

TOURNAMENT ETTIQUETTE

By Yoshitsugu Murosake Sensei, Treasurer of USKF

The hall was echoing with excitement, electrified with shouting, screaming of profanities. Two weary combatants were slugging away at each other.

"Hit him one more, Joe"

"Don't back away, don't back away, damn it!"

"Ooooooh, hey ref., can't you see anything?"

One would think that this animalistic behaviour can be found at only boxing or hockey matches. Unfortunately, we were at the fourth US Kendo Championship Tournament.

What was happening here should have been corrected a decade ago. So, let me take you back a few hundred years to where all of this began.

There, within the castle's walls, one can see a barrier of cloth sectioning off a ground because people of lesser status are forbidden to witness. Within the barriers are the *daimyo* and his vassals seated on a dias while their warriors sit in *seiza* on the ground. Behind the *daimyo* stands several archers ready to shoot on the *daimyo's* order if any unethical conduct is made by the combatants. Between the *daimyo* and the combatants sits an overseer who will give the command to begin. There will be no need to give a command to stop as you will see.

When the names of the two combatants are called, they appear quietly and bow towards the dias, each carrying the weapon of his choice. This is not a two out of three match. There is an air of solemnity, no noise can be heard except the crunching of gravel under the feet of the combatants as they brace themselves, ready for the fight.

The weapons are drawn, the signal is given and the deadly duel begins.

There is no emotional or vocal outcry from the spectators. Only the clash of blades, the grunts of effort and the scuffing of feet can be heard. Suddenly it is all over.

As the blood spurts from his mouth, one of the combatants falls writhing as he gasps his last breath. The victor quietly returns his blade to its scabbard, bows to the officials and makes his exit. No applauding, no shouting. One has won; the other has died. A vulgar display would reduce the moment.

Now, back to the hall where the yelling and booing were taking place. What has happened to Kendo? Has it changed to a modern sport? The respect from the spectators to the participants, judges and referees has been eroded.

Certainly I am glad that the one who loses does not end up dead or suffer any serious injuries (except perhaps to his feelings). What I am referring to is the spirit of Kendo: cordiality and respect. This area of importance is not taught to the general public or even to the students of Kendo. There is a need to educate the spectators as well as the participating *Kendoka*. Here are some guidelines that should be followed:

When the two opponents approach the *shiai* (contest area), the spectators can clap with vigor. Even a vocal encouragement may be tolerated. (When the two team captains are fencing it is proper for the team members to be seated in *seiza*).

When the signal for the match is given, all vocal encouragement should cease. Applause is permissible.

For any strike which one thinks is valid or particularly good, one

should applaud one's approval - but no verbal expression should be made.

There should be no coaching or shouting of advice from the side lines. This rule should apply to everyone, even team members and team coaches.

Even if unethical conduct is committed by one of the combatants, there should be no "booing" from the spectators. Only the team manager or coach may request an audience with the Chief Referee and even then only after that contest has been completed.

Absolutely no insulting remarks or gestures be made towards the referees or court judges.

Although these guidelines may be simple, many spectators are unaware of them. Perhaps they may be forgotten in the spectators enthusiasm or excitement! Therefore, it is the responsibility of the head instructor of each dojo to teach the dignity and respect that is as much part of Kendo as footwork and striking the correct targets.

In Kendo each bout begins with a bow and ends with a bow. "Thank you for the practice," is what we are saying when we do this as well as showing respect to those with whom we practice. Remember the solemnity and dignity in days of old!

This article does not mean to dampen the enthusiasm of spectators or spoil the atmosphere at *taikai*. In fact a measure of decorum and dignity should improve these occasions. But remember, **you are not at a soccer game or a boxing match!**

The above article is re-printed from the January 88 issue of Sempo, the newsletter of the United States Kendo Federation.