

EUROPEAN JUDO IS REALLY JAPANESE SOMBO?

By Dr. Brett Jacques and Scott Anderson

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...Everyone saw the similarities between sambo and judo, but no-one was prepared for the effect that the Soviets were going to have on the evolution of judo over the next twenty-five years. To say that they were unorthodox is an understatement, and it was particularly their numerous variations on armlocks which took everyone by surprise. Up until this time a flying juji-gatame had never been seen in competition, but it was apparent that they were very well-rehearsed moves from a very highly-trained team.

Neil Adams in Judo Masterclass Techniques, Armlocks

Page 9, Reference 1

Sambo, sport wrestling, permitting the application of painful holds; also a means of self-defense in a fight against a stronger or armed enemy. (Composed of an abbreviated form of the word SAM [ozashchita] and the initial letters of the words B[ez] and O[ruzhiya].

The Dictionary of the Russian Language, of the Institute of Russian Language, of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, volume IV, page 16

Every SOMBO practitioner winces when a well meaning martial arts savant describes SOMBO as Russian judo, or better yet, Russian combat judo. That is akin to describing karate as western boxing but with kicks. There is a relationship, of course, but more like third cousins thrice removed.

The founders of SOMBO sifted deliberately through all of the world's martial arts to augment their military's hand-to-hand combat system. One of these men, Vasili Oshchepkov, taught judo and karate to elite Red Army forces at the Central Red Army House. He had earned his nidan (second degree black belt) from judo's founder, Jigaro Kano, and used some of the Osensei's philosophy in formulating the early development of the new Russian art.

SOMBO, however, was born of native Russian and other regional styles of grappling and combat wrestling bolstered with the most useful and adaptable concepts and techniques from the rest of the world. As the unfortunate buffer between Europe and Asia, Russia had more than ample opportunities to sift through the martial skills of various invaders. Earlier Russians had experienced threats from the Vikings in the west and the Tatars and Genghis Khan's Golden Horde from Mongolia in the east. The regional, native combat systems included in SOMBO's genesis are Tuvian kuresh, Yakuts khapsagay, Chuvash akatuy, Georgian chidaoba, Moldavian trinte, Azeri kokh, and Uzbek kurash to name a few. The foreign influences included Dutch Self-Defense (a European version of Javanese Pentjak Silat), various styles of Catch-as-Catch-Can wrestling, savate, mui thai, wu shu, jujitsu, and other martial arts of the day plus the classical Olympic sports of boxing, Greco-Roman and free-style wrestling. SOMBO even derived lunging and parrying techniques from fencing.

Fencing was included in this list because SOMBO's founders recognized that swordsmanship and unarmed combat have been linked throughout the ages. The samurai of feudal Japan needed their jujitsu for the occasions when they did not wish to harm an opponent, or when they themselves were unfortunately swordless on the battlefield. Fencing concepts such as the lunge had already been incorporated into savate to increase the art's striking distances.

SOMBO's early development stemmed from the independent efforts of Oshchepkov and another Russian, Victor Spiridonov, to integrate the techniques of judo into native wrestling styles. Both men hoped that the Soviet wrestling styles could be improved by an infusion of the newfangled techniques distilled from jujitsu by Kano into his new style of jacket wrestling.

In 1918, V. Lenin created Vseobuch (Bceobshchee voennoye obuchenie or General Military Training) under the leadership of N.I. Podovoyevskiy to train the Red Army. The task of developing and organizing Russian military hand-to-hand combat training fell to K. Voroshilov, who in turn, created the NKVD physical training center, "Dinamo." Spiridonov was a combat veteran of World War I, and one of the first wrestling and self-defense instructors hired for Dinamo. His background included Greco-Roman wrestling, American Catch-as-Catch-Can wrestling, Pankration, and many Slavic wrestling styles. As a "combatives investigator" for Dinamo, he traveled to Mongolia, China, and India to observe their native fighting styles. In 1923, Oshchepkov and Spiridonov collaborated with a team of other experts on a grant from the Soviet government to improve the Red Army's hand-to-hand combat system. Spiridonov had envisioned integrating all of the world's fighting systems into one comprehensive style that could adapt to any threat. Oshchepkov had observed Kano's distillation of Tenjin Shin'yo Ryu jujitsu and Kito Ryu jujitsu into judo, and he had developed the insight required to evaluate and integrate combative techniques into a new system. Their development team was

supplemented by Anatoly Kharlampiev and I.V. Vasiliev who also traveled the globe to study the native fighting arts of the world. Ten years in the making, their catalogue of techniques was instrumental in formulating the early framework of the art to be eventually referred to as SOMBO. Here, Oshchepkov and Spiridonov's improvements in Russian wrestling slipped into the military's hand-to-hand-combat system.

Kharlampiev is often called the father of SOMBO. This may be largely semantics since only he had the longevity and political connections to remain with the art while the new system was called "SAM" or "SAMOZ" or "SAMBA" and finally "SAMBO/SOMBO." Spiridonov was the first to actually begin referring to the new system as one of the "S" variations cited above. He eventually developed a softer, more "aikido-like" system called SAMOZ that could be used by smaller, weaker practitioners or even wounded soldiers and secret agents. Spiridonov's inspiration to develop SAMOZ stemmed from an injury that he suffered that greatly restricted his ability to practice SOMBO or wrestling. Refined versions of SAMOZ are still used today or fused with specific SOMBO applications to meet the needs of Russian commandos today.

Each technique for SOMBO was carefully dissected and considered for its merits, and if found acceptable in unarmed combat, refined to reach SOMBO's ultimate goal: stop an armed or unarmed adversary in the least time possible. Thus, the best techniques of jujitsu and its softer cousin, judo, entered the SOMBO repertoire. When the techniques were perfected, they were woven into SOMBO applications for personal self-defense, police, crowd control, border guards, secret police, dignitary protection, psychiatric hospital staff, military, and commandos.

These applications were often further subdivided. SOMBO devoted particular time to developing teamwork in the police and internal security applications. It was crucial that officers and agents not work against each other while arresting dangerous fugitives or spies. SOMBO designed and rehearsed rescue tactics for comrades being attacked by armed or unarmed assailants. It was important that the rescuer act quickly, but not worsen the situation with his efforts. Here again, teamwork enhanced tactics. If the victim were also trained in the rescue tactics, he could aid his rescuer in effecting his escape.

Many applications had specific situational or occupational techniques. For example, there is a series of techniques to be used by bureaucrats and other officials who might be attacked while working at their desks. Particular emphasis was paid to using the environment (i.e. using the desk, the chair, or even a pen) as both weapon and shield.

Ironically, the military applications developed defensive techniques against weapons that quickly became offensive techniques with the same weapons when they were stripped away from their attackers. A partial inventory of this weapon training includes bayonet fencing, clubs, knives, handguns, and unconventional weapons such as entrenching tools, hats, jackets, and chairs.

Jigaro Kano derived judo (“the Gentle Way”) from jujitsu to be both a sport and system of physical and moral education that could preserve the Japanese martial tradition and be readily used for self-defense.

Kano had observed that jujitsu had been in decline since the 1871 Decree Abolishing the Wearing of Swords. Kano started jujitsu practice when he entered Tokyo Imperial University and encountered some of the larger hooligans in the area. Jujitsu would strengthen his body while giving him the techniques needed to beat larger opponents. Unfortunately, the dojos of the day were often haphazard in their teaching, and it was not uncommon for the senior students to brutalize the initiates as part of their own training.

In my youth I studied jujitsu under many eminent masters...each man presented his art as a collection of techniques. None perceived the guiding principles behind jujitsu. When I encountered differences in the teaching of techniques, I often found myself at a loss to know which was correct. This led me to look for an underlying principle in jujitsu, one that applied when one hit the opponent as well as when one threw him...I discerned an all-pervasive principle: to make the most efficient use of mental and physical energy...I again reviewed all the methods of attack and defense I had learned, retaining only those that were in accordance with the principle...The resulting body of technique, which I named judo to distinguish it from its predecessor, is what is taught at the Kodokan.

Jigaro Kano, Kodokan Judo

Page 16 of Reference 9

In 1882, Kano opened the Kodokan to teach his judo. He was 22 years old and used space in the Eishoji Temple on eight straw mats called tatami. In his first year, he had nine students. He did not call his art jujitsu; he hoped to break away from the stigma of the past. His new system was simplified and logical. By 1885, he had perfected his concept of kuzushi (unbalancing the opponent prior to initiating a technique) that would allow his students to beat most every practitioner of the remaining jujitsu schools. Whereas jujitsu concentrated on winning, judo would concentrate on physical and moral development through kata (prearranged technique sequences) and randori (competitive free sparring). The self-defense

techniques were collected into the Atemi Waza and taught after students mastered the basic precepts of the art.

SOMBO, as its name implies, was a combat system that developed a sport version to condition the troops and allow them to practice combat techniques in a relatively safe environment.

Sport SOMBO in Russian is Bor'ba CAMBO and is often translated as SOMBO wrestling. Although the military used the term SOMBO in the 1930s, the sport originally was called free style wrestling (not to be confused with the Olympic sport of today) and did not take on the name of SOMBO officially until 1946. The same year, Kharlampiev assumed the presidency of the All-Union SOMBO section. In this transition period, Combat SOMBO and SOMBO wrestling did much to assimilate each other's techniques. However, neither application ever absorbed the other style entirely. The combat system adapted to field conditions while the "freestyle wrestling" specialized in the limited warfare engaged in on the competitive mat.

The Great October Socialist Revolution opened the way for the further development of national forms of wrestling. By the 1930s, study of the national and ethnic forms of wrestling had already led to the recognition of the need to create a new, all-union form of wrestling which might assist in resolving the task of preparing Soviet youth for work and for defense, and at the same time might give to wrestlers of various ethnic groups and nationalities the possibility of meeting in the sports arena.

E. Chumakov, One Hundred SOMBO Wrestling Lessons

Page 22 of Reference 4

SOMBO practitioners fore go the gi of Japan and fight in SOMBO boots ("cambofki"), "kurtki (jackets)," and shorts so that the bout referees can judge the severity and risk of injury from SOMBO's potentially crippling leg locks and Achilles tendon stretches. SOMBO's birth date is listed officially as November 16, 1938 when the All-Union Committee of Physical Culture and Sport recognized sport SOMBO (at that time, the sport was still called free style wrestling). A. M. Rubanchik was the first president of the All-Union SOMBO section. SOMBO training was conducted by units in Moscow, Leningrad, Kharkov, Saratov, and Baku.

These were dangerous times for the Soviet Union, and the government wanted a civilian populace that had "sport" skills that could be readily translated into military skills for perceived threats from Nazi Germany or even Finland. At last, civilians were allowed to practice the new Russian fighting system. Individual championships were first held in 1939, and team and individual championships were first held in 1949. The first team championships featured fighters from eight

Soviet republics plus Leningrad and Moscow. The Dinamo team won the championship.

Two world wars and relative geographic isolation permitted SOMBO to develop uninfluenced by later judo philosophy and technique revisions. Also, in the late 1930s, the Soviet Union took on a siege mentality and recoiled defensively against foreigners and their outside influences. Vasili Oshchepkov with his nidan in judo and contacts in Japan's Kodokan did not survive the purges of 1937.

Eventually, the SOMBists deemed their sport sufficiently perfected to test it on the international scene. The only international style of jacket wrestling was sport judo. When SOMBO fighters emerged from their Soviet isolation onto the mats of the Essen European Judo Championships in 1962, the Old World immediately noticed the similarities between the two fighting systems. The judoka, however, saw so many differences that SOMBists were at best considered unorthodox. Nonetheless, the Soviet team took third place in the event capturing five medals. A. Kiknadze of Tbilisi won the title of Absolute Champion of Europe.

...It was the arrival of the Russians... which changed many of the traditional attitudes, at least outside Japan. Here were fighters who had very different training methods, and who were accustomed to picking up opponents at any opportunity. They were not worried whether the techniques had proper Japanese name (sic) or not. Their aim was to throw their opponents flat on there (sic) backs-and uranage was just as good as seoi-nage as far as they were concerned. Furthermore, they trained for this, both physically and technically.

This fresh view prised open competition judo. Suddenly, nothing seemed sacred any more. Top champions suddenly became concerned about coming in with a strong forward attack for fear of being unceremoniously dumped backwards.

Robert van de Walle, Judo Masterclass Techniques, Pick-Ups

Page 17 of Reference 14

However, it was only recently, during the 1960s, that the Russians revolutionised modern-day judo with their unorthodox techniques derived from sambo wrestling, thus opening up a whole new range of ideas for modern judoka.

Neil Adams, Judo Masterclass Techniques: Armlocks

Pick-Ups in judo refers to the group of techniques including morote-gari, sukui-nage, ura-nage, kata-garuma, etc. which are considered wrestling techniques as opposed to techniques true to the spirit of judo. Properly executed, a pick-up does, however, score the same point as a classical judo throw.

Through Oshchepkov, the Soviets were well aware of traditional judo training practices but did not always find them practical for their purposes. SOMBO training was based on traditional wrestling instruction bolstered with the latest western athletic training science and philosophy. The wrestling model was particularly useful to the Soviets since much of their military was already versed in their own ethnic styles of combat wrestling. The curriculum was based on learning to use and counter the techniques most likely to be encountered on the streets or the battlefield. It started simply and progressed in range and depth of techniques based on the individual student's training needs.

The Japanese under Kano's influence perfected the concept of the martial art where perfection of technique could lead to personal development and enlightenment. The Russians perfected the concept of survival in combat. They did not train to perfect the technique; they trained to become proficient with the technique in all situations. The Russians understood that a partner who is compliant in kata could be quite perverse as an actual adversary. Multiple attackers would some how not be in the designated places at the right time as specified in any kata.

Kano's genius in creating judo from the many jujitsu ryus was in simplifying the techniques and scouring away the redundant and over complex techniques from the Japanese systems. Kano was always tinkering with the right mix of kata and randori to train his students. He and Oshchepkov were both proponents of kata as a means of training students in their systems. However, most of Oshchepkov's fellow combatives investigators deemed the practical, fluid and unchoreographed applications found in competitions to be superior training vehicles to hone the reflexes and instincts that fighters needed to survive. In that, they were more like the old jujitsu instructors who concentrated on winning above all.

Therefore, the Soviets developed a combative calculus to handle all the variations that could occur in real life. They did not rely on kata except in the most general sense. When they studied the shoulder throw, they explored all the variations at one time, so the student would not be confused or thrown off by minor deviations in execution. It was not important to master the perfect shoulder throw; it was important to knock the adversary down and submit, damage, or kill him. Instead of hard rules, they developed rules of thumb to guide the fighter. Because real life is not the controlled classroom, their motto became philosophy, not plan.

SOMBists supplemented their techniques and tactics with psychological conditioning, aerobic conditioning, and weight resistance training. In sport, it might be enough to be a technical fighter, but in actual combat, it was better to be a tough, technical fighter.

The Russians explored techniques from all angles without prejudice except that a technique must be effective and able to be integrated smoothly into a fighter's overall repertoire. Standing techniques were examined to see if they could be executed as groundwork and vice versa. If a technique, such as a sweep, were executed with a foot, could a variation be developed using a knee or a hand? In which situations might that version apply?

The traditional taxonomies of other martial arts were checked for relevancy in modern times and conditions. The primary condition of acceptance remained: could a technique down the adversary quickly and totally?

If the big lifts of Olympic wrestling filled the role, then so be it. These techniques may appear initially to be dramatic demonstrations of physical power, but like most judo techniques, they are often ingenious combinations of set-ups, grips, footwork, and timing. Thus, the high double leg takedown and the snatch double leg takedown became variants of morote-gari while the suplex became an ura-nage variant.

...favoured by Soviet fighters, probably as a result of their tradition in Sombo wrestling. It [a grappling-style approach to judo] involves getting the most possible amount of body contact, closing right in on an opponent and putting him under severe pressure to make a mistake. Aesthetically, it is certainly not as appealing as the traditional style, but there is no denying its effectiveness.

Peter Seisenbacher and George Kerr, Modern Judo, Techniques of East and West

Page 92 of Reference 12

Judo rules and strategy centered on securing the throw. SOMBO fighters worked to a much larger extent for the submission. The Soviets often used the throw or take down specifically to set up the submission. The SOMBO equivalent of judo's throwing "ippon" is called "ultimate victory." One full point or "ippon" immediately ends a judo bout when one fighter scores ippon or when the cumulative value of one point is earned in a match. Where the ippon may be scored with a sacrifice technique such as tomoe-nage, a SOMBist must remain standing to score an ultimate victory with a take down or throw.

Judo submissions often came from jime-waza (chokes and strangles). In sport jujitsu and judo, chokes are different from strangles. The former cuts off the flow of

blood to the brain while strangles cut off the air supply to the brain. A good technique may be both a choke and a strangle. An excellent technique may a choke, a strangle, and a joint lock all at the same time. Judo banned leg and ankle locks from the sport although they were common in the Atemi Waza. Sport SOMBO banned chokes and strangles while combat SOMBO used them extensively, but not to the degree found in the oriental arts. Alexander Retuinskih cited this difference in Russian Style Hand to Hand Combat:

...Popular judo choke holds using the collar of the clothing are based upon the national peculiarities of the kimono costume with its wide, loose-fitting lapels. For this reason, under our conditions, with buttoned-up collars, thick lapels, and frozen fingers, it's not worth the trouble to misuse exotic holds...

Paragraph 4.2.4 of Reference 8

Retuinskih was referring to another native Russian system that he taught under the All-Russian Federation of Russian Martial Art (RFRMA) at the RETAL Center for Russian Martial Art in St. Petersburg. RETAL also has renovated programs for Sambo/Judo using Retuinskih's System R.O.S.S. His comments are relevant because this same native style influenced the striking, blocking, and kicking aspects of SOMBO's development. Many of SOMBO's kick counters may appear to be generic grappling but are made unique by the system of blocks and evasions.

In judo, ippon may also be scored from an osae-komi waza (a hold down) technique, but in SOMBO; the hold down may only score points. Depending on the duration of the hold down, two or four points may be scored in the match one time by each opponent. A twelve point lead scores ultimate victory. Only if the hold down points cause a twelve point lead, can the hold down end a match. This reflects SOMBO's combat philosophy. Hold downs seldom end actual conflicts in the real world. That an adversary is trapped on his or her back does not alter the fact that the SOMBist applying the technique is only free to leave if the person on bottom is willing to let him go as well.

In combat or the streets, if the fighter on bottom can hold on to his adversary on top until his comrades arrive to help, then the person on top has effectively lost the encounter. In SOMBO, a proficient fighter easily moves from a holddown position to a submission hold to end a contest. That is the preferred method of winning in the sport as well as the real world.

The common ground for submissions in both arts lay kansetsu-waza (arm locks). Since sport SOMBO never allowed chokes or strangles, this application of the art became adept at snagging arm locks from all angles and positions. Many judoka were surprised, and thus, dismayed by SOMBO's single-minded quest for the arm lock-including the flying arm bars of juji-gatame (cross body arm lock). Worse, the Russians did not even use the traditional kumikata (grips) habitually used on the

judo mat. The SOMBO fighters grabbed and threw their opponents by their belts or trousers. The Soviets did wrestling picks and double leg take downs to score ippon, or minor points to set up their submissions. This was very disconcerting to the world of European judo.

Sombo has no strangles, but what it did allow were armlocks, and the Russians wreaked absolute havoc with their clinically efficient juji-gatames, sometimes brought off from the standing position! Their judo was characterized by its unorthodox flavour, but they had many fighters with good, strong koshi-waza (hip techniques), frequently performed by taking an initial grip on the opponent's belt, and had considerable success in the early years with their specialized version of ura-nage, which they imported from sombo.

Peter Seisenbacher and George Kerr, Modern Judo, Techniques of East and West

Page 167 of Reference 12

Part 2

Clothes may make the man, but the uniform defines the sport. Both Kano and Oshchepkov designed their practice uniforms to be hardier, standardized versions of their native dress. The judogi was patterned on the traditional kimono, and the tighter fitting kurtka was intended to represent both modern western dress and the military tunics common to that era. The looser fit of the gi is ideally suited to sport judo in both setting up the classical throws (harai-ogoshi, osoto-gari, etc.) and the jime-waza seen on the judo tatami. As sport judo evolved, judoka consequently became more adept at using the gi against their opponents. Rules evolved to allow more opportunities for the classical throws to occur. Eventually, much of this throwing technology wormed its way into the self-defense portion of the art whether it was street practical or not.

The kurtka was designed to match the uniforms that soldiers might encounter in combat, or that secret agents might meet on guards, civilians, or soldiers. Military uniforms are designed for function and never to allow an adversary to have an equal opportunity to grapple in a clinch. However, for sport matches, all SOMBists wear the prescribed uniform for fair play. In addition, the color of the uniform (comprised of matching kurtka, belt, and shorts) for each player is designated in advance of the match, so that one fighter wears a red uniform and the other blue. This enables both the judges and the audience to better observe the scoring techniques of the fighters. The tighter fitting kurtka complements the scrappier, lower to the ground fighting style found in SOMBO, but inhibits the secure grips needed to perform the classical judo throws and chokes.

In the United States national SOMBO matches, the uniform color for the uniform is strictly enforced. Many international competitions permit white kurtkas to be worn providing that the prescribed belt color is used. Some competitions allow the use of white shorts to alleviate the fighters from having to leave the area to change their uniform bottoms.

French judo adopted a two color uniform system to add contrast for matches to been seen on black and white television. The uniform colors giving the best contrast were blue and the traditional white. Recently, this two color system has entered the realm of international competition. The traditional judoka of Japan have not been pleased by the introduction of this European innovation, but world-wide popularity of sport judo has diluted their influence in the last half of this century.

SOMBO competitions were first broadcast in the era of color telecasts, and the red and blue contrast was adopted.

Judo's philosophy, and therefore, its desired arsenal of techniques, is enhanced by its deliberately engineered rules and uniforms. Judo and SOMBO are analogous to Greco-Roman and free-style wrestling. Judo and Greco-Roman appear more elegant to outside observers because their rules are designed to encourage the high amplitude techniques that please the crowds. SOMBO techniques include all of the major judo techniques, and free-style wrestling contains all of the techniques of Greco-Roman wrestling.

Incidentally, SOMBO contains all of the techniques of Greco-Roman and free-style wrestling. In a chart called the "Wheel" is catalogued all of the arts that fed the development of SOMBO with all of their techniques. When new SOMBO applications are needed and techniques from existing applications are lacking, SOMBists go back to the Wheel to research the needed techniques to design a new SOMBO application. High amplitude throws do not comprise a large percentage of the actual scoring techniques used in SOMBO or free-style wrestling because of the lower stances required to guard against pick-up attacks. This difference makes high amplitude attacks far riskier, and therefore, rarer.

When the Russians fought on the judo mat, they wore the judogi, but cut much closer to the body like the kurtka. Their early successes led many Europeans to adopt similarly tailored jackets, and the unorthodox pick-up attacks became more prevalent. In 1990, the International Judo Federation amended its existing rules to enforce the requirements for the traditional, larger judo jacket.

Kano's judo introduced a grading system that used the colored obi (belt) to indicate a practitioner's proficiency level. The many belt colors of today evolved slowly. In 1886, Kano's most senior students wore the black obi to distinguish themselves from the other students, but these obis were the traditional sashes worn with the traditional kimono. Kano did not introduce the standardized judogi until 1907. With it came the modern martial arts belt; however, it came in only two colors: white and black. Other colors (green, brown, etc.) were introduced as judo was exported to other nations.

Kano wanted the color levels to act as positive feedback for the students' progress in judo testing. Instructors would be able to assess training requirements for students based on the standardized techniques required for the award of each obi. This innovation spread to other Japanese martial arts, but was only introduced into sport SOMBO in 1979 by FIAS (International Amateur SOMBO Federation) in a bid to enlist more judoka to enter SOMBO competitions. These SOMBO belts were ceremonial and used to indicate a fighter's achievements in national and international tournaments. FIAS dropped the competition belt system in 1987, but many American SOMBO organizations such as the American Association of Martial Arts and the American SOMBO Academy have instituted belt systems to track their members' training in self-defense.

The old Soviet system recognized eleven degrees of "black" belt. A national champion was awarded a black belt (sixth degree) onto which was sewn devices representing the host country and organization for the event. A PanAmerican champion or other continental champion was also awarded a black belt but at the seventh degree level. A gold medallist in the World Games earned a gold belt (tenth degree), a silver medallist was awarded a silver belt (ninth degree), and a bronze medallist was earned a bronze belt (eighth degree). The eleventh degree belt was gold like the tenth degree belt but adorned with honorary ensigns.

American SOMBO organizations began in the 1970s as sport SOMBO clubs that realized that the overall art contained a vast variety of techniques outside of the sport realm. These organizations often had members who had received SOMBO training in the Soviet Union as part of cultural exchange programs. Also, many members were wrestlers interested in adapting their own grappling skills to self-defense. American SOMBO (this spelling was adopted for its phonetic accuracy in English) was born as a new application of the Russian martial art. It is usually heavily influenced by sport SOMBO supplemented with techniques drawn from wrestling, judo, jujitsu, tae kwon do, and US military hand to hand combat systems already familiar in the United States.

Considered too unorthodox to be a part of judo, SOMBO's international stature was uncertain until 1968 when the sport was adopted by FILA (the International

Amateur Wrestling Federation) as the third international style of wrestling along side of free-style and Greco-Roman wrestling. This was hindered by the scant amount of SOMBO knowledge and experience in the western world. Until very recently, combat SOMBO was cloaked in secrecy under the mantle of Soviet national security. This sometimes included sport SOMBO and slowed its exportation outside of the Soviet Union.

The jujitsuka of feudal Japan would not be fazed by SOMBO's takedowns. Many of the techniques were common place then and there. However, the distillation of the art that led to judo was too refined to entertain these techniques as good martial arts. Other skills of the samurai did not enter judo's curriculum either. The hojo jitsu and taiho jitsu presently practiced by the Tokyo police and their elite tactical units are other such examples. Many of these skills are retained today in combat SOMBO.

SOMBO is often the archive for techniques that have been lost in other arts. Many of the catch-as-catch-can wrestling styles once prevalent in North America included submission techniques such as neck cranks, toe holds, and bent arm and leg locks. Eventually, these techniques were deemed dangerous, made illegal, and have long since dropped from the modern wrestler's repertoire. Many of these techniques exist in SOMBO today.

The modern Japanese shootfighting, shootwrestling, or shooto was inspired in part by the professional wrestler, Karl Gotch. His real surname was Istaz, but he changed it to Gotch for the association with Frank Gotch. Frank Gotch was one of America's greatest wrestlers in the days before professional wrestling became the show that it is today. He was noted for breaking the legs of opponents who refused to submit to his "Gotch step-over toe-hold." Frank Gotch died in 1917. He was a student of wrestling legend Farmer Burns who most likely taught Mr. Gotch his stepover toe-hold.

Most of the joint manipulation and locking techniques streamlined into judo and aikido have SOMBO equivalents. However, these SOMBO equivalents are often performed in a style closer to that of jujitsu from the first quarter of this century. This is neither good nor bad, but it is different from the modern Japanese interpretation of the techniques.

In Japan, SOMBO could be ignored-almost. Since the 1960s, judo has softened its position on barring judoka from forcing matches to the mat simply to grapple. SOMBO was probably the first wake up call followed more recently by reality based fighting events such as the Ultimate Fighting Challenge (UFC) where judoka have not fared as well as they might have. Oddly enough, sport SOMBOists has fared

remarkably well in Russian reality based fighting events but have not translated that success to the international scene.

A point worth noting: American amateur wrestlers, with their strong tradition in Catch-as-Catch-Can wrestling, have enjoyed great success in reality based fighting events leaving both judoka and SOMBists far behind. Some of the wrestlers have been trained in American SOMBO. Dan Severn, for example, is a black belt under the American Association of Martial Arts. Often criticized for their lack of finishing techniques, the wrestlers dominate their matches with their takedown skills and control their opponents until they can be finished with boxing skills or rear naked chokes.

Since the only “finishing” techniques found in modern amateur wrestling are pins and falls, it should not be surprising that the wrestlers do not have traditional submission skills taught at the lower levels of other martial arts.

SOMBO, judo, and even wrestling do not tolerate mat work that does not actively lead to hold downs or submissions. Unlike the UFC, the bouts are limited to no more than six minutes each, so that fighters must work aggressively to earn points to decide the outcome of a match if there is not a submission, a pin, or a throw to a fall. Unlike the UFC, if the mat judge decides that the ground work is stalemated, the match is halted and restarted with both fighters in a neutral position. Both fighters are then in a situation where they must work to score or be penalized. This is kinder to the audience at least.

In consonance with world level Greco-Roman and freestyle wrestling matches, international judo bouts are five minutes in length without breaks or periods. The power judo players of Europe are lobbying for four minutes matches, but this is being countered by traditional judoka who prefer besting an opponent with excellent technique instead of simply overpowering him (or her). Oddly enough, international SOMBO matches are six minutes in length without breaks or periods. The extra minute was deemed necessary to offset the additional difficulties of beating an opponent by ultimate victory with twelve points vice ippon by one point.

In the United States, SOMBO was ignored by judoka thanks to the relative isolation from the Russians. Also, the United States sided with the Japanese lest the Kodokan frown on its fledgling judo programs. Many of the early Americans who participated in international SOMBO competition came from the ranks of AAU wrestling. Largely, this stemmed from the AAU declaring SOMBO the fourth style of wrestling in the United States. Besides, free-style and Greco-Roman, the United States practices National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) catch-as-catch-can wrestling which is native to North America and is often referred to as “folk-style.”

The wrestlers' domination of American sport SOMBO is changing. When the United States Judo Association (USJA) implemented its policy to award belt promotions for martial arts outside of judo, SOMBO was quickly adopted under the USJA umbrella. USJA SOMBO belts were first awarded in 1995. Unlike the USJA's well-documented judo and jujitsu programs, USJA SAMBO does not have a set curriculum. It does not specify if it covers sport, self-defense, or both. Further, it does not specify if it is Russian CAMBO, American SOMBO, or both. Today, judo and wrestling clubs from all over the United States do participate in most regional and national AAU SOMBO events.

In Europe, however, SOMBO was always a force to be reckoned with even if SOMBO had been declared a style of wrestling. In Russia, wrestling and judo and SOMBO were considered to be the same thing: grappling (free style wrestling again). Just because you changed the uniform and limited some of the rules, you did not stop the athlete from doing what he or she did best. The Europeans countered the Soviet invasion of judo by modifying their sport philosophy to take in SOMBO's more effective techniques and methodologies.

Their tradition in sombo (which is similar to judo although it has a different look and feel) gave the Russians a head start over most of Europe and it still stands them in good stead today.

Neil Adams, Judo Masterclass Techniques: Grips

Page 15 of Reference 2

The distinguishing characteristic of western judo is that it does not aspire to the perfect form embodied in the Gokyo, but rather adapts it and modifies it to be more effective at throwing the opponent. The Japanese ... argue that their goal is not, in fact, the same, since the aesthetic element is of intrinsic importance to the performance of any technique and if the use of force is excessive, rather than truly rational, then the object has not been achieved in accordance with the basic philosophical tenets of judo.

Peter Seisenbacher and George Kerr, Modern Judo, Techniques of East and West

Page 50 of Reference 12

Even so, it is not necessarily a smooth transition from SOMBO to judo or judo to SOMBO.

...In comparing sambo with judo, I found that on the whole, judo techniques were on a higher level. But, I also discovered that the ura nage and juji gatame used in

sambo were considerably more powerful and effective than those in judo. Another thing that I noted was that because the stance in sambo is wide, the samboist is vulnerable to forward-and-back combination techniques particularly to those like tai otoshi, ko-ouchi-gari, and o-uchi-gari. Thus, I was able to take advantage of the weak points of Russian judoists when I met them in contests.

Nobuyuki Sato in Best Judo

Page 243 of Reference 7

SOMBO's relative disregard for the hold down did not always prepare a SOMBist to develop the skills needed to evade a judoka's skillful osae-komi waza. The hold down in judo is just as effective as the arm lock in ending a bout. Judoka, in turn, experienced problems coping with SOMBO's rules and unique techniques: ...I was competing in the All-Japan Sambo Competition. I was fighting the Soviet Champion and I must have tried something like kouchi-gari into yoko- tomoe-nage combination, but it came out like this [furiko-tomoe-nage] instead. I threw the Russian twice for what in judo terms would have been ippon, but in sambo terms was only four points for each throw-one point short of outright victory. In the event, my opponent caught hold of my leg and I lost on a leglock.

Katsuhiki Kashiwazaki, Judo Masterclass Techniques, Tomoe-nage

Page 43 of Reference 9

To clarify: four points or one good throw was required to win in this manner. One point (ippon) ends a judo match. A twelve-point lead in the score immediately wins the SOMBO match. Three four point throws often end many European SOMBO matches. Either way, a third throw of type cited by Kashiwazaki above would have won him the bout if he had not been submitted by the leglock.

Only about a quarter of the Japanese submissions in judo come from kansetsu-waza. This is as true today as it was in 1920 and 1960. European judo maintained this ratio until the SOMBO infusion in the 1960s, but since then has allowed kansetsu-waza to take over almost sixty per cent of judo submissions. In SOMBO, roughly sixty per cent of the submissions come from arm locks with the other forty per cent resulting from pinching the hamstring or Achilles tendons or locking the knee or hip.

Many SOMBO techniques and methods of generating speed and power are better suited to the European physique than judo. Jigaro Kano's martial art is based upon economies of motion, leverage, and energy to generate the most force to throw the opponent with the least amount of energy. However, the foot work and body positions favor bodies that have long torsos but short arms and legs as the average

Japanese has. Europeans and North Americans often have long or short torsos with long arms and legs. Again from Russian-Style Hand to Hand Combat:

...Because of physiological differences, it is difficult for the European to make use of concentration [of force] in a strike as is customary in the East. Therefore, this requires greater physical force. The low Eastern stance is uncomfortable for the European, with his long legs; on the other hand, for his long arms, penetrating lateral strikes are preferable. And it is on these characteristics that the Russian style system is partially constructed...

Paragraph 5.2 of Reference 8

Westerners who do not have a build that corresponds to that of the average Japanese are often forced into bad judo form, which is inefficient, and thus, loses power and speed. SOMBO adapted its techniques to take full advantage of the longer legs and arms found on the average European. These included techniques that use the hands to sweep an opponent's legs out from under him. Many of these techniques derive from Mongolian or Chinese wrestling styles that used jackets but were little influenced by Jigaro Kano's innovations or philosophy. An advantage shared by both the Chinese and Mongolian styles is that their techniques are not dependent on the opponent's gi or other garb to be effective.

Also, by including the full arsenal of wrestling techniques, the SOMBist opens up a wider range of attack techniques and follow-ups. For example, if a SOMBist cannot complete an ouchi-gari style attack because his opponent steps over the technique, the SOMBist may follow up with a "knee pick" to the swept leg. In turn, he may pull that trapped knee over his hip, catch his opponent's far arm, and switch to a harai-ogoshi equivalent throw against the opponent's standing leg. Done properly, the throw should lead directly to an ankle or leg lock off the pick or throw.

Additionally, as westerners entered judo, their different builds caused them to attempt classical judo throws, but forced them to adapt their styles and techniques to be successful. These adaptations were not always met with open arms and smiling faces by traditional judoka. Consider the case of uchimata:

...During the 1950s, uchimata proved the highest scoring technique at competitions in the Kodokan. This was partly caused by the absence of weight categories and the discovery by taller men that the leg form of uchimata could be especially effective against smaller opponents...and to highlight uchimata as a tall man's throw, which did not do full justice to its potential range of application. Long legs also promoted the use of ken-ken uchimata, though this variation was often disparaged as a second-class technique and referred to as shomben uchimata, or the "urinating dog style"-not the kind of variation that appealed to purists and lovers of fine judo. Yet then, as now, no-one could deny its effectiveness.

Hitoshi Sugai, Judo Masterclass Techniques, Uchimata

Page 14 of Reference 13

> This last variation of uchimata is a standard workhorse of both sport and combat SOMBO. Where ken-ken uchimata is considered flawed for judo because the technique lacks amplitude and altitude for the uke (receiver of the throw), it is a philosophically correct technique for SOMBO. The Russian art prefers a lower amplitude throw where amplitude is traded for decreased time for technique execution. This quickly positions the opponent for a submission in the event that the throw is not scored as ultimate victory. In self-defense situations, the lower amplitude techniques take less time to execute and allow the defender to more quickly deal with multiple attackers-or to more quickly submit a single attacker.

European judo, like SOMBO, began to adapt to its environment:

A major difference between judo in the East and West is the sprung floor that is common in all Japanese dojos... The effect of the sprung floor is to encourage movement and spring to allow the judoka to train with less fear of injury, and to move faster, and without inhibition... The typical western judo club mat is slower... and, because taking falls is harder, players tend to be more defensive and attempt to pin their opponents in place, rather than moving with them. Peter Seisenbacher and George Kerr, Modern Judo, Techniques of East and West

Page 75 of Reference 12

SOMBO did not appear on the world scene under its own banner until the first international tournament was held in 1967 at Riga in the then USSR. However, this event only featured teams from the USSR and the nations of Mongolia, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria. The second international tournament was held in 1969 and featured competitors from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands as well. The Japanese fielded their first SOMBO team at the fourth international tournament held in Tachkent in 1971.

Judo held its first world championships in 1956. In 1964, judo became an official Olympic sport spurring worldwide interest in the art and in improving its techniques for competition. Interest in Atemi Waza waned as judoka devoted greater training time to improving their competitive techniques that were now gaining more and more importance in belt promotion requirements.

The first SOMBO world games were held in Tehran, Iran in 1973. SOMBO made its brief Olympic appearance as an exhibition sport in the 1980 Moscow games. By the middle of that decade, it was evident that SOMBO would not join judo as a permanent Olympic sport. The SOMBists who had basked in the limelight of 1980 had no other choice than to take up judo if they dreamed of winning other Olympic gold medals with their hard-earned skills. They did so enthusiastically changing both sports.

In more recent times, there has been an increase in the techniques of sport judo, largely as a result of the influence of Russian fighters coming into the sport with their traditions of sombo wrestling. This eclectic quality has always been Judo's greatest strength. When confronted by anything new and of value, it has always been capable of assimilating it.

Peter Seisenbacher and George Kerr, Modern Judo, Techniques of East and West

Page 30 of Reference 12

In reverse osmosis, the best techniques of SOMBO were absorbed into European judo and via European judo into Japanese and ultimately, American judo. Now, belt throws, single leg picks, double leg picks, and crotch lifts are common in European judo championships, and Europeans acknowledge the SOMBO origins of their new found techniques. The line between SOMBO and judo in Europe is blurry at best, and at worst, unseen.

Following the emergence of the Russians as a force to be reckoned with in international judo, the trend has been towards a gradual sharing of success among European countries, with an increasing number of the world's nations sharing out the honours in international tournaments, generally at the expense of the Japanese. Peter Seisenbacher and George Kerr, Modern Judo, Techniques of East and West

Page 168 of Reference 12

Originally, European judoka were dismayed to have East German and other Soviet Bloc athletes block their ogoshi and uchimata with the SOMBO wrestler's rear crotch lift. Not only did the judoka adopt this technique for both a counter and an attack, but also they learned to adapt ogoshi and uchimata to the Russian inside/out throw to block the rear crotch lift themselves.

The inside/out throw, as a hip throw, is performed by blocking uke's right elbow with tori's (the thrower) right hand, so that tori can step in front of uke (but he behind uke's right arm) and wrap his left arm around uke's waist. The throw may be executed as ogoshi or hane-goshi or uchimata. If altitude is not the object, stepping across uke's left shin with tori's left leg while shoving down and leftward against his trapped leg will also force uke to the ground. Tori may even use the taiotoshi throw from this grip. The chief advantage of this cross arm throw is that uke is severely limited in counter techniques while being set up for very quick and brutally efficient arm, leg, and ankle locks. This same throw, without the leg assists, had long been employed in Greco-Roman wrestling, but had not been included in the original judo by Jigaro Kano. Variants can, however, be found in jujitsu and aiki-jitsu.

Today, the two sports are in no mortal danger of merging together, but then again, the arts have not finished their cross pollination. In 1997, martial arts audiences

were treated to two bold experiments shaped at improving and vitalizing their respective arts: New Sport Judo and American Modified SOMBO. Both of these revised sports preserve their roots while incorporating rules and elements from other martial arts-including each other. They were designed to entertain audiences, attract newcomers, and provide fun but more realistic arenas for the fighters themselves.

Sport judo and SOMBO are different arts that share some common ground in takedowns, throws, arm locks, and Europe. Many great judoka such as Nobuyuki Sato, Katsuhiko Kashiwazaki, Neil Adams, and Peter Seisenbacher have successfully integrated SOMBO techniques into their championship repertoires. Today, most of SOMBO's world champions have relied on judo techniques to score points and to win matches and championships. This is very true in Europe where most every SOMBist also plays judo.

The future of jacket wrestling will continue to evolve as the styles and techniques of the two arts blend and adapt. Ironically, this is happening just now with New Sport Judo and American Modified SOMBO in the greatest of all melting pots: the United States of America.

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