

Interview with USJA President Gary Goltz



by Chad Morrison
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When USJA President Gary Goltz paid us a visit, he agreed to an interview for the blog. He's been really awesome, as I have had a ton of questions for him over the course of several long phone calls.

CM: Let me start with an easy one: What does the USJA do, exactly? What happens to my \$45 per year? I know about the insurance, but what else?

GG: We are a national accreditation body that provides sanctions as well as insurance for events. The insurance cost is around \$20+ and is definitely the largest part of the \$45. The remainder covers our overhead; we have an office, an executive director, a full time staff, equipment, postage, taxes, a website, and a database that needs maintained, and lots of phones! In short, every penny of our fees goes towards running the USJA.

CM: And here is another one, other than touring the country teaching fantastic clinics, what does a USJA president do? What are your responsibilities/duties/superpowers?

GG: First and foremost, I'm a member of the board of directors - as such; it's my responsibility to promote the goals and mission of the USJA. Beyond that, a big part of the president's job as I see it is public relations. Having come into the position after being the Chief Operating Officer for 4 years, I had a lot of knowledge of what our operation entails. In addition I'm pretty much the untitled Chief Fundraising Officer, working to bring in new donors and nurturing our existing donors as well. By the way did I mention that when I went from COO to President my salary was doubled! All kidding aside my approach towards leadership in the USJA is based on this credo -

- Honorably serving our members with communication founded on reality based information, positive, productive and ethical thinking
- Following judo's core principles of *maximum efficiency with minimum effort* and *mutual welfare and benefit* with the goal of developing *good character*
- Remembering the spirit of our founders; Jim Bregman, the late George Harris, Karl Geis, and others in terms of the high standards they strived for.

CM: That's terrific! Can you tell me more about the fundraising? Who are the big donors, and where does this money go?

GG: We have companies like GTMA, Judo Unlimited, and Black Belt Magazine where the USJA gets some revenue. We have member donors like Andy Connelly our club leader in Texas who gives a donation of \$100 every month on his Visa card, Dr. James Lally who is a board member has been our donor of the year for over 5 years, and there are countless others. Every donation helps defray our membership fees.

CM: I'm sure that's a big help to the organization.

GG: If we just went off of the \$45, we wouldn't have enough money to run. We haven't had a price increase in years which is where the donations come into play.

CM: Looking at one of [my posts](#), can you tell me what where you come out on some of the issues raised?

Technology Resources:

GG: Our [Coaches Portal](#) was the result of a complete makeover of our entire database. It is now interactive so our club leaders can look up membership expirations and promotion information online.

Help for Fledgling Clubs:

GG: Beyond providing liability insurance for clubs, through our supplier partnerships our clubs can receive discounts on tatamis and gis. Another thing we've done for our members is instituted background screening not only for coaches but for all black belts. And we're in the process of developing a marketing manual for USJA clubs. As for your Mat Co-op Exchange idea, you're not the first person to think of that. We could definitely do something along those lines. We just need someone to take the initiative and get it going. We are always looking for volunteers.

Help to Start Tournaments:

GG: We offer sanctions for \$25 and have a referee as well as a technical officials committee to help support tournaments. Our IT (volunteer) Director, John Moe developed a free [Scoreboard Program](#) for running matches. We use this at the Winter Nationals and all my club's events. It's excellent, easy to use, and always up to date.

Setting Promotion Standards:

GG: The USJA promotion system has always been one of our selling points. We're more up-front with what you have to do and more objective. If somebody meets those criteria, it's generally a done deal. Along the same lines, we try to keep our standards current. We're in the process of updating them as we speak. Sid Kelly, the creator Kelly's Capers and head of our promotion board has revised our senior promotion system. I've had a chance to go through it and it looks a lot like the modern approaches taken by countries where judo is really proliferating. Hal Sharp, who wrote "The Sport of Judo" and many other books, is doing the same with our junior promotion system and junior manual. Our goal is to have these rolled out by the 1st quarter of 2012. It's been a big undertaking and those guys are doing a great job.

Term Limits for Any Positions of Influence:

GG: The USJA board adopted them a few years ago. I was one of the people who raised this as an issue. Now board members can only serve two terms then they have to sit out for 2 terms before they can run again. The terms are four years. This is my first term as president, so I would be eligible to come back and serve again then I'd have to bow out. You know we have a quality team of board members and Katrina Davis is an outstanding Executive Director with 20 years' experience. They are intelligent and have common sense. While there will always be some disagreements, every one of them is committed to the USJA and making good decisions

Spreading Knowledge:

GG: Our online magazine, [Growing Judo](#) is one of the greatest support arms to the membership. Joan Love our Vice President, who is its editor, puts her heart and soul into each issue. I've seen the publications that the USJA has put out for the last 40 years, as well as the ones from other national and even international organizations and can say that "Growing Judo" is among the best judo publication ever. We cover the entire geography of the USJA. There's a section on new clubs, promotions, human interest stories, articles on how to grow your club, etc.

Among the clinics we offer are coach certification, referee certification, kata certification, Kelly's Capers, and for just about anything you want to learn we'll try to find someone within a stone's throw of our clubs willing to come in and teach.

CM: *I recall that you mentioned that there were approximately 25,000 registered judoka in the US. About how many of those 25,000 are registered with the USJA?*

GG: We have about 9,000 active members and about 20,000 life members - though many of those are inactive. The USJF and USA Judo have about the same in terms of active members. There are many people who are members in more than one organization, which is how we arrived at the 25,000 total amount. If you count some of the other groups that aren't recognized by the NGB there may be about 30,000.

CM: *When did US judo participation peak and how many folks were practicing at that point?*

GG: Right after WWII during the 50's and early 60's, judo was at an all-time high in this country perhaps twice the current amount,

CM: *So while we've seen the US population almost double, we've seen judo participation cut in half.*

GG: Exactly. During the 50's and 60's, we were the martial art. There wasn't that much karate, tae kwon do, aikido, kung fu, or any Brazilian jiu jitsu. You know, when I started judo in 1965, I watched the Green Hornet with Bruce Lee and I said to my dad I want to learn how to do that stuff... The next thing I know, I'm at my local Y enrolled in a 10 week judo class as that was all they had back then!

CM: *Do you think that the competition from other martial arts has pushed judo to the background, or is it something that we in the judo community have done to ourselves?*

GG: I think the judo community can take much of the credit. In the early days of judo, there was an aversion to anyone trying to do it professionally or trying to make money. Some great players like Gene LeBell were ostracized and banned from tournaments.

Karate schools on the other hand spread like wild flowers into the strip malls and many successful businesses were born. Stars like Chuck Norris and the striking arts got more popular while judo moved to the back-burner.

Since we never got connected to high schools like wrestling, we really had nowhere to go. Judo wasn't expanding commercially or non-commercially.

CM: *It's true... there are a ton of clubs - I'll even include myself in this - that just aren't trying to make any money. You don't seem to see that in other arts. Where did this sentiment come from?*

GG: The old AAU (Amateur Athletic Union) as I understand it was based on the notion that only amateurs could compete in events like the Olympics. And they use to govern judo along with the JBBF (now the USJF).

CM: *Do you have any sense for what is going on with judo in other countries... France, Japan, Brazil? Have they been growing, shrinking, or holding steady?*

GG: I'd say that judo is still growing. It's very popular in those countries, and in the former Soviet Republics - Russia, Georgia, etc., it's obviously popular in Asian as well as Central and South America, even in Africa judo is gaining ground.

CM: *So why is judo growing in these places and shrinking here?*

GG: I think we may have bottomed out and are starting to come back. One of the things that we're seeing is mixed martial arts schools and Brazilian jiu jitsu academies have begun embracing judo. In the USJA, we're trying to broaden our appeal too promoting judo as a great way to stay in shape while and learning self-defense skills.

CM: *So why do you think that judo is so much more popular in France (and most of the rest of the world) than it is here? Can it all be explained by cultural factors, or are there things that we should learn from their judo community to apply here in the States? And if so, what?*

GG: There are several reasons: They have national organizations that are supported by their governments in terms of money and authority. They have a single national standard (the judo that you learn over there is much more consistent). Their tournaments are televised and they've had a lot of success at the Olympics. Another thing that the French and the British did was from the beginning they took what they learned from the Japanese and interpreted in a manner oriented towards Westerners. For something to succeed in America, it has to be American... we have to make it a part of the American culture. If you look at Karate, they have done a great job of that. Also in other countries competition is geared towards teenagers and young adults. Here in the states we tend to push judo like a Pop Warner football league on kids. We need to be smarter in our marketing approach understanding that people come to judo for different reasons and that not everyone wants to be an Olympic champion.

CM: *Changing gears a bit - or maybe not - what is your personal opinion of the IJF rules, particularly the latest leg-grab changes?*

GG: After these rules went into effect, I became much more serious about refereeing. I didn't want to be teaching my students something that would get them disqualified in a tournament. I have mixed feelings about the new rules. I like them in some ways - the quality of judo that you see in tournaments is better overall. You really are seeing more quality throws. On the other hand, I think that leg grabs are important. When I started judo, I did it for self-defense. Well, people grab your legs in a fight and you need to know how to handle that situation. There has to be some moderation where you encourage good stand-up judo, but you don't take so much out of it that it becomes unrealistic. Another thing for people to realize is that there are now many grappling and no gi tournaments outside of the main stream of judo which provide opportunities to still use these leg grabs, pick-ups even some striking techniques.

CM: *That's true, but like you said, people are going to end up teaching what is legal in a tournament, and most coaches are only sending people to IJF-rules judo tournaments. So tournament-legal judo is all they are being taught, and that, then, doesn't work well in these other competitions...*

GG: You can always teach your students based on what tournament they are going to. Versatile instructors should be able to make the adjustments to fit each situation.

CM: *So if you could design the rules, how would you do it? What would the Gary Goltz judo rules be?*

GG: Instead of hansokumake [immediate disqualification] for the leg grabs, I'd make it a shido [a lesser penalty]. It's pretty devastating to hansokumake somebody because they got excited and grabbed a leg. It's too extreme and shido should be used as a warning to put the rule back in their head and let them continue with the match.

CM: *Does the USJA sanction tournaments that don't use IJF rules?*

GG: It depends on the situation. If they just want to use just *ippon* and *wazari* like in the olden days sure, we'll sanction it. However, if somebody wants to allow *kawazu gake* [leg entanglement, a dangerous banned technique] then we won't sanction it. It really depends on whether we can in good consciousness support it and provide liability insurance.

CM: *So it's not a matter of "If it's not IJF, we won't sanction it"... It's more on the basis of being safe and reasonable...*

GG: Almost all tournaments deviate from the IJF standards in one way or another. For example, the IJF requires a huge mat area for the Olympics, but at most local events they use smaller mat areas. So there are almost always some modifications. Bottom-line is if it's dangerous regardless of the IJF rules, we won't sanction it.

CM: *What is the significance of IJF rules to most US judoka? That is, should we pay any attention to them, given that most of us will never compete in an international tournament?*

GG: Well, they are relevant because most tournaments in the US use those rules. But like we said most competitors don't think about competing in the Olympics and world championships. They compete within their local area and that's it. These are the people the USJA needs to focus on. To this end, the USJA and USJF formed its [Grassroots Judo™](#) alliance with the goal of fostering participation in all aspects of judo.

CM: *When I started judo in the 90s, it seemed that the big 3 judo organizations were constantly competing with one another, likely to the detriment of judo. I know nowadays, I can at least compete in a USJF-sanctioned tournament with my USJA membership, so it seems that there is at least some level of cooperation. Are there other examples of such cooperation? What, if anything, should we expect in the future?*

GG: Absolutely. The USJA and USJF the Grassroots Judo™ alliance now encompasses our joint Junior Nationals, Winter Nationals, and several other events. Another thing we're doing is the USJA, USJF, along with USA Judo are communicating regularly to improve the brand of judo and we're working on a joint marketing initiative. The best part is that now if we have a problem with each other we feel comfortable picking up the phone and calling one of our counterparts to work it out.

CM: *That's great. Are there any other examples?*

GG: Yes. Last year we issued a [Triad Positioning Statement](#), where we said that our goal was to grow judo in the US. We no longer see pilfering members from each other's organizations as a real growth strategy. We now defined "growing judo" as getting more (new) feet on the mat.

CM: *Is there a need for 3(+) judo organizations? Do any of them serve a unique role, other than USA Judo and its affiliation with the USOC? Is it better for the US to have many organizations to compete and hopefully innovate, or do you feel that we could get more done under one big umbrella?*

GG: The *American Way* is that we Americans like choices. When you go to buy a car, you can look at Ford, at a Chevy, and many others. The USJA and USJF are working well together now and learning from each other. We each have different areas of expertise. I think that having the USJA and the USJF focused on growing Grassroots Judo™ with USA Judo focused on taking our best athletes to prepare them for the Olympics and the world championships as a viable plan. It would probably be cheaper if there was a single organization as there would be less overhead. But we're only going to get there by taking baby steps, building trust and letting nature take its course.

CM: *Thanks a ton for your time, Gary. I really appreciate it. This has been a really informative interview that I think the readers will really like.*