

USA Judo Promotes Professor Keiko Fukuda To 10th Dan!!!

By Kei Narimatsu for USA Judo

Professor Keiko Fukuda, 98 y/o, is a beautiful and petite lady, whose intensity and focus on Judo belies her independence and leadership within the largely male dominated world of this sport. She IS the last living student of the founder of Judo, Jigoro Kano. On July 28, 2011, the promotion board of USA Judo conferred on Sensei Fukuda, the rank of 10th dan(Judan). This is the highest rank possible for anyone. While 19 men have achieved this rank before her, she is also the only woman to have done so in the history of Judo.

Ms Fukuda started her Judo career at the Kodokan in Tokyo Japan in 1935. Her grandfather, Hachinosuke Fukuda was Kano's first Jujitsu teacher. To pay respect to his teacher, he invited his granddaughter to practice Judo in the Women's Dojo of the Kodokan. Thus began a 76 year love affair with Judo.

Sensei Fukuda has dedicated her life to the art of Judo. Her dedication has contributed greatly to mutual understanding and cooperation between Japan and the United States. She has promoted women's Judo, resulting in greater interest in the forms of Judo (kata) for both men and women. Her dojo, Soko Joshi Judo Club is known around the world. She has worked to establish Judo programs in colleges and universities throughout California. She has given seminars in Norway, France, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Philippines, and of course the United States. She is a well-known leader of Judo Kata, but more importantly, she is a teacher of Judo in the true spirit of it founder and her first teacher.

Professor Fukuda possesses exceptional technical expertise in the principles of Judo. Her high moral and philosophical standards have made her an invaluable advisor and consultant to USA Judo, the International Judo Federation, the Pan-American Judo Confederation and the Kodokan.

A documentary film about Sensei Fukuda is being made about her life. "Be Strong, Be Gentle, Be Beautiful." The title comes from Fukuda's philosophy of "Tsuyoku, Yasashiku, Utsukushiku." She explains, "in judo, you need strength of body, mind and soul. I don't mean beauty in the external sense. A compassionate soul is inner beauty. I believe this is true beauty. The gentleness is derived from the Japanese character 'ju' which means flexibility, softness."

However, all was not smooth sailing for Professor Fukuda. At that time, 5th dan (1953) was the highest rank for women that could be achieved under the Kodokan. It would be another 20 years before her next promotion would be awarded, 6th dan(1973). She attained her 7th dan in 1984 and her 8th in 1994. In an unprecedented move, the USJF promoted her to 9th dan in 2001 and the Kodokan in 2006. USA Judo, recognizing, not only her contribution to the sport of Judo but also to the cause of humanity and social understanding among all

people of the Judo community promoted this very deserving lady to the ranks of the most elite of the Judo world.

Sensei Eiko Shepherd of Belleville Illinois was the first to tell her of this promotion. I just wanted to share this good news with the world, Shepherd said. "When I called to inform her of her promotion, she could not believe it because this was her dream. She is a living example that as long as you believe you can achieve anything."

USA Judo and all of Judo congratulates Sensei Keiko Fukuda for this well deserved achievement. This gentle lady is a great role model for women and men, for boys and girls. Well done, Sensei and thank you.

Other honors that have been bestowed upon Professor Fukuda are:

- *1990 Medal of Honor – Government of Japan**
- *The Order of the Sacred Treasure, Gold Rays with Rosette – Japan**
- *Hokka Nichi Bei Kai – Hall of Fame – Japanese American Association of Northern California**
- *Awardee of the National Japanese American Historical Society for transforming Japanese American cultural heritage.**
- *Grand Marshall – Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival.**