

## **Jay Kim's Quest To Elevate Judo To Varsity Sport Level At Michigan State University 1965 – 1973**

Judo possesses a rich history in the State of Michigan and there are many well known chapters of outstanding individual judoka and judo clubs therein. There is a great slice of this history that remains relatively hidden and inconspicuous and that is the story of Michigan State University's (MSU) great judo coach Jongoon "Jay" Kim's (hereinafter referred to as Jay) quest to ascend judo to varsity sport status between the years 1965 through 1973. My brother Bill and I had the honor to be a part of this great effort by Jay and I feel compelled to shine a light upon it for the benefit of all judoka not only statewide but nationally for it is a story worth telling. To forewarn the readers I also inter-lace the story of the 1971-72 MSU judo team that I was a member of to give the entire tale a personal/insider's glimpse of the experience. So, if the telling of the story at time rambles you have been forewarned.

Albeit Jay has been a very prominent individual in the national judo community, not only as a four decades long sensei/coach/professor at MSU (that Jay describes as "my proudest accomplishment"); as a past President of the National Collegiate Judo Association; as a member of the Greater Lansing (MI) Area Sports Hall of Fame and the National Coaches Association; as a three time official in the Olympics – '76 Montreal/'88 Seoul and '96 Atlanta; as the U.S. Judo Coach at the 1974 World university Championships in Belgium/1978 World University Championships in Brazil/1979 Pre-Olympics in Moscow; as the Chairman of the USJF Teachers Institute; as the founder of the National Collegiate Judo Coaches Association and the Midwest Collegiate Judo Association and THE BIG TEN JUDO LEAGUE in the 60s and 70s. Jay was a coach that I and my team-mates would have bulld through a wall for and were loathe to disappoint.

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Yet, despite the above-stated outstanding resume', the story of the quest for varsity sport status for judo at MSU and the yeoman nearly a decade long effort by Jay striving to reach that goal, it remains a story yearning to be told.

My brother Bill and I were talking a few months back how the sport of lacrosse, and to a lesser extent hockey, are going through similar quests presently that Jay undertook on judo's behalf over four decades ago - attempting to obtain varsity sport status in many colleges and universities. Bill and I reminisced about the outstanding teams MSU had while we were there in the late 60s/early 70s and the outstanding people that populated those teams. The primary focus of our conversation however was the Herculean task Jay shouldered in doggedly pursuing this goal.

Judo in the 1950s, '60s and early '70s was "THE" martial art and easily the most popular as this era was prior to Bruce Lee, the television series "Green Hornet" and "Kung Fu"; prior to "Super Foot" Bill Wallace, Chuck Norris, et al. that launched the karate craze. In the sixties there were a handful of colleges that offered judo as a varsity sport, i.e. the legendary San Jose State and Cumberland College of Kentucky to name a few. It seemed to all that judo was muscling its' way into as a very visible collegiate sport. In addition to college campuses you could find judo in YMCAs, Boy's Clubs, recreation centers, store fronts, churches, etc. across the country. Jay was determined to contribute to this movement at MSU in the strongest way he felt conceivable.

In the '60s the Athletic Director at MSU was the renowned Clarence Lester "Biggie" Munn (hereinafter referred to as Biggie). Biggie coached football at MSU from '47 - '53 and won a national championship. Biggie retired from coaching in '53 to assume duties as MSU's Athletic Director and remained so until 1971. Biggie was

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inducted into the college football Hall of Fame in '59 and in '61 he became MSU's first inductee into the Michigan Sports Hall of Fame.

In the 60s Jay and Biggie became friends and in '65 Jay approached him one day about his desire/quest to have judo elevated to a varsity sport. Biggie responded that in order to become a varsity sport there was first a prerequisite that there had to be a Big Ten Conference judo league. Undaunted Jay then set out to contact all the judo clubs within the universities that comprised the Big Ten Conference, i.e. Ohio State, Purdue, Illinois, et al. and apprise them of his vision for judo within the Big Ten athletic picture. Jay received an enthusiastic response from the other schools and the concept was launched.

In the 60s there were many Michigan judo clubs located all over the state and they contained many experienced junior judoka. Jay's vision quest was a door of opportunity for those young judoka to stay in judo. Judo was losing many of their young competitors to Junior HS and HS sport teams by the droves. Judo needed more than just the appeal of advancing rank via various colored belts – it needed to provide a goal to be able to continue beyond HS into the collegiate ranks and lo and behold all of a sudden there it was – MSU. Wow, imagine if it was a varsity sport!

For the sake of brevity I will cut to '69 when my brother Bill entered MSU and joined the MSU judo team. Bill left in the Spring of '71 and I arrived in the Fall of '71. I'll never forget the first time I met Jay. I was in the MSU judo room which is a spacious, large, tatami covered room located in the same IM-West Bldg. corridor as the wrestling room and the weight room. When Jay walked in I immediately thought he was made of granite. For the record let me tell you a bit about his athletic background: Aside from judo (now a 7<sup>th</sup> degree) Jay was a black belt in taekwondo (now a 9<sup>th</sup> degree), Hapkido (now an 8<sup>th</sup> degree) and kendo (now a 5<sup>th</sup> degree). Jay's

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main sport while living in his native Korea however was gymnastics and he definitely was sporting the physique of a gymnast when he walked into the MSU judo room . Visualize a S. Korean Marine.



Jay's appearance though was belied by his confident yet easy going, easy to talk to personality, and immediately I liked him and felt that here is a coach that I want to represent.

Although not a varsity sport the Big Ten had their judo teams and a Big Ten Judo Championship held every year around April. The whole collegiate athletic experience was enjoyed by the MSU judoka however.

Classes were pre-registered for the judoka so you were never shut out of a class. The judo team traveled to other Big Ten schools to compete in dual meets utilizing a full size Michigan State van. Motel/hotel charges, meals, entry fees, etc. were all paid for by the Michigan State judo club via fund raisers, etc. In addition to the dual meets and Big Ten Championship the team traveled to Chicago for the Midwest Collegiate Judo Championships and the United States Collegiate Judo Championships. In '72 we traveled to Kansas City to compete in the Collegiate Nationals and to Ohio State for the Big Ten Championships for instance.

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In order to make the travel squad you had to first win/earn your place on the team via “wrestle offs” vs. other club members. There were regular scheduled practices. I recall a dual meet we had vs. Cumberland College in the IM-West Building and it drew a pretty good crowd one winter’s night in ’72. We had three straight ippon wins in the middle of the meet and put them away. It was a great feeling to represent MSU in front of friends that were pulling for you in the stands.

Although not a varsity sport those MSU judo teams were chock full of varsity level athletes. On that 1971-72 team aside from me at 165 lbs. division, we had my room-mate Jerry Okubo at 154 lbs. Jerry was a dynamo, a 4x national high school champion out of Chicago. Jerry went on to a career as a renowned children’s social worker. Jerry’s life was cut short via a heart attack at age 45 in 1999. His obit pays tribute to his amazing career and worth a read:

[http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1999-09-16/news/9909160287\\_1\\_child-welfare-disturbed-kids](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1999-09-16/news/9909160287_1_child-welfare-disturbed-kids)

At 139 lbs. we had Wing Wah Lum. Wing Wah was a greased lightening judoka with agility Spiderman would have envied. Wing Fu Lum (Wing Wa’s brother) was a 280 lb. heavyweight). Our other heavyweight was 2X Big Ten wrestling champion Ben Lewis. At 205 lbs. we had Arnold Morgado from Hawaii and who was a running back on the MSU football team and later for KC of the NFL. Unfortunately, Arnold had his elbow hyper-extended in a dual meet vs. Purdue and his football coach - the legend himself – Duffy Daugherty made him give up judo or lose his football scholarship. Arnold ended up back in Hawaii after his NFL days and was elected Mayor of Honolulu. Other members of the ’71-’72 Big Ten Championship team were Klein, Kowalski, Harry and Ogilvie.

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On April 1, 1972 the Big Ten Judo Championships were held at Ohio State University and the divisions were loaded with tough judoka in their prime (or nearly). Jerry Okubo and I won the 154 and 165 lbs. division respectively, Wing Wah placed 2<sup>nd</sup> to a tough judoka at 139 lbs. named Dean Tower and Ben Lewis placed 2<sup>nd</sup> to nationally ranked heavyweight Douglas Fortune. In that era most tournaments held a post-tourney called the “Grand Championship” where the winners of each division competed to determine the champion of champions. Jerry defeated the 176 lbs. champion and I defeated the 139 lbs. champion (previously mentioned Dean Tower). Uh oh, Jerry and I then found ourselves as foes the next round and this could never be – pitting team-mates/room-mates.

Jay pulled out a quarter told Jerry to “call it”, flipped the coin in the air and Jerry said “heads” and heads it was. Jerry then had the dubious distinction of facing the heavyweight champion Douglas Fortune in the final match. The match was a great one and dead even until the final 15 seconds when Doug secured a pin on Jerry for the victory. We won the team championship as well as a lifetime of memories. That day was a defining moment in my life. Please check out the attached photo of the '72 championship team and of Jerry (on left) and Wing Wah holding the team champion trophy.



While on the subject of trophies it should be noted that the “Tohkon Invitational Judo Championships” held each year in Chicago has an award in Jerry’s name called the “Jerry Okubo Sportsmanship Award”. Quite the honor.

In addition to my team-mates above-mentioned there were many, many outstanding MSU judoka on Jay’s gaggle of championships including but not limited to: Tom Howard (huge throws), Phil Toyama (great low r-seoi), Bruce Wilson (4 yr. member), John Scott (Rhodes Scholar Nominee), Scot Sylvester (near impossible to throw), Mike DePaulo (Chicago native that I once saw defeat Hall of Fame USA wrestler Wade Schalles in a judo shiai), Bill Lamb (my bulldog tuff brother with a powerhouse r-seoi and sickle-like footsweep, who like a mighty oak could not be uprooted. Bill was the Big Ten and Midwest Collegiate Champ in his weight division the year before I was), Rick Marlatt (an ex-Marine who was as tuff a judoka I have ever been on the mat with). Later on a rival of mine as a junior Johnny Stewart arrived a few years after I departed and he was a potent/awesome judo competitor that won or placed in almost every tournament he competed in. Of note: Wing Wah is still affiliated with MSU judo and had a career as an East Lansing police officer. I want to stick to just this era time period with the exception of a fella from my club Mike Ostrowski who ventured up to MSU and ended up an All American judoka, captain and president of the MSU club in the ‘90s and now is President of Tennessee Judo. To all the MSU judoka from this era whose names I failed to mention I apologize.

Another significant event occurred in 1971 – Biggie retired as the MSU Athletic Director – and eventually this proved to be the retirement, so to speak, of the quest Jay undertook practically single handedly in a mighty endeavor. The door was shut on Jay’s vision quest in 1973 but not without tremendous merit as every

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judoka that competed for Jay and his MSU judo team can attest. Jay may not have implemented judo as a varsity sport at MSU but he sure implemented great and treasured memories. He placed his imprimatur on our spirit and hearts, taught us the meaning of team and made us champions as the MSU judo teams won the Big Ten Judo Championships every year for almost a decade.

Although the vision quest for varsity sport status and the annual Big Ten Judo Championships ended in 1973 the MSU judo team's vision quest for excellence did not die as evidenced by the teams 2<sup>nd</sup> place finish in the 1984 National Collegiate Judo Championships. An interesting twist to that year's championship was that perennial champion San Jose State University finished 3<sup>rd</sup> behind MSU and champion Cumberland College. MSU was sandwiched between two schools where judo was a varsity sport.

I know my brother Bill and I can speak for everyone ever associated with Jay when we testify that Jay is a man's man, a molder of men and champions. Jay is the type of man everyone hopes their daughters will marry and that sons grow up to mirror his character.

It has been in the back of my mind to tell of this vision quest in writing to share this judo history with others and demonstrate the effort was not in vain as it is a victory in every sense of the term that really matters.

----Submitted by Walter Lamb on December 23, 2012----

(Scroll down for the team picture on page 9)





**BIG TEN CHAMPIONS - 1972**

**MICHIGAN  
STATE  
UNIVERSITY**



*Friday*  
**STATE NEWS**

East Lansing, Michigan

Friday, April 7, 1972

**TWO TITLISTS**

**'S' judo squad second**

MSU recently won its fourth consecutive Big Ten judo title. The team, coached by Jay Kim, captured two firsts and three seconds.

Individual titlists were Jerry Okubo at 154 and Walter Lamb at 165 pounds.

Wing Wah Lum at 135, Mike Kowalski at 176 pounds and Big Ten heavyweight wrestling

champion Ben Lewis each placed second.

James Ogilvie at 176 and Vern Klien (open weight) each finished third and John Harry placed fourth.

The judo team also competed in the Midwest Judo Championship over spring break and finished second in a field of 28 teams.

Lamb was the lone MSU champion. Wah Lum and

Okubo each finished second. Kowalski was fourth, Klien fifth and Harry placed sixth.

MSU judomen will compete at the National Judo Championship Saturday at Kansas City, Mo.





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Figure 1 Front row sitting: L to R: Okubo, Lamb; Middle row Lum, Lewis, Kowalski, Back row Coach Jay Kim, Ogilvie, Klein and Harry.

