

Kendo no Kata and Their Effects on Kendo

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June 26, 2011

The following article was prepared for a nihon kendo no kata & kihon bokuto waza seminar on June 10th & 11th, 2011 hosted by the Ottawa and Shoshin Kendo Clubs. The format of the article, notes & definitions have been altered from the original style.

ALTHOUGH it is a common tendency to set our goal in winning kendo matches, developing mental control is much more important. The best way, and absolutely essential, to accomplish this is to practice **kendo no kata** which in turn will produce **kihaku**¹, 気迫. After all, however skillful, **kendo no kata** without **kihaku** is nothing more than a dance with a sword.

¹ Kihaku: one's mental/spiritual strength.

Therefore practicing **kendo no kata** with **kihaku** will produce improvement in the following aspects related to kendo:

1. Calmness and good conduct
2. Fine posture
3. Sensing opponent's movements and intentions
4. Agility in movements
5. Eliminating bad habits
6. Reading of right **maai**².
7. Increasing **kiai** and **kihaku**
8. Deeper understanding of kendo and its meaning
9. Fine character with dignity and elegance

² Maai: distance from the opponent.

Basic Kendo Practice with Bokuto

木刀による剣道基本稽古法

Through the basic kendo practice with **bokuto**³, one must always regard the **bokuto** as if it is a real sword⁴. With such understanding of a sword, we learn the basic technique of **shinai** kendo through practice with **bokuto**.

³ Bokuto: wooden sword.

⁴ Understanding that the Japanese sword has a particular shape each part of which having a distinct function.

Using **bokuto** will also enable us to understand and learn how the sword is used in such **waza**⁵ as **harai**, **nuki**, **suriage**, **kaeshi**, and **kiriotoshi**, which in turn will utilize improvement of **kendo no kata**.

⁵ Waza: technique.

Points to Observe in Practicing Kendo no Kata

While we observe certain set form and order when practicing **kendo no kata**, it is important to be always serious and apply **kihaku**.

Uchidachi⁶, who makes the move at the most opportune moment of full **kihaku**, always initiates the attack upon which **shidachi** must counterattack in response.

Despite the defensive appearance of his attack, **shidachi** must attack with the vigor and active spirit of an offensive attacker.

While **uchidachi** teaches from the position of a master, **shidachi** must learn the skill for victory.

Excellent form (**kata**) result only when perfect balance between practical skills, masterly techniques, and flexible movements is achieved.

When Practicing, Observe the Following Basic Rules

1. Always keep your eyes on the opponent's eyes.
2. Use **suriashi**⁷ both in moving forward from the front foot and backward from the back foot.
3. Use large movements of the sword when attacking, drawing an arc with the point of the sword.
4. In attack, draw your back foot close to the front foot, relax your shoulders, gather force in your lower abdomen, and step forward from your waist.
5. **Kakegoe**⁸ should come from the **tanden**⁹ forcibly: "Yaaah!" for **uchidachi**, "Tooh!" for **shidachi**.
6. Hold your breath when moving forward or backward in order to maximize inner power. Breathe abdominally when entering a **maai** so that the opponent will not detect your move.
7. In **kata** forms with the long sword (no. 1 to no. 7) "**ki wo mite**"¹⁰ while in **kata** forms with the short sword (no. 8 to no. 10) "**irimi ni narouto suru**"¹¹ are the emphasis.

⁶ Uchidachi: initiating attacker.

⁷ Suriashi: footwork where feet brush the floor.

⁸ Kakegoe: shouting.

⁹ Tanden: lower abdomen.

¹⁰ Ki wo mite: seizing the moment.

¹¹ Irimi ni narouto suru: taking over-powering approach.