

Spectator Guide

A Brief History of Judo Competition

In 1956, the first World Championships for men were held. Currently, World Championships for Men and Women are held in odd-numbered years; Junior World Championships for men and women under 20 years of age are held in even-numbered years. In 1964, Men's Judo was included in the Olympic Games. In 1988 Women's Judo was a demonstration event and in 1992 became a full medal event in the Olympics. Every year, USA Judo holds National Championships for Adults (Minimum of 15 years old), Youth (under 20 years old), and Masters (30 years old and above.)

Watching a Contest

So, you're at the Judo Tournament. What the heck is going on? Hopefully the following will be an easy introduction to the rules that will help you to understand the tournament.



Blue player being thrown for "Ippon"

What are they trying to do?

Quite simply they are trying to:

1. Knock the opponent over so that he/she lands on their back (a throw); or
2. Hold the opponent on their back for 20 seconds; or
3. Make the opponent submit by a choke (age 13 and over) or an arm lock (senior competition Brown and Black Belt only).

If any of those three things are done successfully the score given is called "Ippon" and the match is over, like a knockout in boxing or a pin in wrestling.

How do they hope to do it?

There are hundreds of variations of throwing techniques. Some throws use mostly legs, some mostly arms, some a combination of arms, legs, and torso. Some throw their opponent over their own hips, shoulders, or back. They can also sweep the opponent's feet out from under him, or they can drop down and throw the opponent over their own fallen body.

To pin the opponent, they press down from a face-down, side-down position, or back-down position on the opponent (generally controlling the head and an arm or leg) so that the opponent's back or a shoulder is on the mat.

To obtain a submission, pressure can be applied directly on the elbow of a straight arm or the arm bent at a right angle can be twisted in either direction (arm lock). To strangle, or choke, pressure is applied to the sides or front of the opponent's neck by one or both forearms or by using the opponent's own collar. Strangle holds are only allowed on players 13 years old or older. Arm locks can only be used if the player is at least Brown or Black Belt Senior Division.

Although strangles and arm locks may seem dangerous, the players are trained to know when they are in difficulty, and will submit by tapping either the mat, or the opponent, twice, before any damage is done. The referees are extremely alert when one player attempts to apply a choke or an arm lock. If the referee thinks the technique is about to cause serious injury, he can stop the match and declare a winner.

What aren't they allowed to do?

There is a long list of things not allowed. Mainly, players are expected to play fair and continuously attack. They will be penalized for things like intentionally going out of bounds, refusing to attack (stalling), being too defensive, making rude comments or gestures, and performing dangerous acts (like not giving the opponent a chance to submit). The rules are rarely broken except in the tactical areas, such as stepping out or stalling. Penalties in judo are severe; a repeat of any transgression results always in an additional penalty. Acquiring 3 penalties will award the opponent the match. Again, listen to the referee. The four possible signals, lowest to highest:

Because of the escalation of penalties only 3 minor transgressions will result in Hansoku-make (disqualification) and a win to the opponent

Who decides?

3 referees determine the degree of success for all techniques. Depending on the tournament, a "Care System" may be used. This would include a referee on the mat and two referees on the sidelines watching on a computer screen. If a "Care System" is not available, two referees sit at opposite corners and the third moves around the mat to observe the players. The center referee also controls the bout and signals the results. Each score/penalty is agreed upon by at least 2 of the 3 or it is changed.

Below is a sketch of a contest area. For identification, one player will wear a completely blue uniform (Judo-gi, or Judo clothing); the other will wear a white Judo-gi. The contest area is a square 8 x 8 meters on a side. The outer meter (“danger area”) is red and is inside the playing area, but competitors can only remain in that area for a few seconds before attempting a throw or they will be penalized. There is a 3-meter “safety area” in which players can be thrown as long as the thrower remains inside the contest area.

Sketch of a Contest Area



Are there partial scores?

Yes, for throws and pins. Naturally on submissions it is either success or failure. In each bout, unless the match is won by an Ippon or 2 - Waza-ari's (1/2 point) partial scores decide the winner after expiration of time. Waza ari's are given if the opponent does not land largely on the back, or not hard or fast enough, but still have some of the required qualities. Pins broken before 20 seconds, but after 10 seconds are also awarded Waza ari.

How can you tell a technique's score?

Watch the center referee's hand signal and listen to the call. The higher the signaling arm, the higher the score. The scores, in order from highest to lowest quality are:

Ippon: arm straight up.

Waza-ari: arm out straight at shoulder level

Who is ahead?

There should be one scoreboard per mat to show the state of play. In Judo it is always the highest total score that wins; the scoreboard is laid out left to right to show the scores like a 2-digit number

| | Ippon | Waza-ari | Penalties |
|--------------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| | | | |
| BLUE | 0 | 1 | xx |
| WHITE | 0 | 0 | x |
| Timer | 0:00 | | |

With the example above, **when time has run out**,

1. Blue is the winner due to the Waza-ari.
2. Even though Blue has more penalties it makes no difference on the score
3. If the positive scores were equal (1 waza-ari each) they would go into Golden Score (sudden death overtime)
 - The first waza-ari or ippon from either player would win or,
 - If any player accumulates 3 penalties their opponent would win.