

# Understanding the female judoka's coach-athlete relationship: a British perspective.



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The purpose of this study is to examine the coach-athlete relationship, to gain a greater understanding into the relationship between female judo athletes and their coach. To explore what is felt as important, the dynamics in the relationship and does the athlete's opinion differ from that of the coach. A greater understanding to the relationship between an athlete and coach needs to be appraised so that any proposed theories can be examined in the practical/applied domain and whether the proposed theories behind the complex interactions are offering a great enough insight to the reality.

## Introduction

The researchers for this project are both coaches who currently work in their National set ups for England and Japan. The initial idea for the investigation came from Maki Tsukada's two year observation of the British system, and also a reflection on the London 2012 Olympics and the coach-athlete interaction. Coaches came under scrutiny from the results of the Olympics, which made it pertinent to examine the relationship between the coach and athlete, to try and ensure that it does not disintegrate.

The wider impact of the study will mean that coaches will have a greater understanding of how to build and work at their relationship with their athletes and understand what the important dynamics are within.

## Methodology

The research strategy is that of action research, whilst the research design was informed by the ontological and epistemological position of both researchers. Recognising their position within their respective National Governing Bodies and the experience they have at working at this level.

The participants are from the 2013 Great Britain National Women's Squad programme. The athletes were asked to complete a questionnaire given to them at National Squad Training and then two National Coaches were interviewed.

The questionnaire was themed from the specific areas highlighted in the literature research that are thought to be prevalent in a coach-athlete relationship. The questions were open and helped gauge the opinion of the athletes on the coach-athlete relationship, whilst the interviews were semi-structured and followed the themes outlined in the questionnaire.

All participants were given a written explanation of the study including procedure, informed consent, voluntary participation, withdrawal, anonymity and data protection procedures.

## Discussion and Results

### Athletes views on the coach-athlete relationship

| Most Important  | Least Important   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trust and Respect</li> <li>Communication and Understanding</li> <li>Getting on with your coach</li> <li>Honesty</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Qualifications</li> <li>Judo Status</li> <li>Belt grades</li> <li>Gender/ Age</li> </ul> |

### Coaches views on the coach-athlete relationship

The coaches' interviews highlighted three specific areas:

#### Treat athlete as individuals

"I think the coach should fit the athlete. So with athletes as a whole I am the same with everybody, because everybody is treated individual to them but always with the same integrity and the same values." If treated as an individual it leads onto the key point "it's about understanding the athlete, it's about how people develop."

#### Significance of their own behaviour as the coach

"I try and act with consistency so my behaviour with them is always the same." "As a team I would set clear guidelines, in terms of how the athlete and coach work, I fit what they need."

### Coaching more than a job

"If you have got 7 girls, they trust, they put their life's dreams in my hands." One coach went further to suggest that "I want to provide people with the inspiration to dream, the opportunity to deliver and the belief to achieve."

### Coaches and Athletes views on the coach-athlete relationship

In respect to the analysis of the data, one of the main disparities noted is that of the importance the coaches place on their experience and results as an athlete.

The athletes stated that this was the least important attribute of a coach, whereby the coaches feel the need to justify their coaching credentials by it and the experience it gave them. The athletes' views of what attributes are important in their coach include "make me work hard/pushes me, are motivational, knowledgeable, communication, passionate, understands, enthusiastic/positive attitude."

The coaches highlighted that for them, the key is to treat each athlete as an individual, to build an understanding of them and to be a role model in terms of their behaviour.



## Conclusion

The fundamental importance of the coach- athlete relationship was recognised by both the athletes and the coaches, with the athletes declaring that they definitely need a coach to develop and improve. In a direct comparison on what is important to the athlete and to the coach in the dynamic of the relationship, the points are very similar.

| Coach  | Athlete   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listening</li> <li>Honesty</li> <li>Trust</li> <li>Believe</li> <li>Ability to work hard</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trust and Respect</li> <li>Communication and Understanding</li> <li>Getting on with your coach</li> <li>Honesty</li> </ul> |

The strength and importance of the relationship was highlighted as when the athletes were asked whether they trusted and respected their current coach, 100% of them stated that they did. They also noted that the worst experiences with their coach were when they felt like they have let them down, not given 100%, made silly mistakes or got told off.