

United States Martial Arts Association

8011 Mariposa Avenue, Citrus Heights, CA 95610-1514
Tel: (916) 727-1486, Fax (916) 727-7236, Email: psp83@earthling.net
USMA Home Page: <http://www.MARARTS.org>

THE STORY OF MARTIAL ARTS RANK “STANDARDS”

We hear a constant barrage of comments about rank standards, especially among inexperienced Martial Artists. By inexperienced I mean people who have less than 20 years hard training, have never produced a champion as a coach and often have never been in a fight in their lives.

These people insist that we must have “standards.” Of course each one means something different by standards. Let’s take a look at some facts about standards.

First, there are those who say that only competition (winning in tournaments) should count for promotions, that is their “standard.” That’s OK for the first 20 years or so, if you wish, but what about the teacher whose knees are shot but who still goes down to the YMCA every week, year after year to teach kids? He’s too old and injured to compete. Is his promotion career in Martial Arts ended forever? **“Well, no, say these people--in this case we’ll make an exception.”** By the way, how many of our high ranks in any Martial Art actually got their high ranks from competition? Find me one, please, and I’ll show you the exception.

Let’s take technical knowledge. Some shout from the roof tops that every person must have deep technical knowledge and pass an actual exam on the mat before a promotion can be made. But what about our international Judo champions who can’t do the Nage No Kata of Judo or pass even a first degree black belt test? Are their promotions ended? **“Well, no, say these people--in this case we’ll make an exception.”** By the way, how many of the people sitting on the promotion boards testing the others have themselves taken a test? Find me one, please.

And then there are those who say that there must be a certain time in grade between each rank. This is their “standard.” But what about Nakabayashi Sensei, who won “batsugun” (instantaneous promotion) to 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Dan in Judo, just one year apart for each rank, by beating a whole line of equal ranks? Should we take his ranks away? **“Well, no, say these people--in this case we’ll make an exception.”** Exactly! Everyone’s rank is an exception!

And so it goes. For each standard, there must be exceptions, and in truth the whole promotion area is, and should be, full of exceptions. In Japan in 1963, a leader gave two million dollars to the Kodokan and was immediately made 8th Degree. That rank (Hachidan—8th Degree) is called, “Important person of Judo,” and believe me, anyone who gives millions is certainly important, so that rank is very valid. **Excuse me for saying it, but that is another exception!**

We of the USMA believe that time in service to the Martial Arts is the most important factor in making promotions. In the beginning, students have nothing to give but their hard work, and they should be judged on that. Of course technical knowledge is important, of course competition is important, of course coaching and writing are important. But these are all types of service, and so is long effort over many years. In the end, no one fools everyone very long. We

always say, “Everybody knows who can dance.” It is basically the club instructor who makes the promotion decisions in his or her club, and the USMA always gives him that prerogative. For most of our leaders and instructors, who have no Sensei to rely on for promotions, I am proud to be their O-Sensei, which means “Teacher of teachers.” Further, I have been directed by our Board to be O-Sensei for our USMA, to take charge of teaching and promoting all our teachers.

Not a week goes by without my hearing from some old trooper in the Martial Arts who has been neglected for promotion. Martial Arts organizations are famous for neglecting their members for promotion. I find 30 year veterans of competition and teaching who are still first and second degree black belts! It is my pleasure to study their records and often immediately promote them to 4th or 5th degree, often backdating their ranks so that we can promote them again soon. We even find leaders who started in Judo or Aikido, got no rank in those arts, then became high degrees in other arts and have no rank at all in arts they have studied for 30 or 40 years. We are proud of the fact that we correct these injustices. In fact, that is one of the major reasons we started the USMA.

I know these ideas cause some people to have fits. That’s just the way it has to be. We are going to do what we believe is right, even if some inexperienced or narrow-minded person doesn’t like it.

We have very high standards in the USMA because we dare to reward service and devotion to the Martial Arts. This policy is very traditional, very much in keeping with the long history of the Martial Arts. We are proud of the ranks we award, and so are the ones who receive them. There is no need to defend them, just look at the composition of our International Board of Martial Arts Masters on our beautiful website: www.mararts.org . These are the people who stand behind the ranks of their systems and the ranks of the USMA. We are proud of them.

Or come to our yearly National Training Camps held each summer. There you will find great teachers teaching many Martial Arts, and everyone studies all the arts in friendship and eagerness to learn. Solid national training is an important part of our USMA rank system.

Above all we know that the purpose of the Martial Arts is the development and eventual perfection of human character. If we constantly strive for that, we can’t go wrong. And for the great men and women of the USMA who daily give their best to teach students the ways of better character, we can do no less than reward them with the ranks they deserve.

You are always in my heart.

O-Sensei
Judan, Founder, USMA