

# MASATO TAMURA, RYOICHI IWAKIRI, & THE FIFE JUDO DOJO, 1923-1942

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*The father I thought so strict*

*Where did he conceal*

*Such tender feelings*

*Revealed in those gentle letters?*

*Many days I cried.*

~ Teiko Tomita (Nomura, 1987:19)

Fife is a farm town located about two miles northeast of Tacoma, Washington. The first Japanese immigrant (*Issei*) to farm the region was probably Heishiro Mihara,<sup>1</sup> who leased twenty acres from the Puyallup Indians Mary Charley and William McShill in 1897. Mihara then brought over his brothers-in-law Gorimatsu, Heisuke, Toichi, and Tokichi Ohashi to help him clear and work the property. Other pioneers included Soroku Kuramoto, Shintaro Mukai, and Yokichi Nakanishi (Watanabe, 1986: 86-88; Magden, 1998: 35-36).

A local landowner, John McAleer, believed that having people of different races work together would overcome racism and nationalism. By 1907, there were about thirty *Issei* families working McAleer properties in the area. By the mid-1910's, this number had grown to about one hundred and thirty, plus more than two hundred children. From 1910 to 1930, Japanese comprised the largest group of non-European ethnic females in Washington State (Watanabe, 1986: 86-88; Magden, 1998: 35-36; Nomura, 1987: 15).

To educate these children in Japanese culture, history, and language, sixteen *Issei* farmers organized a Fife Language School Support Association in June 1909. The teachers were Tomehachi Nagai and his wife Yoneko (Magden, 1998: 69-70).



**JUDO TOURNAMENT AT THE FIFE DOJO, MARCH 1938.**

*Photo from the Boland Collection, courtesy of the Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma, Washington.*

## FIFE YUDANSHA

(JUDO BLACK BELTS), 1940.

FRONT ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT:

- 1) Masato Tamura
- 2) Richard Hayashi
- 3) Yasuyuki Kamagai  
(Seattle Dojo supervisor)
- 4) Ryoichi Iwakiri

SECOND ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT:

- 1) George Iwakiri
- 2) Leo Kawasaki
- 3) Jack Ohashi
- 4) Seiichi Yamada
- 5) Masaru Tamura
- 6) Joe Mizumoto
- 7) Hikaru Tamura
- 8) Hiroshi Masuda
- 9) Sunji Dogen



A schoolhouse capable of holding thirty-five students was built in late 1912. A *Seinen Kai* (Young People's Club or Association) was added in July 1915. The club's missions included cultivating lofty ideals and character in young people, teaching an appreciation for traditional Japanese values, and improving relations between Japanese and European-Americans. Members paid about a dollar per child per month. With that money, club leaders paid rent and bought books and sports equipment. While the outdoor sport of choice was baseball, indoor sports included judo and kendo. The club met every Sunday, and had about thirty members in 1917 (Magden, 1998: 69-70; Watanabe, 1986: 95-96).

Parents soon found that American-born sons usually preferred playing sports to attending language school. So, in 1923, Fife farmers Hikocho ("Harry") Kawasaki and Kichigoro ("Kay") Yamamoto donated a barn and some mats to the *Seinen Kai*, and arranged for a local man to teach judo to community youths. From late September until mid-May, the Fife Dojo was open three nights a week. Like most rural judo clubs, the Fife Dojo closed during the summer. The reason was, of course, that the barn was needed for storing crops and the boys and men were busy with the harvest (Edith Kuramoto, personal communication, September 25, 1997).

Ryoichi Iwakiri was the local man who taught at the Fife club. Born in Ehime Prefecture, Japan, in 1899, Iwakiri started studying judo at the St. Paul and Tacoma lumber company's judo club around 1917. His early students included George Kawasaki, Jack Ohashi, and Masato Tamura (*Japanese-American Courier*, hereafter referred to as JAC, February 12, 1938: 4).<sup>2</sup>

His first dojo was far from fancy. For instance, the original mat consisted of canvas stretched from wall to wall over sawdust. The walls had no insulation, and "on cold winter nights," said the *Japanese-American Courier* many years later, "many can hark back to those times when we used to toast our toes at spots which glowed red hot on an old cracked stove" (JAC, February 12, 1938: 4). Still, it beat walking a couple miles into Tacoma two or three nights a week. "We went to school in Tacoma," recalled former Fife resident Joe Kosai in 1998, "and used to walk there and back every day. Just the other day I walked the route for the first time in years. It was a lot longer than I remembered. The hills were steeper, too" (Joe Kosai, personal communication, March 16, 1998).

Although Fife judoka surely participated in tournaments in Tacoma and Seattle from 1924 to 1927, I have seen no record of the results. Iwakiri was evidently an active tournament player. He later told his student, Jerry Dalien, that the only Seattle judoka who could beat him was Kaimon Kudo, a Seattle Dojo star who later became a well-known professional wrestler (Dalien, 1988: 23). Therefore, Fife Dojo's recorded history begins with Jack Ohashi's victory over Seattle Dojo's Michio Shinoda on November 18, 1928 (JAC, September 22, 1928: 2; JAC, November 24, 1928: 2). During another Seattle tournament held on January 18, 1931, Masato ("Mac") Tamura was the star (JAC, January 24, 1931: 2). As a result, he received promotion to first dan. His teacher, Iwakiri, simultaneously received promotion to second dan (JAC, February 20, 1931: 2; JAC, March 11, 1933: 2).

In those days, belts were white, brown, or black, and the chief promotion criterion was tournament success. Traditional throwing forms (*kata*) and meditation were taught only to boys who asked - and boys being boys, few asked (Shinji Kozu, personal communication, September 21, 1997; Hank Ogawa, personal communication, September 22, 1997). Instead, what schoolboys wanted was outward recognition. Accordingly, in February 1931, Fife Dojo members voted to award varsity-style letters to deserving members. "The qualifications," said an article in the *Japanese-American Courier*, "were to be decided upon later. Its purpose was to create more interest in the sport, and to set a goal for the younger boys to strive toward" (JAC, February 13, 1931: 2).

On September 26, 1931, nineteen-year old Masato Tamura took over day-to-day instruction at the Fife Dojo. The stated reasons for this change were that Ryoichi Iwakiri had recently started a commercial produce business, and therefore lacked the time to attend every practice (JAC, September 26, 1931: 2; *Tacoma News Tribune*, hereafter referred to as TNT, May 27, 1987: B2). However, the unstated reason was that Mrs. Iwakiri did not support Mr. Iwakiri's love of judo. Like most Issei men, Iwakiri worked ten to twelve hours a day, six days a week. Add judo classes three nights a week, plus a tournament most Sundays from January to April, and Mrs. Iwakiri's disapproval becomes eminently understandable. Indeed, to keep peace, says Iwakiri's daughter Chiyo Iida (Fujiko Gardner, personal communication from Chiyo Iida, May 4, 1997):

Judo was rarely mentioned in our house. I never heard anything about the judo tournaments from my family. My friend, Kiyoko Yamada, kept me informed about who won. It was from her I learned about Masato's brilliant participation in judo and also about my brother's accomplishments.

For the boys in the Fife club - their ages ranged from eight to twenty - Iwakiri's absence was probably something of a blessing. Tamura was an older brother rather than a father figure, and he greatly preferred tussling on the mats to lecturing. On the other hand, Iwakiri was more of a father figure. He never learned to speak English well, and when he did speak English, it was usually to stress the importance of having strong character. The following summarizes his favorite speech. The version quoted here was given in Japanese during the 1950's, and later translated into English (Dalien, 1988: 25-26).

# FIFE DOJO

MARCH 5, 1934.

FRONT ROW, SEATED LEFT TO RIGHT:

- 1) Kiyoshi Kuramoto
- 2) Mitsuru Tamura
- 3) Bob Watanabe
- 4) Harry Morisaki
- 5) Leo Kawasaki
- 6) Hiro Yaguchi
- 7) Unidentified
- 8) Unidentified
- 9) Don Kawasaki

SECOND ROW, SEATED, LEFT TO RIGHT:

- 1) Atsushi Kuramoto
- 2) Unidentified
- 3) Unidentified
- 4) Sam Uchida
- 5) Masato Tamura
- 6) Ryoichi Iwakiri
- 7) Jack Ohashi
- 8) Sakahara
- 9) Seiichi Yamada
- 10) Unidentified
- 11) S. Teranishi

THIRD ROW, KNEELING LEFT TO RIGHT:

- 1) Jin (?) Sagami
- 2) Masaru Tamura
- 3) Kimio Watanabe
- 4) Joe Mizumoto
- 5) Unidentified

FOURTH ROW, STANDING,

LEFT TO RIGHT:

- 1) Sunji Dogen
- 2) P. Tamura
- 3) George Kawasaki
- 4) Masachi Kibe

Photo courtesy of  
George & Risa Kawasaki.

As an integral part of our instruction, we are taught among other things patience, courtesy, humility, and self-discipline. What passes for acceptable conduct from some athletes should not be our goal, but rather our minimum. Self-discipline and courtesy dictate that we respect the rights of others. We are not loud, ill-mannered, or boorish. We lose graciously and win with humility. We act and dress like ladies and gentlemen both on and off the mat.

We take great pains to inform the public that judo is different from other sports. We read about it, talk about it, write about it. We tell boys' and girls' mothers and fathers that judo will make a lady or gentleman of their son or daughter, and that judo is the missing cog in a well-rounded education. In our drive to bring judo closer to the American philosophy of competition, we must not lose sight of these basic principles which make our sport unique.

Nothing is more striking and impressive as a tournament or practice where the players are neat, reserved, and dignified, and the judging is sincere, honest, and honorable. There is the lasting impression and the principle of judo at work. Actions do speak louder than words.

Still, with the combination of lectures, good examples, and sweat, the Fife youths soon dominated local judo tournaments. At a tournament held at the Tacoma Buddhist Church on October 11, 1931, for example, Masato Tamura, Jack Ohashi, Hiroshi Tamura, George Kawasaki, and Masaomi Kibe all won pennants (JAC, October 10, 1931: 2; JAC, October 17, 1931: 2).

While instruction was always in English at the dojo, the names of techniques were taught in Japanese. Upon entering or leaving the mat, students were expected to bow toward the instructors. Students also were expected to sit quietly when not practicing, avoid horseplay, and keep unnecessary talking to a minimum (Kenji Yaguchi, personal communication, October 3, 1997).



Note: The photo on the back wall shows judo founder Jigoro Kano in his court uniform. The significance of the shield is not known. Note the canvas mats. The knotty lumber used in the construction of the barn suggests that it was built from scrap from the St. Paul and Tacoma lumber mill, which was then the world's largest.

As money was always tight, in October 1931, the Fife Seinen Kai decided that it would raise money by holding Japanese movie nights. Excepting the refreshments sold by the local Girls' Club (*Fuyo Kai*) during these movie nights, Fife youth were not exposed to club fund-raising activities. Instead, finances were handled entirely by adults. Parents whose children didn't do judo complained that judo diverted money from other youth activities. So, in January 1935 the Fife Seinen Kai and the Fife Dojo split into separate organizations (Kenji Yaguchi, personal communication, October 3, 1997; JAC, October 17, 1931: 2; JAC, January 26, 1935: 3).

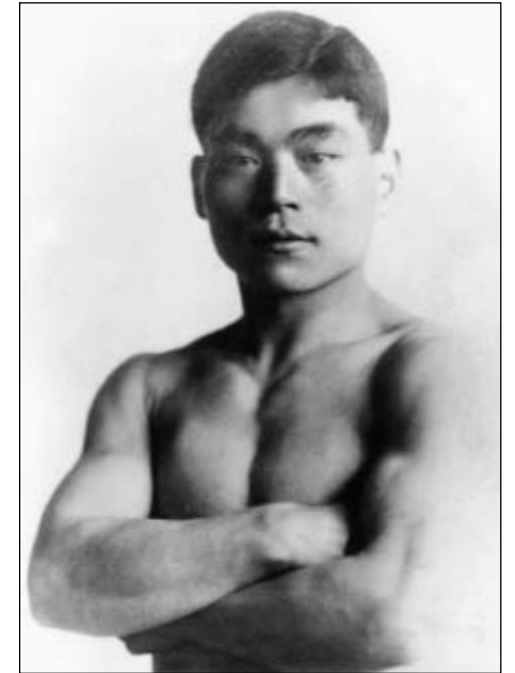
The Fife Dojo hosted a tournament inside the Fife High School auditorium during the weekend of February 28 thru March 1, 1931.<sup>3</sup> Fife hosted another tournament at Fife High School on February 27-28, 1932. The highlight of this tournament involved Ito, a fifth-dan from a ship visiting Tacoma, throwing six local judoka during a handicap match. In competition, Masato Tamura also threw five men to take first place in his division. The *Japanese-American Courier* noted, "In promoting and making a success of the big tournament, the local mothers' group, Girls' Club and the men cooperated in every way" (JAC, March 5, 1932: 2).

So that people could work on their farms, the dojo normally closed between May and September. However, when judo's founder Jigoro Kano announced that he was going to visit Pacific Northwest Japanese language schools in late August 1932, the Fife Dojo resumed training on August second that year (JAC, August 6, 1932: 2). The extra effort paid off, too, as during the welcoming tournament held in Seattle, Jack Ohashi earned a promotion to first dan awarded by Professor Kano himself (JAC, October 15, 1932: 2).

Oral tradition has it that Professor Kano visited the Fife Dojo during the 1932 Northwest US visit. Although I have seen no photos or newspaper articles to prove either the visit or the timing, I suspect that it did take place, on August 18, 1932. Kano had a documented speaking engagement at the Tacoma Japanese Language School that evening, and while en route he probably visited the dojos in Kent, Auburn, and Fife.

In 1933, the club resumed training at its normal time, late September. In early November, Ryoichi Iwakiri loaded the boys in his truck and took them to a small tournament on Bainbridge Island. George Kawasaki returned to Fife with the first place trophy (JAC, September 29, 1933, p. 2; JAC, November 11, 1933, p. 2).

Fife was always a popular stop on the local tournament circuit. The reason was that the school auditorium held two mats rather than one, as was typical elsewhere. Therefore meets ended somewhat earlier in the evening (JAC, February 18, 1933: 2). As elsewhere, speeches, announcements, and the award of service trophies usually prefaced the bouts. For example, on March 17, 1934, Kichigoro Yamamoto and Ryoichi Iwakiri both received silver cups in appreciation of their support throughout the years. Then, to the local crowd's delight, Tamura Masato, Hikaru ("Polka") Tamura, and Joe Yamamoto went out and won medals in their respective divisions (JAC, March 17, 1934: 2).



KICHIGORO ("KAY")  
YAMAMOTO, FUTURE PATRON  
OF THE FIFE DOJO, AFTER  
WINNING THE NORTHWEST  
AAU WRESTLING CHAMPIONSHIP  
AT 125 POUNDS IN 1912.

Photo courtesy of  
Edith Yamamoto Kuramoto.

The 1935 season was among Fife's best. George Kawasaki received an honorable mention at a February 10, 1935 tournament at the Seattle Dojo (JAC, February 16, 1935: 3). Daizo ("Dykes") Itami of Fife, a former Cleveland High School four-sport letterman, took his turn by winning first place during a Tentoku Kan tournament held March 3, 1935 (JAC, March 9, 1935: 3). Finally, Masato Tamura won an upset victory over Seattle Dojo's Kaimon Kudo at South Park on March 10, 1935, and came home with second place (JAC, March 16, 1935: 3; *Great Northern Daily News*, hereafter referred to as GND, March 11, 1935: 8).

In 1936, a small child playing with matches started a fire that razed the Fife Dojo (Edith Kuramoto, personal communication, September 25, 1997). Since Japanese-American boys provided the backbone of the Fife High School football, wrestling, and track teams, the judo club had no trouble arranging temporary sanctuary at Fife Junior High School. The Tacoma Dojo also welcomed Fife judoka. However, living on charity wasn't the same as having a dojo, and the Fife community responded to the disaster by building a judo wing to the Fife Japanese Language School (Edith Kuramoto, personal communication, September 25, 1997).

Other than the loss of its dojo, 1936 was another good year for the Fife Dojo. In March 1936, Tamura Masato, second dan, threw Kuniyuki Kaname, third dan, of Tentoku Kan in a well-publicized match.<sup>4</sup> In October 1936, a twenty-three-man Northwest all-star judo team that included Tamura Masato, Jack Ohashi, and George Kawasaki went to Los Angeles for a tournament with a California all-star team. Said the *Great Northern Daily News* afterward (October 27, 1936: 8):

Wins were scarce [for the Northwest team] until Masato Tamura, who ranked fifth on the Seattle team, turned the tables and hurled three men to the mat. He drew with Warren Lewis, Negro judoist.<sup>5</sup>

As a result of this outstanding performance, Professor Kano personally promoted Tamura to third dan in California (JAC, October 31, 1936: 3). Although this meant that Tamura was now technically senior to Iwakiri, the rank inversion did not affect their friendship. Says Iwakiri's daughter, Chiyo Iida, "My father was very proud to have the Tamura family participating in the Fife judo. Of course, Masato was the number one judoist in the region, as well as other regions. The other brothers did very well too" (Fujiko Gardner, personal communication from Chiyo Iida, May 4, 1997; Fujiko Gardner, personal communication, July 12, 1997). Tamura was equally proud of his teacher, and after the

HANK OGAWA AND  
HIROSHI TAMURA RESTING  
DURING THE TRAINING PRECEDING  
THE 1939 ALL-STAR TOURNAMENT  
IN LOS ANGELES.

Photo courtesy of Hank Ogawa.



war, whenever visiting his family in Tacoma, he would visit Iwakiri at his house. Adds Stewart Bush, one of Iwakiri's postwar seniors, "And Mr. Iwakiri didn't let anybody inside his house!" (Stewart Bush, personal communication, August 30, 1997; Fujiko Gardner, personal communication, October 28, 1997).

Besides doing judo, Fife Nisei (people born in America of Issei parents) were also active in the Fife High School wrestling team, where they dominated the lower weights. With the exception of heavyweight Joe Yamamoto, Swiss-Americans dominated the upper weights (Leslie Sandvig, personal communication, August 14, 1997). Prewar all-Northwest wrestling champions from Fife High School included Don Kawasaki, Leo Kawasaki, and Kenji Yaguchi. George Makoto Iwakiri was also active in both wrestling and judo.<sup>6</sup>

Les Sandvig was the wrestling coach at Fife. Due to Federal salary subsidies, Sandvig earned \$150 a month while his principal earned just \$90. To be sure, Sandvig earned all that extra money, the principal assigned him every extra duty he could find, including wrestling coach. (Few Northwest high schools of the 1930's had wrestling teams.) As Sandvig later recalled:

The teachers did a lot of after school hours of work – with school programs, P.T.A. meetings, etc. There was no such thing as overtime!

The wrestling coach job was enjoyable – working with the kids. Joe Yamamoto at 165 pounds, had no partner to work out with, so he and I spent a lot of time working out (my weight at that time was 170, 175). The things he taught me – together we made a great team, and he made a better coach of me.

Often there would be judo exhibition matches to raise money for the athletic departments. The Japanese who had graduated from Fife and lived in the community were available for these events. Masato Tamura and Sunji Dogen were glad to support this effort.

~ (Sandvig, personal communication, August 14, 1997)

On January 31, 1937, the Fife and Tacoma clubs held a joint tournament at the Tacoma Buddhist Church. This was in preparation for a rematch with the Californians to be held in Seattle over the weekend of April 3-4, 1937. In the individual competition, Hikaru Tamura lost to California's Hikaru Nakao and Masato Tamura drew with California's Mitsuo Kimura. In the team competition, Hikaru Tamura drew with California's Oseko and Jack Ohashi drew with California's Asano (JAC, April 10, 1937: 3).<sup>7</sup>

On February 7, 1938, Fife Dojo celebrated the opening of its new judo hall. The master of ceremonies was Tsugio Yaguchi, and speakers included the head of Kodokan judo in the Northwest, Yasuyuki Kumagai of Seattle. The *Japanese-American Courier* described the new facility, which was attached to the Japanese Language School, as "well-lighted, well-heated, and the mat consists of rubber-cushioned imported tatami – "a veritable judoist's paradise" (February 12, 1938: 4).

On March 20, 1938, Fife celebrated the opening with a tournament. Spectators included Tacoma photographer Marvin Boland, who hoped to get some action photos for *Life* magazine,<sup>8</sup> and officers from the Pierce County Sheriff's Department and the Washington State Patrol (*North American Times*, hereafter referred to as NAT, March 17, 1938: 1).

Judo founder Jigoro Kano visited the Northwest for the last time in April 1938. During this visit, Kano promoted Iwakiri to third dan and his fourteen-year old son George Makoto Iwakiri to first dan. While Dennis Helm has claimed these as Kano's last promotions, that is probably not the case. For one thing, other Northwest judoka, including Ei'ichi Koiwai of Seattle, received promotion the same night. It seems petty to argue about who stood last in line. More importantly, Kano visited Vancouver, British Columbia, on April 21-22, 1938, and probably promoted someone there before leaving (Dalien, 1988: 13-14; Ei'ichi Koiwai, personal communication, July 12, 1997).

The certificates that Kano left behind also caused some confusion. Kano had signed them using the phrase "*kiichi sai*," which means, "return to the original way." In 1977, Dennis Helm speculated that Kano meant that the Northwest judoka, many of whom were Christian, should take up Zen Buddhism (Helm, 1977: 16). Of course, Kano meant no such thing. *Kiichi sai* was simply a pen name he adopted upon turning seventy. Therefore, when he visited Seattle in 1938, he unsurprisingly signed promotion certificates, "Kano Kiichi Sai" (Dalien, 1988: 14; Nakayama, 1984: 201).

Fife hosted another regional tournament on February 12, 1939. The purpose of this tournament was to decide who would represent the Northwest during an upcoming tournament in California. Seven of the thirty players sent to Los Angeles came from Fife. These were Masato Tamura, Hikaru Tamura, Hiroshi Tamura, Jack Ohashi, Sunji Dogen, George Kawasaki, and Joe Yamamoto. The Northwest team trained hard, and while they lost the individual matches 7-11 on March 4, 1939, its members evened things up the following day by winning the team competition (JAC, February 25, 1939, p. 3; NAT, March 6, 1939, p. 1).

As many of these young Northwesterners had never been south of Portland, Oregon, the two days spent visiting San Francisco's Golden Gate International Exposition on the way back from Los Angeles were the true highlight of the trip. Auburn judoka Toshio Yamanaka recalled:

The Japanese Pavilion and Hawaii Exposition were the team's favorite places to meet and get together. That's because the many girls working at the two places were Nisei students at U.C. Berkeley and were there helping and working to help pay their college expenses. They were very friendly and treated us extra good so our car drivers drove them to their homes when it came time for them to get off work. The rest of us had to wait over an hour longer than the time set to leave to get a ride back to our hotel. Most of us in those days were rather girl shy, but the girls were all pretty and very nice and friendly and treated us like we were a special group. So we weren't upset to wait for the guys to take them home. But when we got back [Yasuyuki] Kumagai Sensei had us all stand in the main hotel lobby and gave us a lecture to never do such a thing again, to make all of us wait. It was the first and only lecture that we got from our sensei. This world's fair was really the greatest.

~ (Yamanaka personal communications, February 3, 19, & March 11, 1998)

Being otherwise responsible young men, the travelers bought souvenirs for their stay-at-home friends. Recalled Ryoichi Iwakiri's daughter, Chiyo Iida (Fujiko

Gardner, personal communication from Chiyo Iida, May 4, 1997):

I have a good memory about our [family's] relation with them [Hiroshi and Hikaru Tamura, both of whom were years older than she]. In 1939 they went to the World's Fair in San Francisco (Treasure Island) and brought us a lot of mementos from the Fair. I was so proud I wore my bracelet to school and everyone was so envious.

In January 1941, Masato Tamura's sister, Tadako,<sup>9</sup> saw an advertisement announcing a full-time job teaching judo at Chicago's Jiu-Jitsu Institute (GND, January 15, 1941: 8). She mentioned this to her brother, who immediately applied. He got the job and left for the "Windy City" in March 1941 (GND, February 28, 1941: 8; JAC, March 1, 1941: 3). Besides being lauded in the local papers, Tamura received various honors at local tournaments plus a send-off banquet from the Fife Dojo (GND, September 24, 1940: 8; NAT, November 17, 1938: 1). The latter likely took place at Fife's Poodle Dog Café on a Friday night in late February. The main course was probably chicken, with the men drinking beer and the youths drinking apple cider. And afterwards there were likely speeches culminating in a stirring rendition of "Auld Lange Syne" (NAT, 1940, September 30: 1).

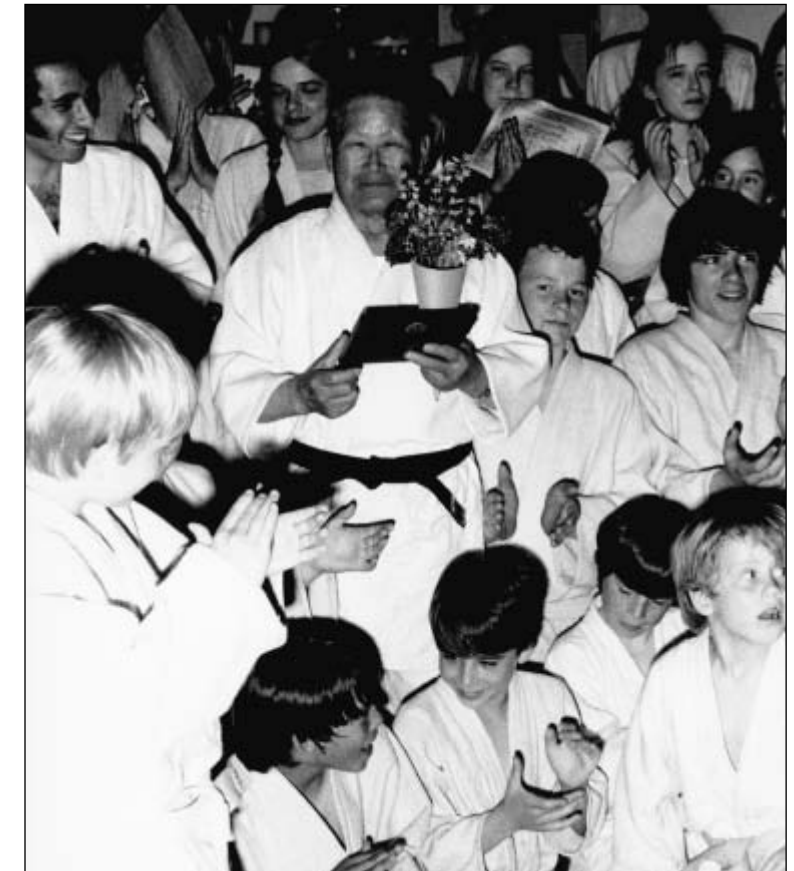
During World War II, Fife's Japanese-Americans were relocated to concentration camps in California and Idaho. Because he lived in Chicago, Masato Tamura avoided being relocated. Hiroshi, who had been drafted in 1940, also avoided relocation. However, the rest of the Tamura family was sent to Minidoka Relocation Center in Hunt, Idaho.

During the summer of 1943, Masato Tamura received permission to visit his family at Minidoka. There he found his brothers active in the camp judo club, and even arranged for his mother to stitch judo jackets for his Chicago judo students (Fujiko Gardner, personal communication, June 8, 1997). Mrs. Tamura always was an enthusiastic supporter of her sons' judo practice (Fujiko Gardner, personal communication, March 16, 1998). Soon after, both Masaru and Mitsuru Tamura enlisted in the US Army and served in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Masaru was killed in Italy in April 1945.

After the war, most of the surviving Tamura boys stayed in the Midwest. Ryoichi Iwakiri returned to Fife in 1947. While his first postwar judo dojo was a friend's garage, around 1952 he moved it inside the old Tacoma Japanese Language School. His dojo was in the basement. The floor area measured about 20' x 20', and the tatami were provided by friends (NT, August 16, 1952: 2; Washington 1995).

RYOICHI IWAKIRI, MID-1960'S.

Photo courtesy of Hank Ogawa.



Although Iwakiri retired from active training around 1957, he remained affiliated with the Tacoma-Fife Dojo until his death in May 1987. Most of what he taught during the last thirty years of his life was philosophy. Favorite sayings included, "Success is like your eyebrows. It's in front of you all the time, you just can't see it," and "Victory even before the battle is for the person who is embraced with compassion and no thought of himself" (Stewart Bush, personal communication, March 10, 1998).

A prospective student once asked Iwakiri what it took to become a judo master. Three things, he replied: the first two were practice, and the third was more practice. "That's not what I meant," said the student; "what is the key to mastering the long run?" Replied Iwakiri, "In the long run, we are all dead." Another student asked what he would be taught. To which Iwakiri replied, "I can't teach you very much, but you can learn a lot" (Stewart Bush, personal communication, November 28, 1997). And, shortly before his death, Iwakiri told his long-time student Jerry Dalien:



[Jigoro Kano] told me once that I must be strong in mind and body always, and help others in life. I appreciate all you peoples who come and see me. I am old now and peoples have no time for them. Mr. Yamashita, Mr. Bush, Mr. Demorest, and you Mr. Dalien are fine students of Kano's judo.<sup>10</sup> Mr. Uchida, he is important mans in Judo – you tell him good-bye for me. I am not important persons. I have done nothing great, I have no schooling. You please make any honor for me, just judo. Okay? I do not have long time left to live anymore, but want you to keep my judo, please? Okay? ~ (Dalien, 1988: 23-24)

VINCE TAMURA,  
THREE TIME U.S.  
AAU JUDO CHAMPION,  
TRAINING AT HIS DOJO  
IN DALLAS, TEXAS, IN 1997.

Photo courtesy of  
Fujiko Tamura Gardner.

Following the war, Masato Tamura also remained active in judo. In 1944, he bought the Jiu-Jitsu Institute of America from Harry Auspitz. In 1949, he was elected president of the Chicago Judo Black Belt Association, and in 1958 he became president of the US Judo Federation. Yet he was not just another judo politician, for as late as 1964 he was still winning US masters championships.<sup>11</sup> More importantly, he remained a friend and mentor to his many students. As one of them wrote following Tamura's death on June 10, 1982, "With modesty and humility he characterized the true judo spirit" ("Masato Tamura, Hachidan," in Masato Tamura collection).

Other former Fife judoka also remained with judo until age or infirmity forced their retirement. For example, Vince Tamura moved to Chicago in June 1945. After completing high school and military service in Korea, he went on to become a three-time AAU national judo champion. In August 1960, he relocated to Dallas, where he was still teaching judo in 1998. After separation from the ser-



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Photo from the Boland Collection, courtesy of the Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma, Washington.

vice, Mitsuru Tamura also moved to Chicago, where he was an instructor at his brother's Jiu-Jitsu Institute for many years. Hikaru Tamura taught judo in Ogden, Utah. Hiroshi Tamura taught judo in Chicago and France. George Iwakiri, George Kawasaki, and Leo Kawasaki taught judo at the Tacoma-Fife Dojo. Finally, Kenji Yaguchi taught judo in Ontario, Oregon, and was chairman of the Oregon AAU Judo Committee from 1958 to 1966 (Stewart Bush, personal communication, November 28, 1997; Kenji Yaguchi, personal communication, June 22, 1997).<sup>12</sup>

And so the falls first learned in Mr. Yamamoto's barn in the 1920's continue to echo throughout North American judo.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Although Japanese put family names before personal names, most of the people named in this paper were or eventually became US citizens. Therefore, it better reflects the way they described themselves if their names are written personal name, family name rather than the other way around. To keep things simple, the occasional Japanese names are also written in the American fashion.

<sup>2</sup> The history of the Fife Dojo – given in Helm (July 1977) and reprinted almost verbatim (albeit without any attribution to Helm's editorial team or acknowledgment of US Judo Federation copyright) by Corcoran and Farkas (1988: 212-214, 217) – is wrong in almost every detail. On the other hand, the history given in Helm, Armetta, and Wickham (May 1973:14-15) is generally accurate except for spellings.

<sup>3</sup> Photograph (cir. 1931-3) of a Fife High School tournament in the Joseph Svinth collection

<sup>4</sup> Published articles and photographs owned by Mr. Tamura's widow, Rose Tamura.

<sup>5</sup> Reasonable numbers of early twentieth-century judoka were not of Japanese ancestry. In California, for example, non-Japanese judoka included San Jose State's Emilio Bruno, Los Angeles' Jack Sergel and Warren Lewis, and Stockton's Robert E. West. In British Columbia, there were a number of Royal Canadian Mounted Police judoka, and in Washington State, there was Stanley McDonald in Seattle and Vernon Anderson in Winslow. There were of course more non-Japanese jujutsu teachers and students elsewhere, especially in New York City and the upper Midwest. While most teachers and students were male, there were female students in New York City and Los Angeles, plus at least one female instructor in Wisconsin.

<sup>6</sup> See Fife High School's *Trojan, 1935-1942*. Fife Nisei did equally well in postwar AAU wrestling. For example, Hisashi Watanabe lettered in wrestling at Fife in 1946 and 1947, and qualified for the US AAU Nationals in Ames, Iowa, in 1948 (*Northwest Times*, hereafter referred to as NWT, May 1, 1948: 3).

<sup>7</sup> See the Keigi Horiuchi collection. The first names for the California judoka were not noted in the reporting.

<sup>8</sup> While Boland's records at the Washington State Historical Society in Tacoma date the surviving photographs to March 30, 1938, that was probably the day he developed them, as the tournament took place a week earlier. Unfortunately, the pictures were too blurred to make *Life* magazine.

<sup>9</sup> Tadako Tamura is an excellent writer, and examples of her essays appeared in the *North American Times* on January 4, 1938 and May 14, 1938, and the *Great Northern Daily News* on January 1, 1940. Her postwar pen name was Thea Mori. For a brilliant example of her mature style, see "Salmon Creek This Week" in the *White Center News*, May 26, 1960.

<sup>10</sup> Stewart Bush, Robert Demorest, and Jerry Dalien were among Iwakiri's postwar seniors. Masao Yamashita was a prewar friend from Auburn who later established the Boise Valley Judo Club in Caldwell, Idaho. George Uchida was a former San Jose State University judo coach who took a job teaching judo in the Kent-Meridian High School program after one day realizing that the spirit of judo was not found in winning medals, but in working with kids.

<sup>11</sup> Tamura became known nationwide through television. The most famous television appearances included his daughter Diane. The act was usually nothing more than Tamura doing a few throws and falls with his daughter, and then talking about judo. The first took place on Chicago television on February 10, 1952. The popularity of their act led to national television exposure beginning in June 1952. For contemporary accounts of Tamura's postwar career, see NT, November 3, 1948: 1; NT, August 20, 1949: 4; NT, August 31, 1949: 3; NT, February 16, 1952: 4; NT, June 18, 1952: 4.

<sup>12</sup> "Members of the Tamura Family Involved with Tacoma-Fife Dojo," unpublished typewritten document in the Fujiko Gardner collection.

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