

Professor Okazaki and the Challenge Matches

By

Bruce Anders

What is the best method of self-defense? For those of us who teach jujitsu, we know this question is common. The question is ongoing and many answers are possible.

Our founder, Prof. Henry Okazaki once defeated a boxer, Kayo Morris, in Hawaii in 1922. Most of us know very little about the match, other than that Okazaki faced Morris in a ring, got his nose broken, and won the match by breaking his opponent's arm. Supposedly, his victory did much to establish jujitsu's reputation. Ever wonder just how it did that? Why would anyone care to compare arts in that way? Is anything really proved?

Whether in Okazaki's time or today, mixed matches have always drawn a crowd.

To get a sense of context of Prof. Okazaki's bout, it's useful to learn how mixed matches came about in 1920s Hawaii.

Classical Fighting Arts (CFA), a new martial arts publication, shed some light on this subject in a two-part article titled *Ju Jitsu vs. Wrestling and Boxing: Three Months of Electrifying Mixed Matches in Hawaii*. The articles appeared in their fourth and fifth issues, late 2004 and early 2005. CFA is an effort at serious martial arts journalism. Currently CFA is primarily oriented toward karateka and includes some articles on other arts.

The author, Charles Goodin, a Hawaii-based attorney and karate instructor, is actively researching and documenting martial arts history in the Hawaiian Islands. Goodin has done an impressive piece of research for this CFA article and has documented his facts from newspapers that reported the matches. This documentation, along with photos of the principals and reproductions of public advertisements of the contests, is of particular interest to Danzan Ryu enthusiasts. There is even documentation of Okazaki's *second* public bout with a boxer.

Prof. Okazaki was not the only one fighting in a ring. In Hawaii, 1922 was quite a time for a series of contests pitting jujitsuka against boxers and wrestlers. As Goodin points out, the most famous of these matches was the one in which Prof. Okazaki defeated Kayo Morris. We likely would know little of this event today if Okazaki had not gone on to found Danzan Ryu and leave us his legacy.

It all started in March 1922. George Clapham, an English wrestler, was already in Honolulu successfully beating local wrestlers. In particular, he beat a local Japanese favorite, Kinjo Ikeda. Unable to schedule rematch as a result of injury to Ikeda,

promoters contacted a Prof. Takahashi, then living in Denver, Colorado, to come to the Islands and face Clapham. Takahashi was both a Western style wrestler and a jujitsu exponent. In their first encounter, the rules stipulated that both use Western wrestling only. Clapham won. Locals wondered how Takahashi would have done if he used jujitsu instead of wrestling. Promoters soon arranged a match and billed it as jujitsu vs. wrestling. Takahashi came out on top with a choke. They had a third match which ended with Takahashi winning via arm lock.

The matches were immense crowd-pleasers, and Goodin makes two very strong points in describing the matches' popularity and outcomes. One: there were racial overtones to the matches, in that Caucasians were fighting men of Japanese and Hawaiian descent. The racial element of the matches' appeal was very strong. Caucasians were the most powerful group in Hawaii and other racial groups liked to compete against them at sports. Two: the rules in each match were highly inconsistent (in particular, what attire each opponent was allowed to wear, which proved critical to the bouts) and strongly influenced the outcomes.

A week after his last bout with Clapham, Takahashi took on Kayo Morris, another Englishman, in a match billed as jujitsu vs. boxing. This may have been the first time a jujitsuka was pitted against a boxer in a public venue Takahashi went down to Morris in 1 minute and 29 seconds. Takahashi had poor eyesight, and while able to grapple without his glasses, detecting oncoming punches clearly was a problem. In short, he ate Morris' punches. Jujitsu fans were disappointed at their hero's loss.¹

A rematch between the two men was arranged, this time with Morris to wear a judo gi. Takahashi had learned something from the first go-round about how to approach a boxer, despite his eyesight, and fought with a different strategy. In the third round, Takahashi won when he "threw Morris forcefully onto the canvas and applied a head hold."²

Enter Professor Okazaki, who would face Morris in the ring on 9 May 1922. Goodin gives no reason why Okazaki chose to get involved. The match was announced in a newspaper before Takahashi's last bout with Morris. The rules for the bout were specific: "Morris would wear a sleeveless jacket and six-ounce boxing gloves. There would be six, three-minute rounds. If Okazaki fell to the mat, Morris would have to go to a neutral corner. If Morris fell, Okazaki could work on him on the ground. Okazaki was prohibited from applying strangle holds using both hands, chopping (*shuto*) to the face, kicking with the toe (*tsumasaki geri*), gouging the eyes with the fingers, and punching with the fists"³

Goodin reports that details are unclear as to exactly what happened in each round, but it lasted only three, with Okazaki winning via a throw and an arm lock. Goodin describes Okazaki as being in strong control of the match.⁴

Takahashi remained active. He challenged three police officers to a public bout. At stake was a possibility to teach jujitsu to the Honolulu police department if he could defeat his opponents. Takahashi defeated the first officer and the referee stopped the second match thinking that Takahashi had submitted. Takahashi maintained that he did not and wanted

to continue, but that was the end of the bouts. There is no report as to whether the third match occurred, but it seems that Takahashi returned to the mainland without ever securing a contract with the Honolulu police.

Remember that all the above took place within 3 months. The fervor and interest in mixed matches seemed to have died down.

Fast forward to 1925. Prof. Okazaki had gone and returned from his training and research trip to Japan. In December of 1925, a boxer appeared in Hawaii claiming to be the younger brother of Kayo Morris. He called himself Kid John Morris. To avenge his older brother's defeat, Kid threw up a challenge to Okazaki. This bout had little publicity compared to the one with Kayo. Nonetheless, 1,800 mixed match fans showed up to again see jujitsu pitted against boxing.

From the account in the *Hilo-Tribune-Herald*, Kid was getting the better of Okazaki. The men exchanged attacks during the rounds, and Okazaki would not come out for a fourth round, stating he had only contracted for three. Both Okazaki and Kid left the venue. Anger broke out amongst the 1,800 fans that were looking for a longer or more decisive show, and it looked like there was a real concern that a riot may have broken out. Somehow, a local professional wrestler and jujitsuka, Tetsuo "Rubberman" Higami came to the venue and Kid was persuaded to come back and fight him. A match ensued, which lasted two rounds, with Higami securing an arm bar against the boxer. This win seemed to do little to appease the hostile crowd.⁵

An editorial appeared in *The Hilo Herald-Tribune* on 16 December 1925 calling for an end to mixed matches:

"(T) his paper is of the opinion that a mixed match of this kind between a Japanese jiu-jitsu expert and a white boxer is not a good thing for this community. It serves no good purpose and merely arouses useless race prejudice.

"Jiu-jitsu is something that the Japanese think undefeatable while the Anglo-Saxon thinks the same of boxing, and both methods are practically rooted in each classes' national pride. When either meets defeat at the other's hands, age-pride of caste and country is aroused and good sportsmanship is bound to suffer...."⁶

Apparently the sponsor of this bout wanted to arrange for a re-match between Okazaki and Kid John. There is no mention in Goodin's article if this re-match ever occurred.

So, there's a little context. And back to the original question: which method is best? Although this issue will keep rearing its head, perhaps it is a misleading question. Rules, or lack of them, strategy and individual skill seem more useful considerations than particular styles. What do you think?

Congratulations to Sensei Charles Goodin and *Classical Fighting Arts* for a great piece of historical research and a little extra perspective of events in Danzan Ryu history.

¹ *Classical Fighting Arts* #5, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2004.

² *Classical Fighting Arts* #6, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2005.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

For further information on Classical Fighting Arts, please contact the magazine at www.dragon-tsunami.org. More of Charles Goodin's research is available at: [Hawaii Karate Seinkai, http://seinenkai.com](http://seinenkai.com).