

Kendo no Kata and Their Effects on Kendo

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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 (気迫).¹ Afterall, 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, one must always regard the bokuto as if it is a real sword.^{3,4} 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 as harai, nuki, suriage, kaeshi, and kiriotoshi, which in turn will utilize improvement of kendo no kata.⁵

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.

Uchidachi, who makes the move at the most opportune moment of full kihaku, always initiates the attack upon which shidachi must counterattack in response.⁶

⁶ Uchidachi: initiating attacker.

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 both in moving forward from the front foot and backward from the back foot.⁷
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 should come from the tanden forcibly: "Yaaah!" for uchidachi, "Toooh!" for shidachi.^{8,9}
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" while in kata forms with the short sword (no. 8 to no. 10) "irimi ni narouto suru" are the emphasis.^{10,11}

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 overpowering approach.