoring, referees would have to be counted on to be able to discriminate. There's no way to expect this would make the calls more accurate or less biased. It's just a better scoring criteria.



If the landing was not of *ippon* quality, then this thrower would need to work on completing throws. Even if the other player somehow managed to twist out of the throw, our task would be to learn to prevent that.

THE SIMPLE CRITERIA

Without the magic gi to assist us, we need to make the scoring criteria simpler and more demanding, not more complex and vague. Keeping gi wiring in mind...

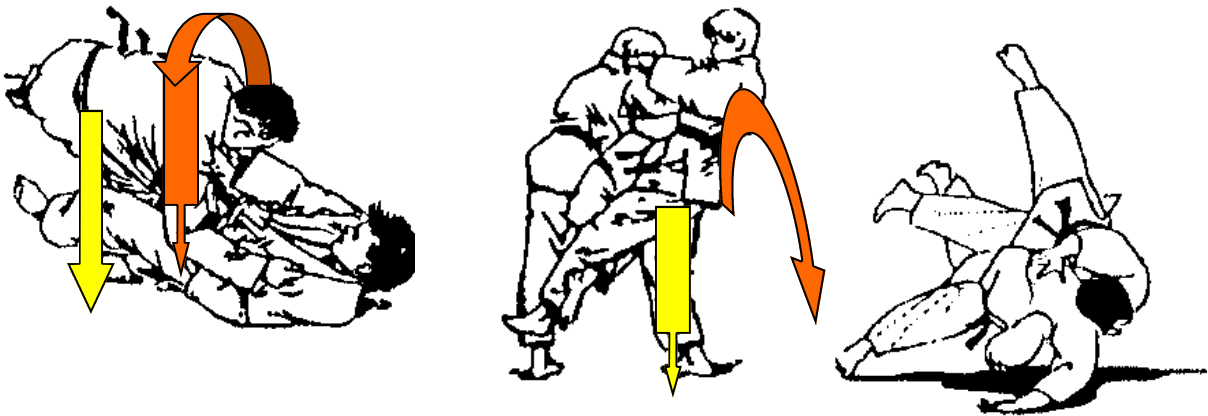
1. Only the part of the body that **hits first** counts for the score. (If the butt hits first, no score. Period.)
2. Continued pushing or rolling of the faller's body does not add to the score.
3. All four criteria for *ippon* must happen. They are:
 - 1) Fully on the back.
 - 2) Force
 - 3) Speed
 - 4) Control

4. Fully on the back must be interpreted as "center of the back outward", not "side of the back inward". Ask, then, did the player land on the center of the back and roll outward, or did the player land on the outer edge and roll inward?
5. The absence of any one of these four diminish the score to *waza-ari*.
6. The absence of two of them would diminish the score to *yuko*.
7. The absence of three would create no score. (Sorry, *koka* fans.)

Consider the forthcoming illustrations. Ask yourself what needs to be done to absolutely assure and *ippon*. (Red Arrow)

What could go wrong? How might a lesser score happen? (Yellow Arrow)

What could your intended victim do to mess up the score, and how could it be prevented?



ONE LITTLE PROBLEM (OR TWO)

What about those pesky sacrifice techniques and counters, done such that the thrower's back has to hit first? The bad news is more than a magic gi is needed. The good news is, determining momentum control could be something the referees do, aside from determining out of bounds and non-combativity, and this returns them to the game. For those who don't believe this is a significant concern, You Tube has the infamous Shinohara vs. Dioullet call as example. Using video replay to settle contentions might work.

LET THE REFS DO THEIR JOB

We could simply let the refs do their jobs, with the magic gi and video as back-up. The main objective is to bring back truly dynamic judo, and stop giving inflated scores for "almost" results.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Koka judo is not exciting to watch. Judo that has throwing for *ippon* as its goal is going to create better quality and more exciting judo. If what now qualifies for *koka* only provided entry into matwork, and if the matwork was allowed to continue, so long as it was clearly moving toward a judo scoring objective, the complaint about the lack of quality *ne-waza* would likely become less prevalent, too. The *koka* knock down would

not be for nothing, unless nothing could be made of it. If somebody says, "I knocked my opponent down, right on the butt. Don't I get *something* for that?" The answer might be, "Sure. You get a chance to do mat work."

If scoring *ippon* is challenging and dynamic, then *waza-ari* is a reward for almost achieving that. *Yuko* is a way of keeping track of something pretty darn good, and for counting *kinsas*.

WHAT IS "DYNAMIC"?

If someone is thrown fully on the back, with force, speed and control, you'd bet they arrived there in a dynamic manner. Speed, force, and power are not in themselves criteria for dynamic as it relates to judo. They simply define the amount of energy being expended. The physical dynamics alone do not create ultimate scores in any sport, except perhaps those related to power lifting. It is more dynamic to allow players to play rather than continually call *matte*. To a large extent, defensive and non-combative judo isn't good to watch and needs regulation to assure more dynamics.

WHAT ELSE?

If the goal is dynamic judo, and the first question asked regarding a rule is, "Is this contributing to dynamic judo?", then plenty of other areas of contest can be better evaluated.

The arguments for lesser quality of skill being rewarded with higher quality scores, is ludicrous at best. Out of bounds rules, grip fighting, leg grabbing, defensive posture, non-combativity... all of it, could be subjected to the rule of dynamic judo, and evaluated on the basis of "Better is better."

If referees believe for some odd reason that the overall popularity of judo is at stake, let's understand that the reason judo is not popular in the United States is that we never marketed it successfully. It's on us. Judo popularity isn't about changing judo contest rules so that people who aren't there in the first place will come back to see more. To the contrary, the few folks who might venture into a judo tournament who aren't coaches, relatives, or other judoka will be less inclined to return to what we are showing now as compared to the non-koka days of yesteryear.

Let's put on the Magic Judogi and upgrade the quality of *shiai*.

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