

**Jack Hatton Introduction:** [Gary Goltz](#) January 9, 2020

Jack visited Goltz Judo this past June during our scrimmage held for my birthday. He paused for photos and to hand out medals to some of the kids that placed. He told me how elated he was to find a grassroots event reminiscent of ones he experienced as a youngster. Jack's genuine sense of enthusiasm made an indelible impression on me.



It was obvious to Jack; judo was much more than about winning medals but a journey of self-development and giving back to society. I looked forward to getting to know him better in the future and building a lifelong friendship. But sadly that never will now never happen.

A few months later when I learned of Jack's suicide, it was hard for me to believe this happened. He was so positive and uplifting when we met; not one overt sign of depression. It made me pondered as a Sensei and Coach what to look for to the point where I called SafeSport to discuss adding a module on suicide prevention to their coach training.

We were honored to have Mark and Harrison stop by our dojo this past Monday night on their trip in memory of Jack. Mark gave me this commemorative patch which I'm having sewn on my gi.



## Email from Jack following his visit to Goltz Judo:

**From:** Jack Hatton <jackhatton35@gmail.com>

**Sent:** Wednesday, July 24, 2019 7:30 AM

**To:** Gary Goltz <gary@garygoltz.com>

**Subject:** Grassroots Judo

Hi Goltz Sensei,

This is Jack Hatton, we met last month at your birthday tournament during my weekend visiting local grassroots judo clubs in greater Los Angeles.

A few weeks ago, I read your article "[Mutual Benefit on What the Judo Community Can Learn from BJJ's Growth](#)" in *Black Belt Magazine* while competing overseas in Europe. This email is clearly long overdue, but I just wanted to express how enlightening the article was for me. Much of the background information about the rise of judo in the US (and then the subsequent fall) was new to me, such as how judoka were viewed as sellouts if they operated a for-profit dojo or how they were blackballed in the community if they did pro-wrestling. Pretty ironic considering our most famous judoka is in the WWE now!

I found the "corrective action" following each point to be a very nice touch as well. Far too often I hear or read complaints about "judo in the US" that are never followed by a solution.

Your points on adult judo particularly interested me as this something I have given much thought. At home, I used to teach both kids and adults judo and I found that the adults had a lot of trouble with randori and more injuries would occur. Since they got hurt, they couldn't come back for weeks/months or just flat out quit. This simply isn't sustainable if you're trying run an adult program and more focus should be put on deliberate uchikomi and generally a practice that is much easier on the body.

As my first teacher Oishi Sensei said, "Judo is like brushing your teeth; good if you do once a week, better to do every day." It's a funny Oishi-ism that stuck with me and while reading this part of your article it seemed fitting.

I hope this email finds you well and I apologize for not touching base with you sooner, but I have been hyper focused as of late with my training and competitions in preparation for Olympic Games in Tokyo next summer.

Thank you again for allowing me to drop into your event last June, it was an honor to meet you and letting me speak in front your students. Hopefully I have the opportunity to come by and visit again next year.

All the best!

*Jack*

Jack Hatton



[Video \(Jack appears at 1:12\)](#)

*He left a comment too...*

[Jack Hatton](#) Posted July 2019

*Great video! Reminds me of how I started at the grassroots level in NY. Thanks for having me 👍*

[Gary Goltz](#) Reply April 2020

*Rest in peace Jack. I didn't know you very long but I'm sure glad our paths crossed through judo. Thanks for visiting our dojo. Wish we could have gotten closer. See you again on the other side my friend!*

**Travel Log:** Mark Hatton January 13, 2020

Gary:

Glad you like the article. It really means a lot that you do. Your imprimatur has gravitas, Sensei.

I have a different story to tell. “The truth” lies in collecting aspects from a variety of vantage points. Mr. Layden’s effort is a good one.



Harrison and I left California after our Joshua Tree trip. Past the Salton Sea and through Indio. I had no idea that the iconic Saguaro cactus grows like a weed around Phoenix. The winter is the time to take desert hikes and the amount of birds can't be counted.

We landed at Southwest Judo in Glendale, AZ where we were treated as family.



We found a place in the National Forest with a view of Sedona's bright red canyon 14 miles away where we disposed of Jack's ashes. A small ceremony with Richie Moss, Harrison and me included some music, prayer and contemplation. Grisham & Garcia played "Amazing Grace".

Hard to let go. It's a process.  
On this journey we have:

- Visited 25 States
- Stayed in 8 private residences
- 9 hotels
- Travelled 9,965.2 miles
- Attended 15 AA meetings
- Visited with 19 family members
- 3 loved ones fighting cancer
- Attended one funeral
- And supervised the final resting place of Jack's ashes.

Our agony and horror has been lessened by the love and affection of so many. Wisdom's perspective is hard won.

**Notes from USA Judo Zoom Seminar on [Mental Health](#) held May 20<sup>th</sup> 2021**

## DEEP WATER

*Judo Player Jack Hatton Was on The Verge of Making His First Olympic Team When He Took His Own Life, Leaving Family and Friends Shocked and Searching for Answers.*

By [Tim Layden](#) January 8, 2020

This is one of those Olympic stories. You know: A story about talent, passion and very real sacrifice in pursuit of gold, silver or bronze. It is the story of a judo player named Jack Hatton, who practiced his sport from just before his fifth birthday until four days past his 24th, when he stood on the cusp of qualifying for his first U.S. Olympic team, this summer in Tokyo, the cradle of his sport and a country that Jack had come to love almost like his own. Other Olympics were likely to follow, and possibly medals, as well. It is the story of a son and brother, a friend and teammate, a child and a man. And a survivor. Until he wasn't.

Like so many in this genre, it is a family story: The Hatton's moved 150 miles upstate from New York City when Jack was 10, in part because a top judo coach lived there, in part for other reasons that seemed practical at the time. They struggled, and money was almost always a problem. A marriage slowly fell apart. One son was bullied. After high school, Jack moved, from New York to California to Massachusetts. He traveled the globe on a shoestring because lasting solvency – never mind glamour – in less prominent Olympic sports comes not in the journey but at the destination, and often not even there. Benefactors and sponsors helped with financing, and at the very end Jack had gathered enough support to pay for most of his professional work. He had achieved a measure of traction, where many never do. This is part of an agonizing puzzle.



In a punishing sport where men and women try to end matches with quick and decisive throws, Jack liked to carry his opponents into what judokas call *deep water*. Eight minutes. Twelve minutes. Longer. Most not only dislike deep water, they fear it. It is a place where strength and power die and only the mind survives. “It’s torture,” says Adonis Diaz, a U.S. judo player and a close friend of Jack’s. Jack wasn’t as ripped or as powerful as many of his opponents; at age 20 he couldn’t do a single pull-up (he was up to half a dozen or so by the end, but from a static, straight-elbow hang with no leg kipping; try it sometime). But his lower body was as dense as poured concrete — “Like his feet were rooted into the mat,” says Alex Turner, another friend and fellow judoka — and his grip was as implacable as winter cold. He wasn’t a high-level thrower (yet), but neither would he be easily thrown. One of his judo partners called him the Iron Marshmallow, because he looked soft, but was not. He made opponents endure suffering.

“If you mentally broke, Jack beat you,” says Travis Stevens, 33, the 2016 Olympic silver medalist at 81 kilograms (178 pounds), who was one of Jack’s mentors and at the end, his coach. “He could taste blood in the water.” And if you beat Jack, heaven help you in your next match. Nobody liked seeing Jack’s name in their draw.

But here, also, is the story of a human who was deeply loved. Loved by his family. “He was a round ball,” says his mother, Marie Hatton. “No sharp edges.” Loved by his friends and fellow judokas. He had a crooked, infectious smile and what Hana Carmichael, 30, a close friend and teammate, calls, “A happy presence, like you feel with your family at Thanksgiving.” Younger judokas respectfully — but also playfully — called him “Cap,” short for Captain. Jack would tell jokes and quote lines from movies like *The Big Lebowski* or *Burn After Reading*. He loved reggae music. Jack trained with two-time Olympic gold medalist Kayla Harrison under coach Jimmy Pedro. Kayla was a star when Jack first met her, in the fall of 2015, so Jack kept his distance and dialed back his social energy in deference. Then one day Kayla was warming up on the mat, softly singing gospel performer Josh Turner’s *Your Man* to herself, when suddenly Jack belted out the chorus in a powerful, pitch perfect baritone, a cherubic young man in a robe filing the *dojo* with his voice.

*I can’t believe how much it turns me on  
Just to be your man*

Kayla was floored. “I was like, ‘Who the hell is this kid?’ ” she says. “It was so beautiful. And I just laughed and after that Jack made me laugh every day.”

Jack was not always in step with the world around him. He would forget things. The first time Canadian judoka Zach Burt, 26, met him, when both were training in upstate New York, Jack had misplaced his *judo gi*, the robe, pants and belt combination that is the judo uniform. Burt loaned him one. Jack’s clothes were often disheveled, and he could never quite tame the cowlick on top of his head; in photos, it reaches skyward in defiance. He loved food and ate so much that in combination with his body type, it led to painful battles to make weight. But all of this was *Just Jack*. “He was always a mess, always running around, never knew where anything was, just completely unorganized,” says Burt. “But always just gleaming. This stuff never phased him. And if you were around Jack, you were laughing.”

It was also *Just Jack* that the gulf between his good days and his bad days was wider than most. On those bad days, Jack would recede. There was no smile, no laughter, no singing.

And no getting through to him with a consoling word. “On Jack’s bad days, you couldn’t really talk to him,” says Carmichael. “You just couldn’t get to him. I would say, ‘Hey, what’s wrong?’ And he’s like, ‘Nothing.’ ”

Burt goes further: “When Jack was up, he was way up. When he was down, he was way down, almost drastically so.”

In real time, much of this was consumed by Jack’s peers as a great athlete’s quirk. Judo’s spiritual core of *Jita-Kyoei* and *Seiryoku-Zenyo* (Mutual Benefit and Maximum Efficiency with Minimum Effort) can be antithetical. The toughness and devotion that attend success in a combat sport like judo often preclude normalcy. Jack was rising in his world. Twice he had won medals in Grand Prix Events, one of the top levels of regular season judo. Last July in the 81 kg quarterfinals of the International Judo Federation’s Montreal Grand Prix, Jack dragged reigning world champion Matthias Casse of Belgium 16 minutes deep before losing on penalties. “[Sixteen minutes of brutality](#),” says Jack’s father, Mark. Casse was thrown quickly in his semifinal match, exhausted from his marathon. This was Classic Jack; even if you beat him, you lost something.

Jack went on to win two matches and lost his third at the world championships in Tokyo in late August, a performance that was neither success nor failure. It was his last competition. He was within range of making the Olympic team. There are no Olympic Trials for judo in the United States. International judo rules stipulate that athletes ranked in the top 18 in the world in their weight class qualify automatically for the Olympic Games (one per country per weight class), plus a total of 50 male and 50 female wild card positions among athletes ranked outside the Top 18 (one per country, total, across all weight classes). It is a very high standard; the U.S. sent just six judo athletes to the 2016 Olympics and that number is likely to be lower in Tokyo. The list changes weekly and the International Judo Federation has removed Jack from its rankings archive, but he was near the Top 18 and had for the moment qualified for the wild card. “We felt he was on the way to qualifying for the Olympics,” says Ed Liddie, high performance director for USA Judo. Nine months remained until team selection. Nothing was certain, but the biggest season of Jack’s career seemed likely to end at the Olympic Games in Tokyo.

It did not.

His life ended instead, in the small closet of a second floor bedroom in a two-story athlete house managed by Jack’s coach on a quiet, narrow, sloping residential street in Wakefield, Massachusetts, a town of 27,000 near the Atlantic coastline, north of Boston. It was in this closet that Jack took his own life sometime between midday on Monday, Sept 23 and early the following morning, when his body was discovered by another of the young judo players who lived with him. More than 600 people attended a wake five days later, near Wakefield, and four weeks after that, hundreds more attended a memorial service at the Brooklyn church where Jack would attend Sunday services with his family as a toddler.

But there has been no closure. Jack left no note, and no other clues at the site of his death. The autopsy report showed no alcohol and no drugs of any kind in Jack’s system. His family and his close friends in the insular world of judo remain gutted by his passing, reverse engineering his life to its final hours, seeking clues to the question of why, and asking themselves what they could have done. There had been troubling behavior late in Jack’s life, but he had neither talked openly about suicide nor made a previous, clear attempt to take his life.

(This is in contrast to Olympic cyclist Kelly Catlin, [who died by suicide in March of 2019](#), and had attempted to end her life two months earlier). Jack had not been diagnosed as suffering from depression, but some of his friends now cite behavior that they found worrisome. Experts say searching for definitive answers in a case like Jack's is common, although rarely helpful to survivors. "The retrospective, looking back on things with a lot of What If? questions, it just facilitates guilt," says Dr. Bill Schmitz, a clinical psychologist and past president of the American Association of Suicidology. "That's the real tragedy of suicide. You never get all the answers, because you can't ask the one person who would have them." Yet it's difficult to not seek.

Jack's family and friends have considered many possibilities; while there were clues in the final months of his life that Jack was unhappy, other clues suggest he was looking forward to the months and challenges ahead. He was a pleaser, as an athlete and friend. "Jack was always more interested in you than he wanted you to be in him," says Colton Brown, 28, a friend and 2016 judo Olympian. With that came a profound sensitivity. *A round ball*. Jack had expressed to some, and written in his journal, that he was disappointing his coaches and longtime financial supporters. There were hints that he was looking for an exit from judo, but also that he feared life beyond judo. None of it is entirely clear, and never will be.

The Hatton's have considered the possibility that Jack suffered from depression and resulting suicidal thoughts, and potentially, chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), brought on by repeated head trauma and insufficient recovery. Jack's family believes that Jack had been concussed at least four times in his career, and likely others that went unreported, in addition to many sub-concussive blows that are common in judo. He had complained of feeling "foggy" at least twice in the final month of his life, and issues with insomnia had persisted.

The Hatton's had hoped to donate Jack's brain to Boston University's CTE Research Center, but a spokesman for the state medical examiner's office says that the family's request came hours after Jack's autopsy, on Sept, 25, which left Jack's brain unsuitable for CTE study.

This was a deep disappointment to a family desperate for answers, but Chris Nowinski, co-founder and CEO of the Concussion Legacy Foundation at BU, explains that a CTE diagnosis isn't necessary to suggest depression or suicidal ideation in an athlete who has been concussed repeatedly, or even once. [A November 2018 meta-analysis published in the Journal of the American Medical Association](#) found that suicide risk was twice as high in individuals who had incurred at least one concussion or mild traumatic brain injury (TBI) and that suicide attempt and suicide ideation were also higher in this group.

"I think he had a brain injury and didn't know it," says Jack's brother, Harrison. "There's no f\*\*\*ing way he would do this with a sound mind. I mean, he could be moody and abrasive at times, but at his core, he was a caring, funny person with a good heart. This just doesn't make sense."

Suicide among Americans aged 10-to-24 rose 56 percent from 2007-2017, the most recent statistics available, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Suicide among people in this age group is categorized by the CDC as a public health issue. Bullying, social media and feelings of inadequacy are all cited by mental health experts as factors in this rise. Jack was at the upper end of this demographic and became another of its data points.

All those who knew Jack continue to grieve, even as they hope for a clear answer that's not likely to materialize. They remember every word of their last interactions and phone conversations with Jack, including one with his father in the last 24 hours of his life. They keep his texts in their phone. One of his Boston friends has told others, "I just wish I could feel what Jack was feeling at the end, then maybe I could say, 'OK, now I understand why.'"

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It was in early November when I first approached Mark Hatton about chronicling his son's life, and passing, for NBC Sports. We spoke on the phone as Mark drove with Harrison, now 26, through rural Washington County in upstate New York, where I was born and raised, and near where Mark lives. We had a little laugh about that. I did what a writer does: I pitched my *bona fides* to Mark and promised a fair, professional and compassionate telling of Jack's story. "What I'd like is a story that brings my son back to life," said Mark. "But I don't think you're that good."

We met up the following week at the small, immaculate home that Mark shares with his partner, Bridget Sullivan, a nurse, in Glens Falls, NY, about an hour north of Albany. Six inches of early, wet snow covered the ground. Mark made a request: "I beg of you to treat our family gently," he said. "The love that his mother and I and his brother have for Jack is more important than anything. And now we all have to move forward, with Jack in our hearts."

Mark is 61, and a big man, 6-1 and 255 pounds; he passed on a gentle face, warm eyes and that distinctive, off-center smile to his younger son, who grins into the living room from a framed photo on a table in the corner. Their mesomorphic builds are similar, although Jack was smaller (5-9 1/2, 178 pounds at fighting weight and anywhere from five to 15 pounds heavier walking around). Mark warns me that he might cry, and I tell him that given the circumstances there's no shame in that.



Jack and team manager, Lou Moyerman. Note - The sunglasses were part of an ongoing joke with the two.

“There is if it’s all my fault,” he says. And then he pauses, before adding, “Which doesn’t happen to be the case.” Mark is sensitive to the possibility that others might blame him for pushing Jack too hard, too long. I interviewed 32 people for this story; none made that suggestion, and most praised Mark’s love for his son and help with his career. But it’s instructive that Mark opens this door because Jack’s judo life grew from Mark’s judo life.

It begins here: In 1986, Mark, then 28, was running a personnel service in Manhattan, but also had recently lost his mother, owed “a massive amount of back taxes,” was facing eviction and drinking enough alcohol and smoking enough weed that he sought out counseling and recovery, and Mark says he has been sober for 33 years. In ’86, a friend encouraged him to try judo, sensing that its demanding physicality and Eastern discipline would aid in his recovery. Mark tried it. “I got pounded for a year,” he says. Then he earned his black belt in five years and decided, “My god, I wish I had found this earlier in life. If I ever have kids, I will have them do this.”

Mark met Marie Lorenzen, a Wisconsin girl who came to New York to be an actress, in the early ’90s. Together they had Harrison in 1993, after that got married, and then had Jack two years later. They built a family life in Brooklyn Heights. There were hurdles. Harrison is on the autism spectrum, which affects him socially, not academically, but required educational planning. He was enrolled in elementary school in lower Manhattan with a very good program for children like him. Marie was diagnosed with Stage 3 metastatic melanoma in 2000 and endured debilitating treatment. And, like millions of New Yorkers, the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, reached deep into their lives. On the morning of the attacks, Marie walked with her boys from school in lower Manhattan and across the Williamsburg Bridge to Brooklyn.

True to the promise he made to himself, Mark enrolled the boys in classes at Oishi Judo in Manhattan. He also coached them in baseball, on a travel team called the Gorillas, made up of 10-to-12-year-olds. “Mark created a wonderful environment for a group of kids,” says Tom Gallagher, a family friend whose son also played on the team. “He drove them everywhere, finding field space, which is not easy in New York. Batting practice under the BQE [Brooklyn Queens Expressway] at sunset, games in Queens. It was just fun, and it went on for three years.” Both Hatton boys were good players; Jack in particular was a precise and rubber-armed pitcher.

But Jack was outstanding at judo almost from the start. In one of Jack’s first tournaments, he foretold his own competitive future by taking a more mature little boy deep into overtime before losing. A teacher switched Jack’s stance and from right to lefthanded, and along the way Jack immersed himself in the fine details of a sport that can appear simplistic but is not. After a youth match in which Jack threw a bigger boy, Mark asked him on the ride home, “How did you manage to throw that boy?”

Jack smiled impishly and raised his index finger. “Technique,” he said.

Mark and Jack were best friends on rides like that. As time went by and challenges emerged, they would both come to call Mark Jack’s “wartime consigliere,” a *Godfather* reference they both liked. Mark was awed by his boy’s ability to perform in places like New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, where the mat was surrounded by immigrant families from Russia and Georgia and Turkey, screaming in their native languages. “Like cockfights,” says Mark. Jack won a lot of matches in places like that, undaunted.

In the summer of 2005, the family moved to Burnt Hills, NY, a rural suburb between Albany and Saratoga Springs. Mark was working as a stockbroker and had been successful for a time but was then struggling. The family had moved from Brooklyn to the Tribeca neighborhood in Manhattan and the rent was too high. There was lingering sadness from 9/11. “A lot of bad moves were made,” says Mark. “There was a metronomic unhappiness about where we lived.” Also: Jack and Harrison had attended a summer judo camp run by four-time Olympian and 1992 silver medalist Jason Morris, one of the best-known judokas and coaches in the sport. It would be a place for them to train.

It didn’t go entirely as hoped. Mark’s planned arrangement with the Albany branch of an investment firm did not materialize and money remained exceptionally tight. Marie worked diligently with the local school district to ensure that Harrison was provided for, but he was bullied at times. (Harrison went on to graduate from Bridgeport University, speaks three languages and is a caring and beloved teacher in the judo school that Mark eventually opened near Saratoga Springs, a success story by any measure). Mark and Marie grew apart. Life was not easy. “Our neighbors were wonderful, people helped us,” says Marie. “But the move was a miscalculation.” Neither Mark nor Marie blames the other for this.



Marie and Jack

Jack was in the middle of this world, but his judo steadily improved. Morris, who also coached Ronda Rousey early in her career, taught Jack the inside grip that he used throughout his professional career, effective in battling taller opponents. “Jack was a competitor, better in matches than in practice,” says Morris. “Ronda was like that, too.” Jack also wrestled for the Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake high school team and as a senior in 2013, won a sectional championship and two matches in the New York State Tournament. In that same year he qualified for the international Judo Federation world junior championships for the first of three consecutive years.

But Jack had not been a strong high school student, with so much time at the *dojo* and on the road. He did not immediately go to college. His relationship with Morris soured and, in the fall of 2014, a year after high school graduation, Jack enrolled at San Jose State University, a school with a judo program. He struggled academically and dropped out, and at times was jobless and couch-surfing, with no driver’s license. He got help from Richie Moss, 55, a judo player, coach and supporter, who is also a successful businessman, and had met Jack at national and international tournaments.

Moss began depositing money into Jack's bank account, \$500 most months, then hosted Jack at his home in Arizona for a few months before, in concert with Mark Hatton, sending Jack east to train with Pedro, who, like Morris, was a four-time Olympian, and won two medals.

Moss's assistance, which he happily offered and with no proviso, was part of a years-long pattern of beneficent support for Jack. Gallagher, the baseball dad from New York, said he paid for some plane tickets and other items, early in Jack's career. "As did others," said Gallagher, "Unbeknownst to our wives." Such assistance is common in the Olympic world, and especially so in less prominent sports, where financial rewards are minimal.

Jack arrived in Wakefield late in the fall of 2015. His primary job was to help both Harrison and Stevens prepare for the Olympics. Jack was in Rio and helped warm up Stevens for his 81kg semifinal match against Avtandil Tchrikishvili of Georgia. The winner would fight for the gold, the loser for bronze, with no guarantee of any medal at all. Jack loved Georgian culture; one of his earliest seminal matches was a 24-minute victory over rugged Georgian Solomon Gogoj in the 2013 Morris Cup in Burnt Hills. Jack gave himself a Georgian nickname – Hattonishieli. Stevens beat Tchrikishvili to reach the final. Jack watched as the Georgian delegation stormed off the mat, furious at their loss to an American. And he loved it. "Jack said that was his greatest moment in judo," says his father. "Sharing someone else's victory."

In fact, it was quintessential Jack.

Jack moved permanently to Wakefield in early 2017. Moss bought him a car to get around and he accumulated tickets that Moss paid. It was Pedro's *dojo*, but Stevens was Jack's day-to-day coach; Stevens was an uncompromisingly hard worker as an athlete and expected the same of Jack. The goal was to make Jack stronger and better able to contest good opponents early rather than extending matches to infinity. Weight training included a five-lift workout where the goal was to lift as many pounds as possible, with a time limit. Jack started at a max of 32,000 pounds in 90 minutes and improved to 170,000 pounds in 75 minutes. And those six perfect pull-ups. Jack did not shrink from the work; he never shrank from work. And he got stronger. But it was challenging.

"At one point," says Stevens, sitting next to the mat at Pedro's, "Jack's father called Jimmy and said I was abusing his son." Mark Hatton says he did not complain that Stevens was abusing Jack but did feel that Jack –in typical fashion — was pushing through some lingering injuries to fulfill his coaches' expectations and hoped to improve communication from both Jack and his coaches, to prevent serious injury or setback. Mark Hatton also says that Jack never complained to him; that was not his style. Proving his toughness was important, not only in long matches, but in punishing workouts, too.

The group dynamic had changed. Kayla Harrison was retired from judo; Stevens was a coach. More significantly, Pedro (and by extension, Stevens) had pulled away from USA Judo and begun focusing their effort on their own lives and businesses – Pedro is president of Fuji Mats, Stevens owns a jujitsu school in the same building and together they operate a nonprofit called Project 2024, set up to build a U.S. team for the 2024 Olympics. Pedro did not seek to coach the 2020 Olympic team, and no coach has been named.

One result of all these changes is that neither Pedro nor Stevens traveled regularly to coach Jack at competitions.

This bothered Jack. He broached the subject with Stevens at a training camp in Canada early in 2019. “He was asking what it would take to get me or Jimmy on the road with him,” says Stevens. “I told him I couldn’t justify traveling, paying out of my own pocket, and then being homeless.” USA Judo officials say that training centers like Pedro’s receive an annual grant for development costs; in 2019, Pedro’s was given \$15,000. Pedro says that grant is for support of all athletes in his club and not sufficient for extensive international travel by coaches.

Stevens says, “I told Jack, ‘I’m sorry this falls on you, at this time in your career, but if the organization keeps leaning on people to do this for free, it will never get fixed.’ ”

Jack forged ahead. He won his first Grand Prix medal in September of 2017 and another in April of 2018. These were significant wins that illustrated Jack’s rising level in the sport. Also, his funding was in good shape. USA Judo provides a monthly stipend to its top-five ranked players, at levels from \$2,300 to \$1,000 per month; Jack had been consistently on that list, which changes quarterly. He was also getting \$1,000 per month from the New York Athletic Club as one of its sponsored athletes. And he was getting free equipment from another sponsor.



From left: Jack with Jimmy Pedro, at age 4, and signing for fans

However, the head injuries had piled up. Mark Hatton says Jack incurred his first serious head injury in Miami in 2014. Then another in San Jose in 2015, when the weight of two players engaged in a throw landed on his head; this one was documented as a concussion and treated. A third happened at a training camp in Austria in the summer of 2017, when, at the end of the long training session, Jack insisted on fighting a Russian player he had never fought. Stevens, who was present for that camp, told Jack to stop fighting for the day, “because he looked tired.” Jack told his father later, “I wanted to put my hands on him.” Jack’s judo instincts were so refined that he could learn volumes from a short engagement, and file it all away for a potential future match.

On this occasion, the Russian threw Jack with an *ura nage*, similar to a suplex, with such force that in addition to landing on his head, Jack also injured his toes, which landed after his head. Jack later told his father he was knocked out. “I saw stars, Dad,” Mark recalls Jack telling him. “Like in the cartoons.”

Stevens was present for this incident and says, “There’s no way of telling if Jack was knocked unconscious or suffered a concussion. I’m not a doctor, so I can’t say for sure. But I know Jack stood up, took 15-20 seconds to gather himself, and finished the round with the guy. We all walked back after that, and Jack showed no traditional signs of concussion: vomiting, dizziness or sensitivity to lights. Seeing that there were only a few days of camp left, I made the decision to not let him train for the rest of camp.” (If Jack did suffer a head injury, continuing to fight could also have been more injurious).

A few months later, Jack suffered a head injury at a camp in Montreal. It’s not clear how fully Jack recovered from these concussions; judo’s record-keeping is less precise than in the NFL, for instance. The Hatton’s and others suspect that Jack’s frequent, drastic weight cuts, which left him dehydrated, could have slowed his brain’s healing from any of these concussions. The relationship between concussions and dehydration has not been widely or definitively studied. Dr. Robert Cantu, a neurosurgeon and, with Chris Nowinski, co-founder of the Concussion Legacy Foundation, says, “I haven’t seen any good studies on concussions and [weight-cutting], but dramatic weight loss in those sports is not healthy on its own.”

Jack’s efforts at education had stalled. He had tried to enroll in an online college program with DeVry Institute, but didn’t stick with it. Pedro hired him to help sell Fuji mats, but, says Pedro, “Jack wasn’t successful juggling the work dynamic with the training and the travel.” In 2017, Jack had co-founded an athletic tape company called Wrapbox; it is unclear if the company was successful, but it did not appear to have changed Jack’s financial status.

As Tokyo 2020 approached, Jack was successfully climbing the Olympic mountain by some measures but sliding down that same mountain by other more nebulous ones.

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On the last morning of his life, Monday, Sept. 23, Jack called his father. It was 6:50 a.m., but it was not unusual for Jack to call early. Mark had just walked out of his house and had gotten into his Toyota Corolla. After that, he would go to an 11 a.m. class, as part of program to create an opportunity for job enhancement at the hospital where he was working as a mental health technician. Jack was in the bedroom where he would die. He was agitated. He told Mark he had slept 14 hours the previous night, but not much the night before that, a typical pattern for Jack. He had recently obtained a card for medical marijuana, to help with insomnia, but had not filled the prescription. (There was no THC in his body on autopsy).

Mark recalls a portion of the conversation like this:

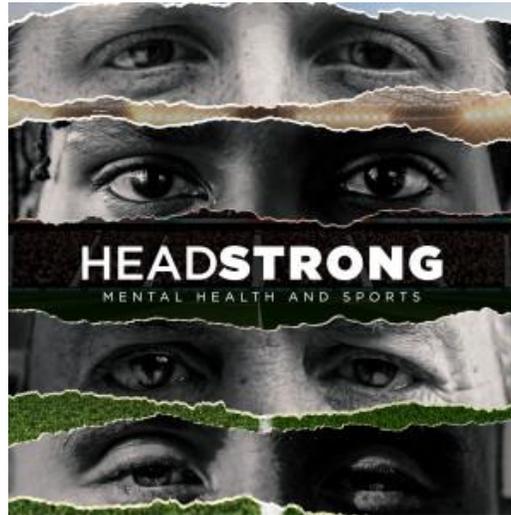
Jack: “I gotta get out of this apartment, I gotta get out of this house.”

(Mark and Jack had discussed the possibility that Jack would soon move into his own apartment, out of the athlete house. Mark sensed that Jack was especially uneasy on the call and brought up the idea of seeing a therapist, which they had discussed previously).

Mark: “Listen, you need to talk to somebody, you need to see a professional.”

Jack: “I know Dad, I know.”

Mark: “If I drive out there right now, we’ll find somebody together, using your insurance. But if you pick up the phone and do it yourself, the impact is going to be far greater.”



Click the image to watch “Headstrong,” an NBC Sports documentary on Mental Health and Sports.

Mark says Jack agreed with him on that point and promised to find someone that day. There was an optional weightlifting session in the morning; Mark suggested Jack go to it and then take a nap. Jack yelled back that he had slept 13 hours the previous night and didn’t need a nap. There was practice at night. Mark encouraged Jack to get out of the house. It was forecast to be a warm, early autumn day in New England. There is no indication that Jack left the house.

Mark also suggested that Jack reach out to Kayla Harrison, who had spoken publicly about her depression and suicidal thoughts. Mark says Jack snapped at that prompt. “He said, ‘What are you, f\*\*\*ing crazy?’ Jack never talked like that.”

The call ended with Jack agreeing to stay in touch throughout the day. Mark considered ditching his class and driving out just the same but didn’t. (The class was actually cancelled at the last minute). They never spoke or communicated again; Jack did not respond to texts or answer any calls. Because of the outcome, Mark has agonized over his decision to stay home, which experts say is a common reaction among survivors. “Hindsight is 20/20, that’s how the human brain operates,” says Schmitz, the suicide expert. “You say, ‘I should have listened to that bad feeling I had. But what about all those other times you had a bad feeling and nothing bad happened, which is most of the time.’”

Mark says now, “I was the last guy to talk to him, I was his wartime consigliere. I should have known. I feel guilty. It’s me. I’m the one who knew him better than anybody, but I couldn’t get him to spit it out, the suicidal ideation. He tried, but he wouldn’t let me all the way in. And I didn’t make the connection. I didn’t think he was capable of this.”

There had been scattered clues over the last months of Jack’s life, disconnected and largely unexamined in real time but which retrospectively paint a picture of a young man struggling for comfort. Life is rarely linear, but last May Jack had a noisy public argument with his mother in a Boston restaurant.

Both were tired; Marie had driven from Burnt Hills to New York to Boston; Jack was in the midst of heavy training and travel. “He seemed world-weary,” says Marie. Jack became angry that Marie was fighting to keep possession of the family home, even though it had become too big for her to maintain by herself. (Marie admits this: “The house had started to fall apart, and I could not keep up with it, but I wanted a place for my boys to visit.”). They remained estranged to the end. Harrison Hatton says, “I was surprised that Jack just boxed her out. She was trying to apologize.”

Jack was saddened in June by the death of his aunt Barbara Hatton, who passed away in New York at age 68 after a 10-year battle with cancer. The last time Jack saw her was at the NYAC’s New York Open judo tournament in April. He pushed forward after her death.

At the Montreal Grand Prix in July, the tournament where he battled Matthias Casse for 16 minutes, Jack had planned to make peace with Jason Morris, the former coach from whom Jack been estranged for several years. Both were busy and the meeting never took place.

Later in July, he visited Richie Moss in California. Jack loved Moss’s family, and especially his nine-year-old son, Brody, a dirt bike rider and judoka. One afternoon when Moss was out of the house, Jack told Moss’s wife that he wanted to quit judo. Moss came home and told him, “‘Jack, you’ve already had a great career. If you’re done, you’re done.’ But Jack didn’t want to disappoint anybody. So he kept going.” Jack had rarely slowed in 19 years of judo, with few extended breaks. He left Moss and pushed forward again.

That same month, British judoka Craig Fallon was found dead in the woods near his home in Wales. It would be three months before authorities ruled Fallon’s death a suicide, but the judo world reached that conclusion more quickly. Jack saw an Instagram post from Justin Flores, a coach and friend, honoring Fallon. Hatton texted Flores to ask what happen to Fallon and Flores responded, “Man. Committed suicide.” Jack responded, “Jesus....” And once more, pushed forward.

Jack was named to the U.S. team for the Pan-Am Games in Lima, Peru from late July into early August. He spent time at the event with U.S. teammate Ajax Tadehara, who had trained with Pedro in Wakefield, but recently retired. Before the competition in Peru, Tadehara filled out the physical and mental health history form that all U.S. athletes are asked to complete. “I decided to be as openly honest as possible about the mental health part,” says Tadehara. “My answers ended up getting me flagged by the USOPC sports psychologist on site, so I made an appointment and that meeting forced the realization of some things I had been avoiding for a long time, that I’m not just sad some days, but there’s legitimate depression.”

Tadehara says Jack was also flagged by the USOPC for his answers, “but Jack was unable to schedule a time to sit down and talk [with the sports psychologist].” Because: He. Pushed. Forward.

Jack and Tadehara were together at the world championships in Tokyo in August; Tadehara extended his stay by two days after he was eliminated, to watch Jack. After Jack’s last match, they went to dinner. “Jack just started opening up to me that he was very, very scared, worried and anxious about what he was going to do with his life after his competitive judo career,” says Tadehara. “He told me he was clueless; he felt no sense of direction and he just didn’t know how he would manage to live up to the life he had lived so far.”

I asked Tadehara if Jack talked about suicide. “Jack never said the word ‘suicide’ to me,” said Tadehara. “We did talk about escapism, the fantasy of turning everything off and being done, and how all your problems don’t matter if you follow through with an action like that. But Jack never said, ‘Hey this is what I’m thinking of doing.’ So it’s hard to get a read. But I did open up to Jack about my own depressive struggles, and he opened to me, as well.”

My interview with Tadehara was over Skype video, with him at home in Pullman, Washington. “It really hurts my heart to say this,” said Tadehara. “But I’m not entirely surprised by Jack’s actions.”

In September, after returning home from Tokyo, Jack had dinner in Boston with Brown, Carmichael and Turner, three of his friends and former training partners. At one point, Jack and Brown were left alone at the table. Jack said to Brown, “Hey, we helped each other on the mat, right? You felt like I made you better, right?” Brown told Jack, absolutely, but he found the question surprising. They were still in the midst of their careers.

Later that same night, after dinner, Jack told Carmichael, “I finally figured out how to win.” Carmichael has since wondered if winning meant winning judo matches, or something else. It’s what they have all done, parsed Jack’s words. But unlike Tadehara, neither Brown nor Carmichael came away from their last interaction with Jack thinking in real time that he might take his life.

Brown: “I never saw this coming. Never.”

Carmichael: “Completely unexpected. Super shocking.”

There was another event that nobody has managed to unravel with certainty. On Sept. 4, the Wednesday after Labor Day, Jack drove into New Hampshire and set off on a hike into the White Mountains. He had hiked, but it would be a stretch to say that he was an experienced hiker; on this day, he wore sneakers and a t-shirt, which is less than optimal hiking gear. He was gone for nearly the entire day and into the evening, when he was discovered, lost and hypothermic, by a group of German tourist hikers. They gave him fluids and warm clothing and tucked him away for the night, and Jack hiked out the next morning to his car and drove home for a scheduled visit to his father’s house. Many in Jack’s world wonder now if the hike was an attempted suicide, though none confronted him at the time with that possibility.

Jack spent five days at home. He was tired. He had been bequeathed approximately \$50,000 by his aunt (as had his brother), and at one point Jack asked his father what would happen to the money if he died. On Tuesday night, Sept. 10, he watched “*Life of Brian*” with his father. They liked that movie. The next day Jack drove back to Boston to resume training, reluctantly. “The vacation wasn’t long enough,” says his father. “He needed more time.”

Friday, Sept. 20 was Jack’s 24th birthday. They had a small party with a big cake at Pedro’s *dojo*. Everybody sang Happy Birthday to Jack. He had that big smile on his face, and he ate three pieces of birthday cake. Jack was a big eater, but three pieces was a lot, and he was scheduled to go to Brazil the next week for a tournament. “Jack has trouble making weight and he eats three pieces of cake,” says Pedro. “Maybe he already had it planned. I just don’t know.” (On the other hand, just a few days earlier, he had texted Flores: “Brazil or Bust”).

Earlier on Friday morning 21-year-old judoka Nefeli Papadakis had texted Jack birthday greetings from Uzbekistan, where she was competing. Jack texted back, “Thank you! Good luck!”

Two days later, on Sunday, Zach Burt texted him about his match that day, also in Uzbekistan. “And we texted back and forth about the match,” says Burt. “And that was it. There was no ‘I need to talk to you,’ or anything. Nothing. I’ve thought about it so much. But with me, that was Jack. We were as close as brothers, but Jack rarely ever came to me with an issue of his that he wanted to talk about. He kept everything bottled up. I think that was part of his illness.”

Marie Hatton called her younger son on the night before he took his life. Jack didn’t answer. She texted him: “Remember when you were a little boy and you used to play chess? Maybe you should play chess again.” He didn’t respond. She remains saddened by the distance between them at the end. “I have a lot of guilt,” she said, “Because I believe he would have told me.” Later she said, “I can’t tell you how many times I told people, ‘Jack is going to the Olympics.’ It was a privilege to be his mother, and he was a good kid.”

The guys in the athlete house, most younger than Jack and less accomplished, had been asked by Pedro (Stevens was travelling) to check on Jack on his last night, but they didn’t, because in the past Jack had yelled at them if bothered while in his room trying to sleep. Jack’s body was found in the closet on Tuesday, when concerned housemates finally entered. The medical examiner ruled Jack’s death a suicide. Jack had ended his life in a manner that would have been similar to being a manner of losing in a match, connected to judo until the end.

When Mark Hatton looked at Jack’s phone, the last two searches were: “Kayla Harrison mental health” and “Mental health professionals Wakefield, Mass.” Mark shook his head as he recalled this discovery, and said, “All he had to do was punch the number.”

**The number that anyone can call, at any time, is the national suicide prevention hotline: 1-800-273-8255. Or text a message to 741741.**

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Experts hold that suicide is most commonly multi-factorial, seldom caused by a single event or a single condition. “It’s common to look at suicide and say, ‘What’s the one thing that caused him to cross that line?’ ” says Schmitz, the suicide expert. “But most often there are many different pieces that come together in this perfect storm of distress and darkness.”

Only after Jack was gone did the people in his life come to understand the stress and desperation that he was feeling that his moods might not have been just moods. Mark Hatton looked at Jack’s journals. “He fell into a pattern of negative writing,” says Mark. “he regretted that he failed at college, twice. He wrote that he felt unworthy of the help that people gave him. I do believe that this perfect storm fell upon him.”

Tadehara, who seems to have talked most deeply with Jack, says: “He had a bundle of issues and each one of them was extreme.” His future. His past. His concussions. The expectations he placed on himself and the obligations he felt to others.

The survivors try to find a lesson in their loss. Everyone close to Jack understood that judo had consumed his life, even more than the rest of them.

For many years, his Instagram handle was @JudoJack. Some people called him that, and he came to dislike it, and changed his handle to [@ JackHatton](#). It was a small step away. “People need to know that there is more to life than judo,” says Papadakis. “There is a lot of pressure in our lives, and very few people understand that pressure. But you need something else.”

Hana Carmichael says, “It’s made me think about how we interact with people. We need to listen; we need to try to understand what someone is feeling.” That works both ways: “There is help available,” says Schmitz. “It’s a phone call away. It’s a text away. It might not solve everything, but it opens that pathway.”

Travis Stevens puts it more pointedly: “Jack died 10 feet from a community.”

Jack had a long-term plan. After Tokyo he would use the inheritance from his aunt’s estate – and who knows, maybe some bonus money for winning a medal – to buy an RV and travel across North America, spreading the message of judo. No pressure, just teaching and sharing. Mark Hatton loved a famous quote attributed to Jackie Robinson and recited it frequently to Jack: *A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives*. He spoke it so often that Jack would finish it for him. Mark holds those words closely now, finding solace in the truth that Jack touched others.

Mark and Harrison, a father and a brother, decided to make the trip without Jack, in his memory. They would drive across the Midwest, from Minnesota through Montana and into Idaho and Washington, before curling down into California and back home through the American Southwest. They would see many of Jack’s old friends and training partners. Perhaps they would find answers or a kernel of peace. Mark wrote in a text: “It’s all about Jack’s legacy. We are fulfilling some portion of his vision. It’s a searching for America, Jack Kerouac with *judo gis*... it’s a journey knowing that the guy we wanna roll with, we’ll never meet.” On a cold December morning, they climbed into the car and headed west.



Jack and his brother, Harrison, at Harrison’s graduation

*Tim Layden is writer-at-large for NBC Sports. He was previously a senior writer at Sports Illustrated for 25 years.*