

Dal flips for Judo

BY SARAH SIMMONS

Many Dalhousie University students are throwing each other around these days, and the idea is catching on quickly.

Since its inception four and a half years ago with only seven students, the Dalhousie Judo Club has seen its membership increase by five hundred per cent, setting the club apart in a sport that has received only lukewarm interest in Nova Scotia.

Dave Stocker, founder and head instructor of the Dalhousie club, says that the group has had tremendous success even though the sport has a small following in the province.

"The trend in the eighties was that judo was very popular but it seems to have really died off," Stocker said. "I think it's been replaced more by karate. A lot of that has to do with the way karate is portrayed in popular culture, and in the movies — for instance the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and the Karate Kid."

Judo, meaning "the gentle way," was founded by Jigoro Kano in 1882. Kano wanted to consolidate all the different forms of jujitsu into one form that was safer to practice. Judo uses a combination of throws, armlocks, chokes and hold-downs. It differs from other martial arts mainly because there is none of the kicking or punching in judo that characterizes karate or tae kwon do. Judo became an Olympic sport in 1964 and enjoyed a period of popularity before interest began to drop off.

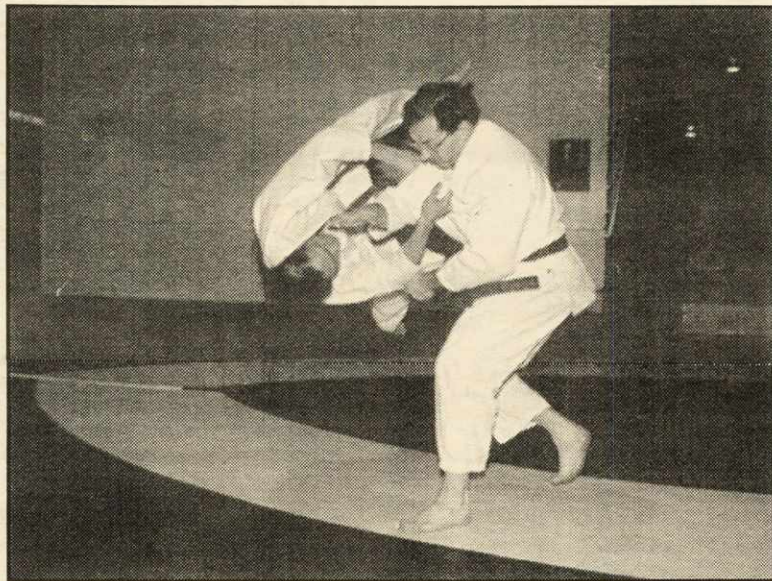
Evidently, someone forgot to tell the Dalhousie Judo Club that people are losing interest in the sport. The club boasts eighty registered members (or *judoka*), making it the largest of approximately twenty clubs in Atlantic Canada, and the cheapest at only \$15 per year (with a Dalplex membership). On any of the three class nights a week, approximately twenty students show up to learn the many techniques of judo. That's compared with the eight to fifteen who may attend other clubs in the

metro area. The members range in age from eighteen to about fifty and include students, Dalhousie faculty members and anyone with an interest in the sport.

Brian Coolen, club president, attributes Dalhousie's success to a variety of factors. "I think the judoka find the classes fun and interesting," said Coolen. "They have a good time so they keep

Stephanie Varner, a fourth-year biology major, is one of five women who regularly attend the classes. "It was a dare (joining the club), but I stayed because I had so much fun," she said. "It's a good place for meeting people and for self-esteem."

Varner feels very comfortable among her fellow judoka. "When you put on your *gi* (uniform)," she



Judoka throw everything they've got into their training at the Dalplex.

coming out. The club grows when they tell their friends and get them interested."

Stocker believes that one of the main reasons the club has attracted so many people is because of the structure of the classes. "It's a train-to-your-own-style-and-pace club," he said, "which I think is less intimidating than a lot of places can be."

When Stocker founded the club in 1991, he wanted to give people the opportunity to do judo. He had several goals for the club, which are still an integral part of its philosophy. "The club's objectives," Stocker said, "are to teach people judo in an environment that is non-threatening, that is challenging, and that is fun. It is also important that the judoka feel that they are able to be either recreational or competitive members."

said, "you're just like everyone else."

The number of women in the Dalhousie Judo Club is slowly rising, but they are still outnumbered. "Maybe they're intimidated by it or they feel silly fighting with someone," said Varner. "At first, I felt really silly, but now it's just...attack!"

Varner says women shouldn't be intimidated by sports that are dominated by men. "Women can really benefit from judo," she said. "Other than self-defense, it's great for building character. It's empowering when a guy stands up and goes "ow" after a throw!"

Craig Bishop, club treasurer, says that the only major difference he has noticed between the men and women is size. "Usually they (women judoka) are smaller than me so it's easy to overpower them," he said.

Stocker is quick to point out,

however, that size should not be confused with skill, and that it can happen to anyone who is fighting someone out of their weight class. "Sometimes it's easy to mistake size difference for skill difference," he said. "If they're getting beaten, they mistake that for a lack of skill, but really it's because of size."

Club members seem to agree that bigger isn't necessarily better and that those with a smaller build shouldn't rule out competing in judo. Tournaments are run on a system where fighters are matched with others in their own weight division, so skill becomes more important than size.

Members of Dal Judo are beginning to enter more tournaments and test their skills against the competition. The club has started sending members to various tournaments throughout the province.

Club members have taken part in many tournaments, including the Provincials that were held in New Glasgow on March 9th, and the Atlantics in Charlottetown, P.E.I. last spring. Stacey Hare, tournament coordinator for the club, said that last year marked the first year the club held its own tournament. This year's tournament, to be held on March 30th at the Dalplex, will see thirty-five fighters from across Nova Scotia compete in nine categories.

The success of the tournament may have been a stepping stone for the Dalhousie club to host the provincial tournament next year. Hare says she is con-

sidering placing a bid with Judo Nova Scotia to bring the Provincials to the Dalplex.

Stocker is also pleased with the success of the tournament and sees good things in the club's future. "We have a dedicated crop of beginners," he said, "and if we can continue to develop leadership in the club, we should be around for a long time to come."



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Dalhousie," confirms Ota.

Villeneuve is seeking an opportunity to play pro volleyball in Europe. When asked what he would like to do after volleyball, he responded, "I don't have any ideas at this time. I would like to play as long as possible, so whatever is available I would like to do it. Hopefully I will be able to play overseas for a few years, then decide on what comes next at that time."

Citing the 1997 Nationals as the highlight of his university volleyball career, Villeneuve reflects, "To finish off my career with a silver medal feels unbelievable. No other Dalhousie volleyball team has ever accomplished what we did this year, and I feel very fortunate to have been a part of it."

"My five years at Dal have been more than enjoyable and this year in particular has been very re-

warding. I am very proud to be a part of this team. This is a great group of guys, and I will miss it tremendously."

Villeneuve's accomplishments continue as he has just recently been nominated for the Climo Trophy for Dalhousie's Outstanding Male Athlete of the Year for the qualities of athletic ability, clean sportsmanship and team spirit. The recipient will be announced at next week's Black and Gold Varsity Awards Night which honours the varsity teams and their support staff.

Villeneuve is the epitome of the Dal Tiger; a great ambassador to the school, the volleyball program and the community. He ends a brilliant university volleyball career with a national silver medal and golden memories.

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