

I recall Nick Zaffuto the Founder of South Hills Judo Club in Pittsburgh
by [Gary Goltz](#), 2/15/12



Arnell Newsome, Nick Zaffuto, & Gary Goltz in 1975

Nick Zaffuto, 6th Dan, USJA LM 147, member since 1970 passed away quietly last Wednesday. He started Judo in 1945 while serving as a [Marine stationed at Pearl Harbor](#). He formed the first Judo Club in Pittsburgh at the downtown YMCA and continuously taught judo for over 60 years. Nick was indeed the father of Pittsburgh Judo.

In 1975 he introduced me to the US Judo Association and supported my promotion to 1st degree black belt. Later he asked me to run for local [AAU Judo Chairman](#) and worked hard to get me elected. This was the beginning of a lifelong involvement in judo politics with the goal of trying to make a positive difference. I will always remember Nick as a good Sensei who was devoted to judo and his students.

In [Yoshisada Yonezuka's book](#) which has just been published in English he talks about a tournament in Pittsburgh in 1962 where he took on a challenge line of 15 in under 10 minutes per Nick's request who was the event coordinator and promoter. Later Nick got a tag team of 2 women black belts Jordi Ludwig and Donna Waxter to be a regular feature at Pittsburgh's Civic Arena as an act during the Professional Wrestling events. They would come out and do an action packed judo demo in the days of Bruno Samartino and 'Judo' Gene LeBell. It really helped put judo on the map in my hometown.

I feel lucky to have started judo under Pittsburgh judo legend, [Kyu Ha Kim](#) and after short lived falling out with him I got to study under the original Pittsburgh judo legend, Nick Zaffuto. Both men contributed to who I became in the judo world today. Eventually after Mr. Kim and I made amends, I felt he then saw me as a grown-up man, like a son that had found his own way. This I'm sure is among the reasons he listens to me on important things like when I told him point blank to stop vacillating and sign-up for the [heart transplant list](#) which proved successful in saving his life.

It always amazes me how just like in judo things all seem to come together in the end. Rest in peace Sensei Nick, I'll miss you.