

seeds of judo

PLANTING RESPECT • GROWING PEACE • INSPIRING GENERATIONS

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL women and girls.



An International Judo Federation publication

**GROWING VALUES
SHARING KNOWLEDGE
SEEDS OF HOPE
FIGHTING FOR THE FUTURE**

ON-THE-GROUND UPDATES



The Seeds of Judo

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ABOUT THE SEEDS OF JUDO

The 'Seeds of Judo' is an IJF judo magazine dedicated to the education and development dimensions of judo, published online periodically. It gathers articles published on the IJF website (www.ijf.org).

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EDITORIAL



Marius L. VIZER
IJF President

**Dear judoka,
Dear judo family,**

On the occasion of International Women's Day, we are reminded that progress towards equality is not a destination but a continuous and shared responsibility. Around the world, as societies evolve, sometimes in harmony, sometimes in tension, judo remains grounded in its founding principles: mutual respect, solidarity and equal opportunity for all.

From its origins, judo was envisioned as more than a sport. It is an educational journey, a discipline and a path to build stronger individuals, contributing to a better society. Its moral code transcends gender, nationality, culture and belief. On the tatami, individuals meet as equals, guided by respect and united by shared values. This is not only our heritage, it is our enduring responsibility.

The International Judo Federation remains unwavering in its commitment to equality and equity. We believe that access to judo must never be limited by gender or any other form of discrimination. Every girl and every woman who steps onto the tatami must feel that she belongs, that her ambitions are valid, her dreams powerful and her future supported. True equity means creating the conditions in which talent, dedication and character can flourish freely.

Throughout our history, women have played a fundamental role in shaping the identity and success of judo, as athletes, coaches, referees, officials, administrators and leaders. Their impact extends far beyond medals and titles. It lives in the culture

we nurture, in the integrity and humanity of our community. Their strength, intelligence and vision continue to elevate our sport and our community. Without them, judo would not be what it is today. We honour their achievements. We value their leadership. We stand beside them and we will continue to strengthen pathways for women at every level of our sport.

This inaugural edition of The Seeds of Judo, the new IJF magazine launching on 8th March 2026, is dedicated to the women who influence and shape our lives as judoka and as individuals. Through stories of resilience, leadership and inspiration, it reflects how deeply women are interwoven into the fabric of our sport.

By celebrating their journeys, we reaffirm our collective responsibility to foster inclusion and opportunity. On this International Women's Day, we renew our pledge to build a world of fairness and dignity through judo.

Guided by our values and united in purpose, we will continue to open doors, empower future generations and ensure that judo remains a force for equality across the globe.

HAPPY INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY!

Women in Judo: Empathy, Strength and Compassion

Although the development of women's judo began later than for men in most countries and regions around the world and the share of participation for women is still low, the contribution of women as role models and as hard and passionate workers in judo must be recognised. This publication is dedicated to the contribution of many women - as athletes, as coaches or judo leaders, they contribute significantly to the development and progress of judo.

Women in judo are committed and dedicated to their roles in judo, no matter their domain. Many articles and interviews have been published on the IJF website in the last five years, representing girls and women as role models for generations to come. They are persistent to

achieve their goals and in many cases judo values are their life inspiration, an engine for resolving challenges they meet every day.

International Women Day, 8th of March annually, is a perfect occasion on which to celebrate and recognise all the women in judo for their diverse and impactful achievements. Within the IJF as a whole and the Gender Equality Commission, our aim is to remove barriers and always promote judo as a sport equally suitable for men and women.

We hope that you will enjoy reading this publication; we are sure you will be inspired to join us on the path to gender equality in judo.



Dr Sanda Corak
IJF Gender Equality Commission Chair

GIRLS AND WOMEN

Safa Soliman A Symbol of Power and Potential for African Women's Judo

Egypt's Safa Soliman is rapidly establishing herself as one of Africa's most promising young judoka. At just 18, she has already built an impressive record on the continental stage. She claimed the African Cadet Championship title in 2022 and went on to secure the junior crown in Cameroon the following year.

However, continental success was not her ultimate ambition. In October 2024, Soliman achieved an historic milestone by winning a bronze medal at the World Junior Championships in Dushanbe. It was a significant moment, marking a rare global podium finish for an African female judoka.

Speaking after her victory, Soliman expressed both pride and determination. She highlighted the sacrifices required to reach such a level, noting that opportunities for women in her training environment remain limited. Her achievements, she believes, can have a positive influence on women and girls across Egypt and the wider African continent. She also paid tribute to her coaches and federation for their technical guidance and support.

Her momentum continued in July 2025, when she captured a second junior African title in Luanda, Angola. The event was further elevated by the presence of six-time senior world champion Clarisse Agbegne-



nou, whose masterclasses and engagement with athletes reinforced the importance of visible role models.

Today, Soliman stands as both an inspired and inspiring judoka, a powerful example of how sport can shape futures and redefine possibilities for the next generation of African women in judo.

Eteri Liparteliani The Pioneer

Since Georgia first appeared at global sporting events in 1992, the nation has celebrated many male champions across Olympic sports, from wrestling and shooting to football, basketball and, notably, judo. Yet it was not until June 2025 that a Georgian-born woman stood at the very top of a world championship podium. That woman is Eteri Liparteliani.

On Sunday 15th June, at Budapest's Papp László Arena, Liparteliani delivered the performance of her life to claim the -57 kg world title. The are-

na was packed, Georgian flags draped across the stands as fans travelled in large numbers to support their athletes. When she defeated Japan's Momo Tamaoki in the final, the venue erupted. The joy among the Georgian supporters and delegation was overwhelming.

As the individual competition drew to a close, Liparteliani stood out even more: she was the only member of the Georgian team to win gold! Although other medals followed, no-one else reached the top step of the podium. Her singular triumph underlined the

magnitude of her achievement, not only in judo, but across Georgian sport.

"It's an important moment, to become the first in the history of Georgia in judo," she said, before realising the significance extended beyond her discipline. Georgia had never before had a female world champion in any Olympic sport. "I am the person who is writing this history," she reflected. Already a trailblazer, she had been the first Georgian woman to win a European medal, a grand prix gold, a grand slam medal and a junior world

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title. In Budapest, she continued that journey.

Her world title did not come by chance. Liparteliani had been working towards this result, particularly after losing the European final in Montenegro earlier in the season. The silver medal, though impressive, left her wanting more. “The Europeans were not the maximum for me,” she explained. That disappointment became motivation. She returned to training, determined to push beyond previous limits, convinced that a world title was within reach if she delivered her very best.

The -57 kg category in Budapest was stacked with world, continental and Olympic medallists. Names such as Cysique, Tamaoki, Huh and Nelson Levy ensured fierce competition. Yet Liparteliani refused to be distracted. Deliberately, she avoided studying the draw in advance, choosing to focus solely on her own preparation. “I didn’t look at the list of entries or the draw beforehand,” she said. “The most important thing was to realise that I have to beat them all, no matter who.”

Her mental approach has become one of her greatest strengths. She insists on channelling positive energy and blocking out doubt. “Mostly, I’m not nervous before I fight because I’m always thinking that I have to be ready to win,” she explained. For her, performance is about committing maximum energy and refusing to allow negative thoughts to take hold.

That resilience was forged through painful experiences. Twice she finished fifth at the Olympic Games, narrowly missing out on bronze medals; those defeats were devastating. “When I remember those fights, it’s still hard,” she admitted. “I so wanted to be the champion at both Games and to have no medal was painful.” Yet she believes those losses strengthened her. Without feeling the pain of defeat, she suggests, the joy of ultimate victory cannot be fully understood.

At just 25 years old, Liparteliani has already built a remarkable career but her ambitions remain high. The Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games are firmly in her sights. “The main target is LA28,”

she said. “I want to have a medal there.” Having become Georgia’s first female world champion, she now dreams of becoming its first female Olympic champion.

Beyond personal goals, she recognises her broader impact. Young girls across Georgia are watching. By breaking barriers, she has opened doors that once seemed closed. “The next girls will remember that I was first and will know that they can do it too,” she said.

Eteri Liparteliani’s victory in Budapest was emotional, historic and transformative. More than a champion, she is a pioneer and her story is still being written.



Eteri Liparteliani

GIRLS AND WOMEN

Pan-America We Will Do It!

Under the leadership of its re-elected president, Carlos Zegarra Presser, the Panamerican Judo Confederation (PJC) has launched numerous initiatives to strengthen judo across the continent, both in sport and education. Two key positions are now held by women whose experience and expertise offer valuable support to the entire Panamerican judo community: Kimberlie Rivera Tello as Sport Director and Yuri Alvear as Education Director.

Their appointments are the result of consistent hard work. Both have built strong reputations through dedication and competence, yet their presence in such senior roles also carries broader significance. Sport remains, in many areas, male-dominated, and seeing women in leadership positions can inspire others to believe, “I can do it too.”

Yuri Alvear is already a recognised figure in international judo. A three-time world champion and two-time Olympic medallist, she had previously served on the IJF Sports Commission. Now responsible for education within the PJC, she views the role as both an opportunity and a responsibility. “I feel good being in this position. It’s a big opportunity for me,” she explains. Having worked at international level, she believes she has developed the skills necessary to give back to the continent that shaped her career. The transition from



Yuri Alvear

athlete to leader has required adjustment. “When I was competing, it was all about my training and my performance. Now I have to think about everyone. I want to give my best to improve the overall level.”

Initially, stepping into a leadership role and advising athletes and coaches felt challenging. Over time, however, she has grown more confident. She believes women bring their own perspective and way of thinking to decision-making processes, enriching the whole organisation. Kimberlie Rivera Tello’s path has been different, which adds further diversity to the leadership team. She began judo at university at 18 and started competing at 21. Her

involvement expanded quickly, beyond the tatami. In 2017, she volunteered for the Peruvian federation, taking on a wide range of responsibilities, from athlete management at competitions to transport, accommodation and accreditation.

“I had all possible jobs,” she recalls. Each role became a learning opportunity. Gradually, she became more involved in organisational systems, working to align local standards with those at the international level. Supported by mentors such as Carlos Zegarra Presser and Maria Martinez Murciego, she joined the PJC team in 2019. Serving as an assistant on both national and continental stages provided invaluable

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experience. After months as acting Sport Director, she was appointed to the role officially. The title brought a clear shift in responsibility. "Before, I could say that the Sport Director asked for something.

Now I am the Sport Director," she explains. Leadership means making decisions and accepting scrutiny. Despite the pressure, she remains focused on the core mission: supporting athletes and coaches and raising performance standards across the continent. Her journey has not been without challenges.

As a young woman in a senior position, she sometimes faced doubts about her experience. Over time, professionalism and consistency earned respect. She acknowledges that perceptions are evolving and believes that having women like Yuri and herself in visible leadership roles will help accelerate positive change.

For Kimberlie, leadership is also about attitude. Staying calm, smiling and fostering a positive environment are central to her approach. She hopes people will appreciate her way of working, built on respect and colla-

boration. Together, Yuri Alvear and Kimberlie Rivera Tello represent more than administrative appointments. They symbolise progress. Their stories demonstrate that competence, perseverance and authenticity matter more than stereotypes.

The message is clear: regardless of background, gender or starting point, ambition combined with hard work opens doors. More women across the continent may now feel encouraged not only to say, "I can do it too," but firmly, "I want to do it and I will do it."

Cathy Arnaud *Let's Make Our Way*

Catherine "Cathy" Arnaud is a true legend of French and world judo. A double world champion in 1987 and 1989, Olympic medallist at the Seoul 1988 demonstration event and four-time European champion, she remains one of France's most decorated judoka. Although her competitive career is long behind her, she continues to serve the sport with undiminished passion, overseeing veteran judo and attending major events such as the Veteran World Championships.

As International Women's Day approaches, Cathy reflects on what keeps women engaged in judo and how the sport can continue to attract girls and women worldwide. "For me, it's about staying close to judo," she explains. "We must find ways to keep women involved so they can flourish." Central

to that idea is belonging. Cathy believes that finding one's place within a group is essential for growth and confidence. "Human beings need others to move forward; we need the group. Judo offers women the opportunity to find that place."

Importantly, she does not believe in creating something separate for women. Equality, rather than division, is the key. Being treated like everyone else, without discrimination, encourages genuine integration and respect.

What matters most is clarity of purpose. Each woman should feel free to define her own objective in the sport, whether it is competition, self-defence, friendship or enjoyment. "I don't want anything imposed on me," she says.



Cathy Arnaud

For Cathy, the decisive factor in her journey was the sense of family she found in judo, along with lasting friendships and unwavering support that continue today.

GIRLS AND WOMEN

Diyora Keldiyorova Incredible Dojo Opens in Tashkent



Yuri Alvear

Uzbekistan has invested significantly in judo in recent years, strengthening the sport from grassroots clubs to elite performance, and from education to infrastructure. Those efforts are now producing visible results, with medals at world championships and Olympic Games confirming the country's rising status.

A turning point came in the summer of 2024 in Paris, when Diyora Keldiyorova became Uzbekistan's first Olympic champion in any sport. Her historic gold medal ignited unprecedented enthusiasm nationwide and inspired a surge of interest in judo, particularly among girls and young

women. Supported by strong government collaboration, new dojos are now being built across the capital and in regional centres to sustain that momentum.

On Thursday 27th February 2025, one such dojo was inaugurated at School No. 17 in Tashkent. The ceremony was made especially symbolic by the presence of Keldiyorova herself, whose name the dojo now bears proudly. Her Olympic triumph has reshaped the sporting landscape in Uzbekistan and across Central Asia, offering tangible proof that international success is within reach. For many young people, particularly girls, she has opened

the door to new dreams.

The Uzbekistan Judo Federation, in partnership with the Ministry of Sport, the Ministry of School and Pre-School Education and the International Judo Federation (IJF), has launched an ambitious project to build school-based dojos nationwide. The facility at School No. 17 was the 16th to open under this initiative, demonstrating the scale of commitment to youth development through sport.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony brought together leading figures from sport and public life. Among them were Her Excellency Mrs Shahnoza Mirziyoyeva, vice pre-

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sident of the Uzbekistan Paralympic Committee and First Deputy Director of the National Agency of Social Protection under the President, as well as IJF President Marius Vizer. Their presence underlined the national importance of the project.

Scores of children attended the celebration, performing traditional music and dances in colourful national dress. The atmosphere was festive, reflecting both pride in cultural heritage and excitement about new sporting opportunities.

Speaking at the event, Diyora Keldiyorova expressed her enthusiasm for the project. Having spent recent years training with the national team, she looks forward to contributing directly to youth development. Together with her husband, Azamat Matyakubov, and her coach, Nelly, she will help coach at the new club. "We will see how many children come to practise judo here," she said. "If needed, we will bring in more coaches. I am excited to see judo continue to grow here and throughout Uzbekistan."

An official introduction highlighted the broader vision behind the initiative: Uzbekistan is committed to building modern dojos in schools across the country, providing children with access to high-quality training environments that meet international standards. The aim is to develop future champions and also promote values such as discipline, respect and perseverance.

IJF President Marius Vizer congratulated the Uzbek authorities and sporting bodies for their sustained commitment to judo. He praised the achievements at the 2024 Olympic Games and expressed hope for continued success at future editions. He emphasised that the journey to Olympic excellence requires long-term dedication and systematic work, beginning at school level. "Judo means friendship, respect, solidarity, unity and peace," he said, wishing young judoka success in both sport and in life.



Diyora Keldiyorova

Dr Ikramov, Uzbekistan's Minister of Sport, also addressed the gathering. He thanked parents for supporting their children's participation and highlighted the rapid expansion of school-based dojos. With 16 new facilities already operational at that time with approximately 13,000 judoka training in those programmes, the initiative represented a major investment in youth development. This has continued since. He also stressed the importance of in-

clusivity, noting that the schools support children with disabilities and contribute to broader social wellbeing.

The minister pointed out that Tashkent hosted an IJF grand slam during the same week as the opening, with more than half of the participants being women. This, he said, reflected growing equality and inclusivity within international judo. He expressed hope that among the children present at the ceremony would be future champions inspired by Keldiyorova's example.

Following the speeches, Keldiyorova offered words of gratitude to the IJF, the National Olympic Committee and the Ministry of Sport for creating a facility built to international standards. She encouraged the younger generation to work hard, honour the trust placed in them and strive to raise their national flag ever higher.

The celebration concluded with lively performances; young judoka demonstrated dynamic sequences combining gymnastics and judo techniques, while pupils performed traditional dances to enthusiastic applause.

The opening of the dojo at School No. 17 symbolised far more than a new training hall. It represented a strategic investment in education, equality and the future of Uzbek sport, a future already transformed by one Olympic champion, now open to many more.

GIRLS AND WOMEN

Hela Ayari From Tunisia to Saudi Arabia

The IJF Academy stopped in Kuwait in February 2025 to deliver internationally recognised diplomas, bringing together coaches eager to deepen their expertise. Among them was Hela Ayari, who took part in the practical sessions to refine her coaching techniques and exchange ideas with leading international experts.

A former Olympic judoka from Tunisia, Hela is now a professional coach with more than a decade of experience. Holding a third dan black belt, she leads the MAHD Elite Team at the MAHD Sports Academy in Saudi Arabia and coaches the Saudi women's national judo team. Over the course of her competitive career, she claimed multiple Arab and African titles and built a strong international reputation.

Her achievements include reaching first place on the IJF junior world ranking list (-52 kg) in 2014, competing at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, winning bronze at the Düsseldorf Grand Slam (-48 kg), securing eight African titles and six Arab championship wins, and earning a bronze medal at

the Mediterranean Games in Türkiye.

One remarkable detail shared during the Academy session highlighted the unique dimension of her current role: among the children she trains are the children of global football star Cristiano Ronaldo. For Hela, this represents both pride and responsibility, marking a significant milestone in her coaching career.

When she moved to Saudi Arabia, women's judo was still in its early stages. Through dedication and collaboration with the Saudi Judo Federation and MAHD Academy, she helped lay strong foundations for growth. Under her guidance, Saudi female judoka have already achieved notable success, earning medals and gaining visibility on regional stages.

Hela credits judo with shaping her character, teaching her discipline, resilience and leadership. Today, her mission extends beyond competition. She promotes girls' participation through school programmes, talent identification initiatives and tourna-



Hela Ayari & Slavisa Bradic

ments designed specifically for young female athletes.

She also emphasises the importance of kata in development programmes. For her, kata is fundamental in teaching discipline and technical precision. Introducing it early allows girls to build confidence and master core principles from the outset.

Looking ahead, Hela aims to develop a new generation of Saudi female judoka capable of competing internationally and reaching the Olympic stage. Proud of her contribution so far, she continues to serve as a pioneer and role model, proving that dedication and vision can transform not only a career, but an entire sporting landscape.

Kate Corkery Sets the Example for Women in Judo

At the Abu Dhabi World Championships 2024, among federation presidents and continental leaders from across the globe, one presence symbolised both continuity and renewal: Kate Corkery, recently elected president

of the Oceania Judo Union (OJU). Attending her first world championships in this new capacity, she described the experience as a homecoming.

"It feels like I never left," she said. Corkery previously ser-

ved as president of the Australian Judo Federation from 2016 to 2022 and was active internationally, including participation in the IJF Gender Equity Conference in Baku.

After time away from the Wor-

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Id Judo Tour due to Covid and professional commitments, returning to the global judo family felt natural.

Only months into her continental presidency, Corkery has been deepening her understanding of the vast and diverse Oceania region. The challenges are considerable. "Travel is our biggest issue," she explained.



Kate Corkery

Island nations are separated by thousands of kilometres, and connectivity and access to technology vary widely. These realities complicate communication, organisation and athlete development.

To respond, the OJU launched a small grant programme of up to US\$5,000 per project. More than a dozen federations have already benefited. In Tonga, funding helped secure a permanent dojo after years of training in borrowed agricultural buildings.

In Kiribati, support enabled the federation to clear IJF-donated tatami from customs and establish a dedicated training space. Such practical assistance, Corkery emphasises, makes an immediate and meaningful difference. Her vision extends beyond infrastructure.

Performance and unity are central priorities. The Paris Olympic Games marked a milestone, with ten Oceanian athletes qualifying, including one seeded in the top eight. Corkery hopes even more will reach Los Angeles 2028. "We must work together and build a new generation of athletes, coaches and leaders," she said, highlighting the importance of regional collaboration.

Corkery's belief in sport's unifying power dates back to the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. Watching athletes from diverse cultures compete on one stage left a lasting impression. For her, judo's strength lies not only in results but in its values.

As one of the few female continental presidents in international sport, she recognises the symbolic impact of her leadership. "You can't be what you can't see," she noted, stressing the importance of visible role models.

She encourages women to pursue leadership with confidence, to learn continuously and to support one another.

A lawyer and business owner, as well as a mother of four, Corkery did not begin her journey as a judoka; she discovered the sport through her children. Appointed president of the Australian federation at just 30, she brought fresh perspective and strategic focus. "We would lose opportunities if we only measured people by their belt," she reflected.

Guided by respect, courage and integrity, Corkery represents a modern, inclusive and values-driven leadership determined to expand access to judo across Oceania.

For Cathy, the decisive factor in her journey was the sense of family she found in judo, along with lasting friendships and unwavering support that continue today.



GIRLS AND WOMEN

Lisa, Marine, Anastasia We Will Continue to Diversify

As International Women's Day Approaches, three names resonate strongly within the international judo community: Dr Lisa Allan, IJF Secretary General since 2023, and her close collaborators Marine Stroobants and Anastasia Parusova. Together, they represent not only leadership within the International Judo Federation but also a shared commitment to inclusion, competence and diversity that extends far beyond sport.

For Dr Allan, judo has shaped her entire life. Raised in a family deeply rooted in the sport, she was influenced by both her parents. Her father, a highly ranked judoka, instilled discipline and commitment in her. Her mother, with a very different personality, taught her to see the world from multiple perspectives. Another key influence was Loretta Doyle, whose humility and kindness left a lasting impression. "For me, she embodies what a true champion should be," Lisa explains.

Professionally, IJF President Marius Vizer played a decisive role in her journey. She describes him as a mentor who often believes in her more than she believes in herself. By pushing her beyond her comfort zone, he has helped her grow into one of the most influential administrators in international sport.

Working closely with Lisa are Marine Stroobants and Anastasia Parusova. Marine, one of the secretary general's assistants,



Lisa and Marine with the IJF Refugee team in 2019

acknowledges her admiration for Lisa and for Larisa Kiss, Director of the Olympic Games and Olympic Movement for Judo. "They are role models," she says. She appreciates the way they carry their responsibilities and the determination they have shown to reach their positions. For Marine, their example proves that leadership is built through perseverance and competence.

Anastasia Parusova, who also serves as one of the IJF's safeguarding officers, draws inspiration from inside and outside sport. She cites Simone Veil, Holocaust survivor, former president of the European Parliament and tireless advocate for women's rights, as a powerful example of courage and commitment. Within judo, she finds daily inspiration in the athletes themselves. Working behind the scenes at major events, she witnesses their victories and defeats, their joy and disappointment. "We see their daily fights," she explains,

emphasising how inspiring their resilience can be. French champion Clarisse Agbegnenou, both on and off the tatami, is a particular role model for her.

For Anastasia, fundamentally, inclusion is about respecting human rights. Diversity, she believes, is a strength. "In judo we all wear a white judogi," she says. The uniform symbolises equality: individuals from different cultures and backgrounds unite under shared values. Differences are not erased but embraced as part of a collective identity grounded in respect, solidarity and friendship.

Marine approaches inclusion from a complementary perspective. She does not favour quotas for their own sake. "I want the right people in the right place because they are competent," she states clearly. She wants to hold her position because she deserves it, not because she is a woman. At the same time, she

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supports equal opportunities. No-one should be excluded because of gender, race or origin. She notes significant progress in judo in recent years, particularly in the representation of female athletes. Countries that once placed little emphasis on women's participation are now investing in it, demonstrating a broader cultural shift.

Since 2007, when Marius Vizer became IJF president, the federation has undergone substantial transformation. Judo is more inclusive and diverse than ever before. Women are increasingly visible not only as athletes but also as referees, coaches and

administrators. However, progress remains ongoing. The World Judo Tour may reflect strong gender equity objectives but the global judo community extends far beyond elite competition. Inclusion must also reach grassroots levels and address broader issues, including opportunities for people with disabilities.

The three leaders agree that meaningful change takes time. Transforming an historically male-dominated environment into a balanced, values-driven discipline cannot happen overnight. It requires advocacy, education and patience. Yet they remain optimistic. With each new

generation of female referees, coaches and leaders, the culture evolves further.

Judo, they emphasise, is more than a sport. It is an educational tool that teaches respect, courage and responsibility. By continuing to diversify and open doors, the judo community strengthens its own structures while also contributing to society.

Their message is clear: inclusion is not a trend but a long-term commitment. Step by step, through competence and shared values, judo will continue to diversify and in doing so, become even stronger.

Sabrina Filzmoser Inspiration and Inclusion

As International Women's Day approaches, the spotlight falls on inspiring inclusion and investing in women to drive progress. Sabrina Filzmoser embodies this spirit. A former world number one, four-time Olympian, world medallist and European champion, she also served as chair of the IJF Athletes' Commission. Always seeking new challenges, she has even pursued a helicopter flying licence.

In 2022, Filzmoser climbed Mount Everest, carrying judo's values to the highest point on earth. For her, sport is inseparable from personal growth and responsibility. She credits her mother as her earliest inspiration, whose steady support shaped her resilience and ambition.

As a young athlete, she admired



Austria's winter sports champions, but in judo it was Ryoko Tani, double Olympic champion and seven-time world champion, who influenced her most. Tani's speed, discipline and consistency showed what dedication could achieve.

Beyond sport, Filzmoser found role models in science and exploration. While studying physics and mechanical engineering, she looked to Marie Curie, whose perseverance and groundbreaking achievements rede-

efined possibilities for women. Amelia Earhart's courage and independence also left a strong impression, as did mountaineer Gerlinde Kaltenbrunner, whose resilience and respect for communities reflected values close to judo's philosophy.

For Filzmoser, inspiration and inclusion are inseparable. Inclusion means creating real opportunities and ensuring diverse talent is welcomed and supported. Judo's moral code, built on respect, courage, sincerity and friendship, provides a powerful framework. On the tatami, differences fade behind shared values. Inspiring inclusion, she believes, requires daily commitment, enabling women to lead with confidence and purpose.

GIRLS AND WOMEN

In Azerbaijan White Suits Girls

In 2023, Azercell Telekom, in partnership with the Azerbaijan Judo Federation, launched a social initiative named 'White Suits Girls!' The campaign aimed to encourage girls across Azerbaijan to take up sport, strengthen their self-confidence and support their physical and mental development.

This new phase of collaboration focused on teenage girls particularly, promoting judo as a pathway to wellbeing, discipline and empowerment. Beyond sport, the project also sought to address wider social challenges, including the issue of early marriage, by offering young girls opportunities for personal growth and independence.

Rashad Rasullu, General Secretary of the Azerbaijan Judo Federation, emphasised that one of the federation's core objectives is to further develop and popularise judo nationwide. He explained that the organisation is equally committed to contributing to broad social progress, supporting education and youth development particularly. According to Rasullu, the partnership with Azercell aligned perfectly with these goals and is expected to increase interest in sport while boosting the confidence of young girls.

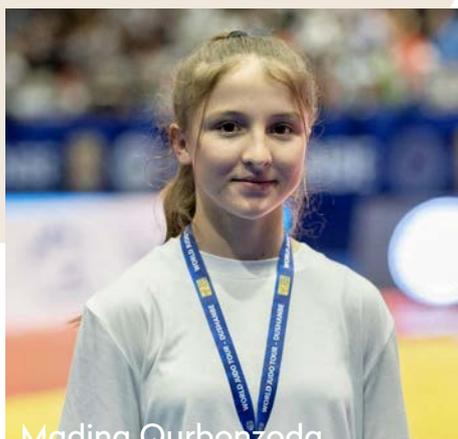
The federation has identified the development of women's judo as a priority and intends to continue promoting inclusive programmes that enable women to engage in



sport confidently, representing Azerbaijan on the international stage.

As part of the campaign, the first 1,000 girls aged 7 to 14 who registered for judo received a judogi as a gift. Through this initiative, organisers hoped to see a new generation wearing the white suit and stepping forward as strong, confident role models for the future.

Madina Qurbonzoda



On the opening day of the 2023 Dushanbe Grand Prix, a 15-year-old Tajik judoka stepped onto the tatami for her very first IJF event. Still a cadet at the time, with no previous international experience at cadet or junior level, Madina Qurbonzoda embraced the challenge of compe-

ting on the World Judo Tour. For her, it was an opportunity too important to refuse.

Competing in the -48 kg category, Madina finished in seventh place, notably defeating the reigning African champion along the way. After such an impressive debut, she went on to compete at the Cadet World Championships in Zagreb that summer and has since won medals at continental cups at the cadet and junior level and took her first grand slam medal in Dushanbe in 2025.

Her journey has already been extraordinary. In regional competitions across Central Asia, she has won remarkable prizes, inclu-

ding two cars and even a horse. Often competing against boys due to the limited number of girls in the sport, she has emerged victorious frequently. One of the cars she won in Uzbekistan was proudly given to her father.

Judo conditions vary greatly around the world. In Central Asia, while the sport enjoys popularity, it remains largely male-dominated. Cultural expectations still influence participation, particularly for girls. Yet change is slowly taking place and Madina is part of a new generation determined to inspire progress.

Invited by the national team to compete in Dushanbe in 2023, she accepted without hesitation.

AS ROLE MODELS IN JUDO

Competing at home, under bright lights and in front of a passionate crowd, required significant courage, especially against opponents almost twice her age. The pressure to represent her country added further weight to the experience.

“I know I train hard,” she explains. “But there is also a spiritual element. I have faith and carry that with me onto the tatami.”

One of her most memorable contests was against a strong Mongolian opponent. Although she lost, she viewed the match as a valuable opportunity. Her final bout, against Serbia’s Stojadinov, was physically demanding.

Despite her youth, Madina was not intimidated by her more experienced rivals. Those contests formed pivotal moments in her understanding of the elite end of the sport and have fuelled her progress ever since.

Her introduction to judo came through her older brother. As a young girl, she followed him to training sessions and became the first girl to join her local club. Initially hesitant, her mother eventually supported her passion, encouraged by her father’s belief in her determination.

Living in Dushanbe and training

away from her family, she is no longer the only girl at her club. Her initial solitude never discouraged her but strengthened her resolve. Training alongside boys, she believes, has made her stronger.

Her message is simple: parents should encourage their daughters to practise sport and stay healthy. “Women can do anything,” she says confidently and she is already proving it.

Clarisse Just Changed the World

For decades, it was widely accepted that when female athletes chose to start a family, their elite careers would be over. Pregnancy was seen as a natural and final chapter. The physical demands, the recovery, the emotional adjustments, all were considered incompatible with a return to the highest level of sport.

Then came Doha, May 2023. Less than a year after giving birth to her daughter Athena, Clarisse Agbegnenou stepped onto the world stage and claimed her sixth world title. Her baby was present in the arena. It was more than a sporting victory; it was a powerful statement and from that moment, something shifted.

Doha marked a turning point; the narrative changed. What had long been viewed as impossible suddenly became visible, tangible and real. Clarisse did not just win a gold medal, she dismantled a barrier that had stood for generations.

After Doha, no federation, no coach, no athlete could automatically assume that motherhood meant the end. Doors opened. Expectations evolved. Young girls saw a future that included both family and sporting ambition. Clarisse proved that motherhood and excellence



Clarisse Agbegnenou

are not opposites. From Doha onwards, things were different and they will never be the same again.

GIRLS AND WOMEN

Maria Portela A Courageous Career & What Comes Next



In March 2023, Maria Portela made one of the most difficult decisions of her life. After nearly two decades representing Brazil's national team, three Olympic Games, 14 world championships and 18 World Judo Tour medals, she chose to retire. At 35, still ranked among the world's best and in a direct qualification position for what could have been a fourth Olympic Games, in Paris, she walked away, not because she could not continue but because she felt complete. Years later, that decision stands as one of the most courageous acts of her career.

At the time, many questioned her timing. Why step aside when Paris 2024 was within reach? Why leave while still competitive? Maria's answer was deeply personal. After years of relent-

less commitment, of structuring her entire life around training, recovery and performance, she realised something had shifted. The urgency that had always driven her was no longer the same. A minor knee surgery in 2022 had forced her to slow down and for the first time, returning to full intensity did not feel natural.

There was also her family. During the Tokyo Olympic Games, her mother became unwell. Competing while carrying that emotional weight changed her perspective. Maria had always given everything to judo, physically, mentally, emotionally, but she began to question the cost. "I owe them some time now," she said in 2023, speaking about her family's unwavering support through victories and defeats. Looking back, it is clear that her retirement was not an end but a transition.

Maria had always competed with visible courage. Whether in marathon golden score battles or against legends such as Lucie Décosse, she fought with authenticity. She was not defined solely by medals. In fact, she often emphasised that her career was about far more than

podium finishes. Ten losses at world championships taught her as much as her victories. She learned resilience, responsibility and leadership, qualities that would shape her next chapter.

One of her strongest values has always been a responsibility toward the next generation. In 2023 she explained that stepping aside early in the Olympic qualification cycle was also about fairness. Younger Brazilian athletes deserved a genuine opportunity to build their campaigns. Waiting until the final year would have compromised their chances. That awareness reflected her maturity as both an athlete and a leader.

Since retiring, Maria has remained deeply connected to judo. True to her word, she returned to the tatami with a "white belt mindset," ready to learn again. Coaching became a natural pathway. She also pursued further education, exploring mentoring and the psychological aspects of performance, an area she had come to appreciate profoundly during her own career. Mental organisation, emotional regulation and authenticity were themes she now wanted to transmit.

In recent years, her influence has grown in quiet but powerful ways. She has worked with young athletes, shared her experience in seminars and supported Brazil's new generation as they navigate

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the pressures she once carried. Those who once looked up to her as a teammate, now look to her as a guide.

Maria's competitive identity was intense. She described judo as "literally the way." Growing up without her father, facing personal challenges, in the Brazilian team she found a family, a structure and a purpose. Judo gave her friendship, travel, cultural discovery and education. It gave her the tools to fight not only on the mat but in life.

Her fighting style reflected who she was. Competing at -70 kg despite often being smaller than her opponents, she refused to conform to expectations. Many suggested she drop to -63 kg but after trying it once she knew it was not her path. Instead, she adapted her system, adding left-sided attacks, developing strong ashi-waza and counters, building a style that fit her body rather than forcing her body to fit a category.

Former rivals even admitted she was difficult to face because she was different. That authenticity has become one of her most important legacies. In a sport where physical prototypes often dominate conversations, Maria demonstrated that success

can be built on individuality and integrity. She showed younger female judoka that they do not need to reshape themselves to match an ideal. They can refine their strengths, protect their identity and still compete at the highest level.

Maria's words about courage remain powerful. Courage, for Maria, was not only attacking an opponent. It was attacking self-doubt, facing transition and ac-

Olympic preparation has been replaced by different challenges, she continues to apply the same principles: sincerity, responsibility and effort. Her family, once spectators to her sacrifices, now share more of her daily life. The time she promised them has been honoured.

Brazilian judo has also evolved. A new generation has taken the spotlight, athletes who grew up watching Maria fight through golden scores and difficult draws. They saw that persistence mattered. They saw that leadership was not loud but consistent and many still cite her as a reference.

Republishing her story now is not about nostalgia, it is about perspective. Retirement is often portrayed as disappearance but in Maria Portela's case, it was transformation. The competitive arena shaped her; the time since has expanded her influence.

Her career reminds us that greatness is not measured only by Olympic medals. It is measured by courage to step away at the right time, by generosity towards teammates, by authenticity of identity and by willingness to begin again.

In 2023 she said she had no sadness, only pride. Three years later, that pride feels justified. Maria Portela's career was courageous and her life after competition proves that courage was never limited to the tatami.



Maria Portela

cepting vulnerability. In 2023 she admitted feeling "a little scared" about starting a new chapter. After doing one thing for so long, beginning again required humility. Yet she embraced that uncertainty.

Today, that bravery has proven justified. While the intensity of

GIRLS AND WOMEN

Akyama Hinako Kodokan Judo Instructor

During the Tokyo Grand Slam 2024, Croatian Judo Federation President Sanda Corak, Editor-in-Chief of the IJF scientific journal and chair of the IJF Gender Equality Commission, visited the Kodokan, judo's historic home. There, she met Akyama Hinako, one of the few female instructors in an institution traditionally dominated by men.

Within the IJF Gender Equality Commission, Corak works to promote equal opportunities in all areas of judo, particularly in leadership and coaching roles.

Coaching remains one of the most influential but also most demanding positions, often requiring extensive travel and long hours, factors that can make it

challenging for women to pursue and sustain such careers.

Akyama Hinako represents an inspiring example of perseverance. She began practising judo at the age of seven, despite having no family background in the sport. She continued throughout junior high school before studying judo at Hiroshima University.

After spending three years in Jordan, she was invited to become a Kodokan instructor, a role she embraced as her life mission. Her goal is simple yet powerful, "to make people happy through judo." While much of the modern judo scene focuses on competition, Akyama emphasises the deeper values of the discipline.



She believes judo offers life lessons that extend beyond medals or rankings, regardless of age, level or gender. In doing so, she embodies not only the role of instructor but that of a true educator.

Ryoko Tani The Importance of Judo for Women and for All



The global movement towards gender equality has made clear progress, yet true fairness remains an ongoing mission. In sport, visible and invisible bar-

riers still limit opportunity. Few understand this better than Ryoko Tani, double Olympic champion, five-time Olympic medallist and seven-time world champion, whose career reshaped expectations for women in elite judo.

Tani was among the first top judoka to start a family while continuing to compete at the highest level. She went on to win an Olympic medal and a world title after becoming a mother, challenging long-held assumptions about motherhood and performance sport. For her, this represented an important evolution in mindset.

"Today there is a real possibility for athletes to have children and remain in high-level sport," she explains. Her vision is simple: sport should be 'gender-free.' Whether married or single, with children or without, every athlete deserves equal opportunity and support. Achieving this, she believes, requires mutual understanding and shared responsibility.

Tani also points to wider global inequalities. In many countries, social and economic barriers still prevent access to sport. Rooted in Jigoro Kano's philosophy, judo was created to contribute to society. Through voices like Tani's, that mission continues, promoting equality and opportunity for all.

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Tina Trstenjak Her Lifelong Exploration of Judo Continues

On 31 December 2022, my first judo career, in the field of judo competition, finished.

With those words, Tina Trstenjak closed an extraordinary competitive chapter. Her career, built alongside her coach, federation and parents, brought her two Olympic medals, four world championship medals and seven European medals. At her peak, she simultaneously held Olympic, world and continental titles – a rare and remarkable achievement.

But in judo, a career is never defined solely by medals. The journey extends far beyond the spotlight of major arenas. For Trstenjak, retirement from elite competition did not signal an end, but a transition.

“My second judo career just started,” she explained. “With the same discipline and motivation, I’m beginning to understand why and how a judoka can become a champion.”

Through an initiative supported by IJF President Marius Vizer, Trstenjak embraced educational opportunities with the IJF Academy. There, she deepened her understanding of the 100 Kodokan-classified techniques and explored the technical foundations that underpin high-level performance.

At the same time, she embarked on a refereeing pathway, earning both the IJF continental and IJF international refereeing

licences, stepping onto the tatami in a new role, with fresh responsibility.

Central to her studies was kata.

At the IJF Academy, students must demonstrate Nage-no-Kata and Katame-no-Kata, collectively known as Randori-no-Kata, which represent the essential principles of throwing and groundwork. For Trstenjak, this marked the beginning of an intensive three-year educational journey.

She progressed to Ju-no-Kata, expressing flexibility and the efficient use of energy, and then to the self-defence forms Kime-no-Kata and Kodokan Goshin-Jutsu, both emphasising decisiveness, awareness and the practical application of judo principles. Finally, she completed Itsutsu-no-Kata, symbolising natural forces and movement, and Koshiki-no-Kata, which preserves classical techniques rooted in judo’s samurai heritage.

By the end of 2025, after examinations in Slovenia and at Kodokan seminars in Europe, she held certification in all seven Kodokan kata.

“On 31 December 2025, I reflected on my three years of study. It was a great feeling,” she said. “From winning Olympic and world gold to earning my refereeing licence, I’ve always been proud of my work. Completing these kata examinations brought



another new and special sense of achievement.”

That same day, she shared the moment with her parents, presenting her seventh certificate as a symbol of gratitude for their unwavering support throughout both of her judo careers.

It is possible that Tina Trstenjak is the first Olympic, world and continental champion to hold certification in all seven Kodokan kata alongside such competitive success. Whether or not history confirms that distinction, her journey embodies the true spirit of judo: continuous learning, humility and growth.

For Trstenjak, judo has never been simply about winning. It is a lifelong path of education and self-improvement and her exploration is far from over.

PATH TO GENDER EQUALITY

IJF Strong Girls Judo A Lasting Impact

In 2025, the IJF Strong Girls Judo initiative marked a significant step forward in the development of women's judo in Saudi Arabia. The launch weekend was both dynamic and meaningful, reflecting a clear ambition: to strengthen female participation in a country where judo is experiencing rapid growth.

Across the Kingdom, the expansion of judo has been remarkable. Within this broader development strategy, increasing opportunities for girls and women remains a key priority of the national federation.

The introduction of Strong Girls Judo formed part of this vision, offering a safe, structured and encouraging environment in which young women could discover the sport, its values and its practical benefits.

The seminar was led by Larisa Kiss, IJF Director for the Olympic Games and Olympic Movement for Judo. She was joined by Gabriela Mueller Mendoza, leadership and communication trainer, professional certified coach and founder of Women Lead Sports.

Technical guidance was provided by Hedvig Karakas (HUN), three-time Olympian, world medallist and European champion, alongside Denisa Deliu, several times Romanian national cham-

panion in judo and kickboxing and assistant to the IJF president. Held on 1st and 2nd June 2025 at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University in Riyadh, the event brought together 32 young women, none of whom had practised judo previously. The objective was clear: to introduce the fundamentals of the discipline in a safe and sup-

portive setting. Participants were taught breakfalls (ukemi), basic throwing techniques and essential defensive skills, ensuring that confidence and safety were prioritised at every stage. Each day was divided into two complementary parts. Morning sessions focused on empower-

ment masterclasses, addressing themes such as self-awareness, leadership fundamentals, team dynamics, communication styles and key tools for building confidence. These discussions encouraged participants to reflect on their potential not only within sport but in wider aspects of life.

In the afternoon, attention shifted to the tatami. Through carefully structured sessions, the participants explored practical self-defence applications and developed physical awareness.

The approach was deliberately inclusive and non-competitive, emphasising resilience, composure and self-belief. For many, it was a transformative first encounter with martial arts.

During her opening remarks in June 2025, Larisa Kiss underlined the broader significance of the initiative. She reflected on the evolution of sport from traditionally male-dominated environments towards more inclusive structures grounded in merit and fairness.

She reiterated the IJF's ongoing commitment to expanding opportunities for women both on and off the tatami, describing Strong Girls Judo as a programme centred on empowerment, self-confidence and the understanding that strength





manifests in many forms.

Gratitude was also extended to the Saudi Judo Federation and its president, Dr Abdulaziz Al-Bassam, for their vision and support. The collaboration with Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University was particularly significant, representing progress and leadership within the Kingdom's educational and sporting landscape.

The technical sessions, guided by Hedvig Karakas and Denisa Deliu, were delivered with deep respect for local culture and traditions. Beyond techniques, the emphasis was placed on posture, awareness and inner strength. The aim was not to teach judo skills in isolation, but to provide tools that participants

could apply confidently in everyday life.

Saudi Arabia continues to witness dynamic social and sporting development, driven largely by the energy and ambition of its young generation. Initiatives such as Strong Girls Judo align with this transformation, demonstrating how sport can contribute positively to personal growth and social progress.

As this article is republished, the essence of that June 2025 launch remains unchanged. Strong Girls Judo is about far more than physical training. It is about equipping girls with resilience, discipline and belief in their own capabilities. By learning how to fall safely and rise again, participants internalise

lessons that extend well beyond the tatami.

The impact of that inaugural seminar endures; empowerment begins with opportunity and through judo's moral code of respect, courage and integrity, a more inclusive future continues to take shape.



PATH TO GENDER EQUALITY

JFPSA Works for Women's Empowerment

Launched in 2021, the Judo for Women Empowerment initiative was created by Judo for Peace South Africa (JFPSA) in response to the low participation and retention of women in judo. The programme was designed with a clear objective: to attract more women and girls to the sport while creating an environment that encourages them to remain and grow within it.

The first women's event organised under the initiative took place in Brixton, West Johannesburg, bringing together women and girls from different dojos. The day combined judo practice, motivational talks and opportunities for social connection. For many participants, the experience proved not only educational but also deeply restorative, offering a supportive space in which to address everyday social challenges.

To strengthen its impact and structure, JFPSA formalised a partnership with Women Win, a Netherlands-based non-profit organisation funded by Nike, a long-standing partner of JFPSA. This collaboration enabled the implementation of a detailed action plan and reinforced the programme's sustainability.

Since its inception, the initiative has organised twelve women-only events across South Africa: five in Berea, three in Brixton and one each in Alexandra, Soweto, Orange Farm and

Parys. The results have been tangible. Two female judoka have progressed to brown belts, while 31 women have developed as competitors, with four also stepping into coaching roles. At the 2023 Judo for Peace Grand Gala Awards, Warda, now a brown belt, competitor and coach, received recognition as the most consistent woman in training, inspiring other girls to remain committed to their journey.



Initially, the events focused strongly on self-defence, reflecting the urgent context of gender-based violence in the country. As the programme evolved, its scope expanded. JFPSA introduced judo as both a sport and a tool for personal development, while body confidence seminars developed by Nike were incorporated into the curriculum. Professionals from safety and security sectors, including representatives from the Alexandra Police Station and the Kwanele App, were invited to share practical advice on staying safe within local communities.

UNHCR, another long-standing

supporter of JFPSA, has also contributed actively, by hosting round-table discussions particularly centred on women's empowerment, including during World Refugee Day activities.

Beyond training and competition, the girls involved in the programme are active contributors to their communities. They participated in the Berea Cleaning Campaign, helping to restore a park behind the main dojo and learning about environmental responsibility. They also joined the 'Big Pack' initiative at Linden Police Station, filling food jars with soup mixes to support families in need.

Demonstrations at schools, family markets and public events have further extended the programme's visibility and reach. Partnerships with organisations such as Kwanele App NGO, Phola NGO and Gun Free South Africa reflect a growing network committed to social development.

The impact of the initiative continues to expand. By challenging stereotypes such as "judo is a man's sport" and integrating safeguarding, mentoring and anti-bullying frameworks, JFPSA is helping to create conditions for a more equitable society. The Judo for Women Empowerment programme stands as a powerful example of how sport can build confidence, leadership and lasting social change.

Judo Skipathon For Women's Empowerment

In April 2025, judo clubs around the world united for an inspiring online initiative: the Judo Skipathon. Held from 21st March to 21st April 2025, the event was led by Judo Club Golovec in Slovenia, as part of the global #G100JumpForChange campaign, organised by the G100 Sports Empowerment & Championship Alliance.

Hosted across social media platforms, the Judo Skipathon invited clubs to challenge one another in a symbolic and energetic display of solidarity. The aim was clear: to promote empowerment, resilience and gender equality through the shared values of judo. More than 200 participants, representing 20 organisations, joined the movement, demonstrating how sport

can serve as a powerful vehicle for social change.

The initiative brought together clubs from 12 countries, including Slovenia, Romania, Bosnia



and Herzegovina, Italy, Germany, Spain, Pakistan, Croatia, Türkiye, Serbia and Brazil. Alongside judo clubs, a taekwondo club, a youth

centre and a fitness centre also participated, highlighting the inclusive and collaborative spirit of the campaign.

The Skipathon received strong support from prominent members of the judo community, including Ms Neli Lorenzo, president of the Madrid Judo Federation, Olympic champion Tina Trstenjak and European ID judo champion Azra Dedić.

Nuša Lampe, CEO of Judo Club Golovec and a member of the IJF Education & Coaching Commission, emphasised that initiatives such as the Judo Skipathon strengthen global connections and reaffirm judo's core values of respect, discipline and empowerment, contributing to a more inclusive sporting community.

Sierra Leone Launches Gender Equality Initiative

In March 2025, the Sierra Leone Judo Association (SLJA) marked a significant milestone with the launch of its Gender Equality Initiative and the country's first female judo seminar and training camp. Held from 15th to 17th March at the SLJA Training Academy in Bo City, the landmark event was supported by the International Judo Federation (IJF) and aimed to strengthen the role of women in judo nationwide.

Aligned with the IJF's commitment to gender equality and the principles of the Olympic Charter, the initiative reflects a broader effort to ensure inclu-

sive opportunities within sport. A key highlight of the opening ceremony was the establishment of the SLJA Gender Equality Commission, created to advance female participation and leadership in judo. The event welcomed leading figures from the sporting community, including SLJA President Idrissa Massaquoi and Mrs Permala Williams, Women in Sport Commissioner from the National Olympic Committee. Representatives from various sporting organisations attended, demonstrating a collective commitment to empowering women in Sierra Leonean sport. The three-day training camp, delivered by ex-

perienced coaches and international judo experts, combined technical skill development, tactical sessions and leadership workshops tailored specifically for female judoka. Participants were encouraged to exchange experiences and discuss the challenges they face, fostering solidarity and confidence. Beyond the tatami, discussions addressed the importance of increasing women's representation in sport governance. Through this initiative, the SLJA aims to create sustainable pathways for female athletes, strengthening opportunities at both national and international levels.

PATH TO GENDER EQUALITY

Margaux Pinot **I'm at Peace**

In May 2024, Margaux Pinot completed one of the most powerful chapters of her career. On 19th May, she stepped back onto the world stage and, with determination, precision and heart, claimed the world title, exactly ten years after her first senior world championship appearance.

Her journey to gold was far from straightforward. In 2021, already a European champion, Paris Grand Slam medallist and world bronze medallist, Pinot represented France at the Olympic Games. An early defeat was a heavy blow, but the challenges in her personal life proved even more difficult. For more than six months, she disappeared from the judo scene, focusing on rebuilding herself.

"I needed time to heal," she explained. "I only came back to the tatami in Paris in 2022. I had to change clubs and reorganise my life. I felt lonely at times and lost people I thought were close friends. It wasn't easy but I had to keep my head up."

Over the past three years, Pinot has worked tirelessly, not only on her judo but on managing her emotions and regaining stability. "This is a very good moment to celebrate my personal and professional victories. I'm really proud of me."

She credits her club PSG, her sponsor and her family for their unwavering support, as well as her partner, Alpha Djalo. "Maybe this medal shouldn't be a surprise, I've worked hard since I was seven years old."



So, with peace of mind regarding Olympic selection and clarity about her path forward, Pinot shared a message for other women facing hardship, "Be strong enough to remove negative influences from your life. Don't hesitate. That's how you find the real you."

Margaux Pinot stands today not only as world champion, but as a symbol of resilience and renewal.

Automne Pavia **Making a WISH**

As the Olympic Movement continues to prioritise gender equality in sport, increasing the number of women in elite coaching remains a major objective. The WISH programme (Women in Sport High-Performance Pathway), supported by Olympic Solidarity and co-ordinated by the University of Hertfordshire in the UK, was created to empower and support women coaches with the ambition of reaching the highest levels.

Among its participants was Olympic and double world medallist Automne Pavia (FRA), who completed the programme in

July 2024. Reflecting on the experience in 2025, she described it as a significant step in her coaching journey. "The programme helped me think differently about my work, especially about relationships with athletes," she explains. "It's not only about what happens in the coaching chair during competition, but about the daily environment we create." Nominated by the French federation, Pavia embraced the opportunity. Now a national coach for cadet girls in France and working with young seniors at INSEP, she has transitioned fully from elite athlete to committed coach. "I love sharing what I have expe-

rienced. With cadets, everything is about learning. They absorb so much." She admits that coaching has brought unexpected emotions. "When I walk to the mat with them, I feel stress again, almost like competing. I have to control myself, especially during the 'mate' moments." For Pavia, coaching mirrors athletic development with constant evolution and learning. "I'm still at the beginning. I want to keep improving so I can truly benefit the athletes I work with." From competing at world championships to guiding athletes at them, Automne Pavia continues to grow, now shaping the next generation.

From Linz to Oradea

In March 2024, inspired by the International Judo Federation's celebration of International Women's Day during the Upper Austria Grand Prix in Linz, Judo Club Liberty Oradea in Romania brought the initiative from the international stage to the local dojo.

At club level, coaches Loredana and Bianca, joined from afar by coach Alina, prepared a special surprise for their judo community. Parents and children were also involved, creating a shared celebration that reflected the family spirit of the club.

As the young judoka and their mothers entered the dojo, they were welcomed into a warm and

festive atmosphere. A photo session was organised to capture the moment and create lasting memories. IJF posters were first presented by the children, girls and boys alike, before the celebration continued with the mothers gathered on the tatami.



The initiative was closely linked to a Romanian tradition. The beginning of March marks

'Mărțișor,' symbolising the arrival of spring and renewal. A week later, International Women's Day offers the opportunity to honour the women who shape everyday life, at home, at school and in the dojo.

Notably, Judo Club Liberty Oradea is led entirely by women. The three coaches, all mothers, emphasise care, trust and education as central pillars of their work. This supportive environment is reflected in the strong participation of girls across all age groups.

Through events like this, the club continues to promote judo's values of respect, unity and shared celebration.

Peru Continues to Make Strides

With Gender Equality Initiatives

In August 2023, following the successful organisation of the Lima Pan-American Tour 2023, Judo Peru reinforced its commitment to inclusion by hosting the first Gender Equity Commission Seminar of the Pan-American Judo Confederation (CPJ), entitled 'Let's Talk About Gender Equality.'

Held at the Novotel Hotel in San Isidro, Lima, the seminar gathered key figures from across the continent. Among them was Daima Beltrán (CUB), Chair of the CPJ Gender Equity Commission. CPJ President Carlos Zegarra Presser opened the event with a message of unity and

recognition, highlighting the importance of creating real opportunities for women based on professional merit and capacity. One of the most impactful interventions came from María Martínez, president of the Peruvian Judo Sports Federation. Speaking openly about her journey, she addressed the challenges women continue to face within Peruvian society and sports leadership platforms. Her testimony resonated strongly with attendees, underlining the need for perseverance and structural change.

Contributions from Karen Artavia (Costa Rica), Johanna

Orozco (Colombia) and Kimberlie Rivera Tello (Peru), among others, enriched the discussion with diverse perspectives and practical experiences.

Participants agreed that while progress is visible, women are still too often offered roles without real decision-making power. The seminar represented an important step towards genuine equity. Both the CPJ and Judo Peru reaffirmed their determination to drive lasting change and strengthen female leadership across the region.

PATH TO GENDER EQUALITY

Where There's a Will **There's a New Way**

In March 2023, the IJF Gender Equality Commission organised its second online round table dedicated to advancing gender equality in judo. Following the success of the first meeting held on International Women's Day, this new session provided a platform for open dialogue and the sharing of concrete initiatives among national federations and continental representatives.

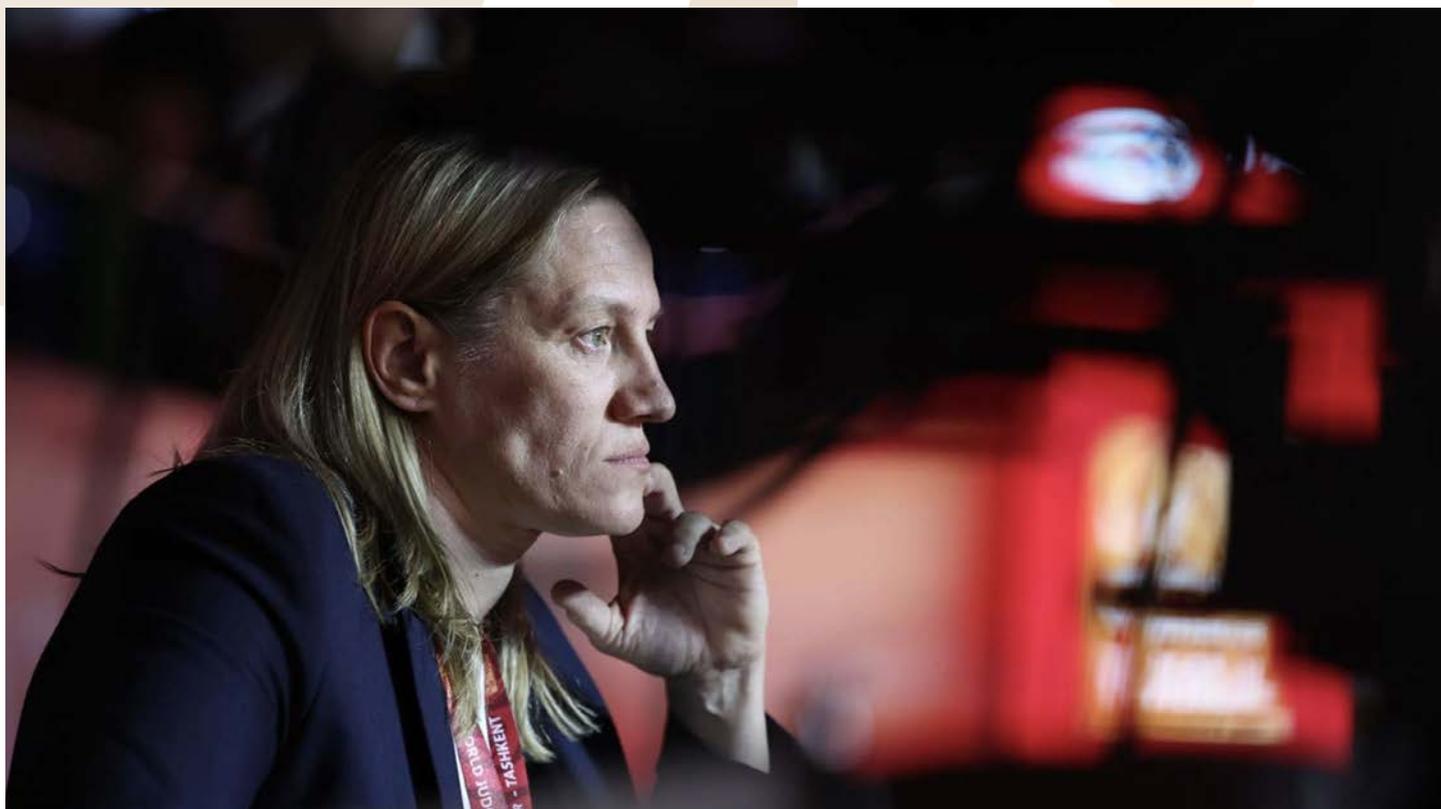
Dr Sanda Corak, Chair of the IJF Gender Equality Commission, opened the session by reaffirming that gender equality is, not only a strategic objective but a fundamental right. "Women and girls represent half of the world's population and therefore half of

its potential," she reminded participants, underlining that empowerment must be supported by structured action.

IJF Vice-President and Pan-American Judo Confederation (PJC) President Carlos Zegarra Presser expressed strong continental backing. He praised the creation of a space where women and men can engage together in meaningful discussion and reaffirmed that the Pan-American region is fully committed to promoting female participation and leadership in judo.

Larisa Kiss, now the IJF Director for the Olympic Games and Olympic Movement for Judo,

highlighted the progress already achieved while acknowledging that challenges remain. She identified two main barriers limiting female participation: social constraints in certain societies and the persistence of male-dominated environments in sport. Nevertheless, she emphasised that judo has made significant strides in a relatively short time, particularly in ensuring equal conditions for men and women at the highest competitive level. Kiss encouraged federations not to be modest about these achievements. "Judo is made for women," she insisted, pointing to encouraging developments in countries where women's participation has expanded rapidly. She also stressed that the next



frontier lies in leadership roles. Real transformation, she argued, happens when women are present in decision-making positions.

The IJF's strategic recommendations were recalled during the meeting, including the proposal that governing bodies of national federations and continental unions should aim for at least 25% representation of the under-represented gender. Establishing a Gender Equality Commission within each federation was described as only the first step. Research, planning, implementation and monitoring must follow in order to create sustainable change.

Concrete examples from national federations illustrated how strategy can translate into action. Veronika Jakl of the Austrian Judo Federation presented the findings of Austria's first diversity report, published in 2020. At that time, 28% of Austrian judoka were women, along with 27% of referees and 25% of executive board members. By 2023, female representation on the executive board had increased to 36%, demonstrating measurable progress.

Austria also introduced gender-sensitive language in official documents and achieved parity within its recurring com-

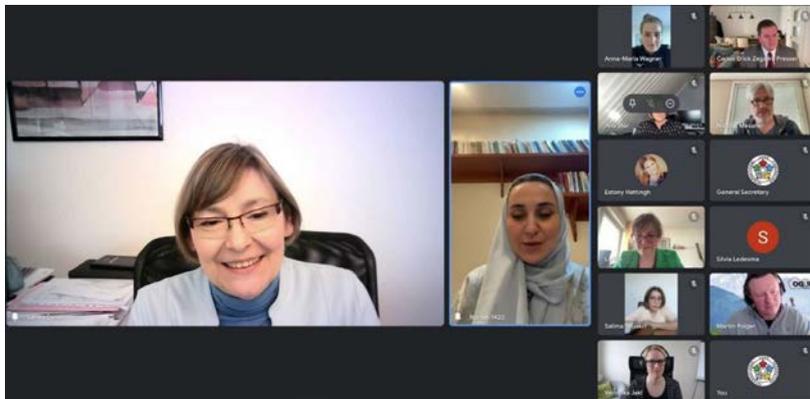
mittees. Through a transparent recruitment process, Yvonne Snir-Bönisch was appointed head coach for both men and women, reinforcing the principle that competence and inclusion go hand in hand. A nationwide survey conducted among clubs revealed that female judoka felt highly respected, with an ave-

jective. "It is not only about being a woman, but about competence," he stated, while acknowledging that confidence gaps and structural habits can prevent women from seeking leadership roles. He admitted that while he once opposed quota systems, he now recognises that they may be necessary tools to accelerate systemic change. "We need to change our mindset," he said, emphasising that men must also support inclusion actively.

Throughout the discussion, it became clear that gender equality in judo is not merely symbolic.

It requires policy, education, transparency and cultural evolution. Participants, including representatives from various national federations, and athletes, recognised that judo has positioned itself as a leader in promoting equity within sport.

The round table concluded with a strong sense of collective determination. The progress achieved so far demonstrates that change is possible when there is commitment and co-operation. Yet the journey continues. As the discussions showed, where there is a will, there is indeed a new way and judo is determined to lead by example.



rage rating of 4.4 out of 5.

Additional measures include a dedicated budget for gender equity initiatives, the appointment of designated 'persons of trust' to address safeguarding and respect concerns, and the integration of gender equality and the prevention of sexual violence into coach education programmes. The federation has also strengthened its licensing system to ensure accountability and uphold safeguarding standards.

Martin Poiger, president of the Austrian Judo Federation, reinforced the importance of shared responsibility. He explained that when forming his leadership team, diversity was a clear ob-

PATH TO GENDER EQUALITY

Prisca Awiti Alcaraz **A Wonderful Place to Be In**



In March 2023, Prisca Awiti Alcaraz (MEX) found herself at a pivotal moment in her career. Living in the United Kingdom, with a Kenyan father and a Mexican mother, she embodies a truly global identity. Rooted across three continents, she carries with her a blend of cultures that shape both her life and her sporting journey.

Judo was not her first passion. Until the age of 12, Prisca competed in gymnastics at national level and also trained in swimming. "I realised I was too tall for gymnastics at the highest level," she explains. Judo began modestly, with just one weekly session at her local club, but it gradually became her calling.

In Mexico, opportunities for women in high-performance sport have not always been readily accessible. However, over the past 15 years, female athletes, particularly in judo, have produced outstanding results. Prisca highlights Vanessa Zambotti's career as a turning point for Mexican women's judo. A four-time Olympian in the +78kg category, Zambotti's international success demonstrated that Mexican women could compete and succeed at the highest level. "She ignited the flash point for women in judo to be recognised," Prisca says.

Today, support for women's sport in Mexico is stronger than ever. Through CONADE, the national commission for physical culture and sport, funding is allocated based on performance and federation nominations. Prisca benefits from this system, supported not only by her own results but also by the collective success of her team. In Tashkent, she secured her first grand slam medal after 12 previous attempts on the World Judo Tour. At 27, the breakthrough came at a crucial time, with qualification points for Paris 2024 carrying immense importance. "We plan each quarter carefully," she explains. "My result improves our position as a team. It's a real family effort, we all need each other to do well."

That collective spirit aligns perfectly with judo's philosophy of *jita-kyoei*, mutual welfare and

benefit. Prisca speaks warmly of the unity within the Mexican squad. "I've never experienced discrimination in judo. The team is united and I feel fully supported."

She acknowledges that this has not always been the reality everywhere. In Mexico, traditional gender roles have long shaped society but change is visible. "We are in a mid-phase," she reflects.

"Step by step, things are becoming more equal." Combat sports, she believes, are particularly empowering spaces for women, challenging outdated stereotypes.

Prisca had the option to represent Kenya, reflecting her dual heritage, but Mexico felt like home. She joined the national team in 2017 and has embraced the journey ever since. "I grew up immersed in Mexican culture through my mum. It made sense."

Her success in Tashkent was the product of resilience and mental strength. After withdrawing from a previous planned event due to illness, she arrived in Uzbekistan in the Spring of 2023 determined to deliver her best. "My draw wasn't easy but I believed I could beat them. I kept my focus and stuck to my tactics."

The semi-final was especially emotional. Having finished fif-

th twice on the World Judo Tour previously, she knew she had to break that barrier. "When I won, it was almost disbelief, like, 'Oh my, I've done it.'"

The atmosphere within the team made the moment even more meaningful. Amid concerns about funding linked to performance, her medal was celebrated as a shared achievement. "We win and lose together," she says.

Reaching the final felt overwhelming. Used to working behind the camera with Fighting Films and observing others in those moments, she suddenly found herself centre stage. Yet through it all, humility remains at the core of her perspective.

"My story isn't about being a woman in sport," she concludes. "It's about being a judoka. And I look forward to it being like this for all women."

For Prisca Awiti Alcaraz, that sense of belonging, of being able to focus purely on performance without fighting for acceptance, is, as she describes it, "a wonderful place to be in."

Since the original article was published, Prisca Awiti-Alcaraz made history for Mexico on a whole new level, winning a silver medal at the Paris Olympic Games in 2024.

IWD In Ireland

In March 2025, the Irish Judo Association marked International Women's Day with a series of initiatives designed to encourage greater female participation and celebrate the progress of women in judo across the country.

Throughout Ireland, clubs embraced the occasion by creating welcoming spaces for women and girls to engage with the sport. Trinity Judo Club, in collaboration with Trinity's Women's Health Society, organised a dedicated women's taster session, offering newcomers the opportunity to step onto the tatami for the first time, in a supportive environment. The initiative reflected a broader commitment to accessibility and inclusion. To further strengthen development pathways, a women's open mat training session was also held, providing both beginners and experienced judoka with additional time to refine techniques and practise randori together. On the competitive front, the Intervarsity Judo Competition at University College Cork delivered another highlight. The Trinity women's team secured gold in the team event, underlining the growing strength and confidence of female judoka at university level. These initiatives demonstrate Ireland's proactive approach to inclusion, development and excellence. By combining grassroots engagement with competitive achievement, the Irish Judo Association continues to reinforce its commitment to empowering women in judo.

PATH TO GENDER EQUALITY

Japan and France Celebrate IWD

In March 2024, while the Upper Austria Grand Prix was taking place in Linz, another meaningful gathering of the judo family unfolded in Tokyo. At the French Embassy, French and Japanese representatives, bound for Paris 2024, came together to celebrate International Women's Day in a ceremony highlighting friendship, equality and shared ambition.

Among the distinguished guests were Japanese judo legend Ryo-ko Tani and members of the French and Japanese women's teams, alongside the French ambassador to Japan. The evening focused on the strong bond between the two nations, the journey from Tokyo 2020 to Paris 2024 and the role of judo as a powerful tool for women's empowerment. Discussions also touched on equality at the Olympic Games and the healthy

rivalry between France and Japan, particularly in the mixed team event.

Ms Atsuko Nakamura, vice-chair of the Japanese national team, underlined the unique relationship between the two countries, describing it as a privilege to celebrate women's judo together in such a symbolic setting. For athletes such as Miku Takaichi (-63kg), the evening was also personal. Speaking about her long-standing rivalry and friendship with Clarisse Agbegnenou, she emphasised the mutual respect that exists beyond competition. Agbegnenou echoed this sentiment, noting that the spotlight was placed entirely on the women's teams and on their perspectives regarding gender equality. She highlighted the opportunity to interact with students and to reflect on motivation, ambi-



tion and progress. Christophe Massina, then head coach of the French women's team, expressed pride in leading a group that demonstrates the potential of women to excel at the highest level in sport and in life. He stressed that while rivalry exists on the tatami, friendship and shared values prevail off it. As preparations intensified for the world championships and the Paris Olympic Games, the ceremony offered a moment of unity. It illustrated how judo transcends competition, fostering respect, solidarity and a common commitment to advancing women's sport.

Mantapala Judo for Peace Celebrates IWD

In March 2025, the Mantapala Judo for Peace programme in Zambia joined the global celebration of International Women's Day with a meaningful event dedicated to women's strength and resilience, and equality.

International Women's Day highlights the ongoing fight for gender equality and women's rights worldwide. Within the judo family, the occasion was marked by initiatives that promoted inclusion, empowerment and op-

portunity. In Mantapala Refugee Camp, located in the Nchelenge district of Luapula Province, the celebration reflected these shared values. Judo for Peace has been active in Zambia for several years, already established in the Meheba and Mayukwayukwa refugee camps. Since the launch of activities in Mantapala in August 2024, the programme has continued to grow, offering young refugees and members of the local community structured sporting opportunities. The Women's Day event included friendly team matches, a symbo-

lic tree-planting ceremony and judo demonstrations performed by junior judoka. The tree planting represented growth, unity and hope for the future, while the demonstrations showcased discipline, respect and perseverance. Through sport, the Judo for Peace initiative empowers girls and young women, strengthening confidence and fostering community spirit. The celebration in Mantapala stood as a powerful reminder that judo can be a meaningful tool for equality and positive social change.

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The JUDO MORAL CODE

POLITENESS

It's respecting other people



COURAGE

It's doing what is right

SINCERITY

It's talking without falsehood



HONOR

It's keeping your word

MODESTY

It's talking about oneself without pride



RESPECT

It's instilling confidence

CONTROL OF ONESELF

It knows how to keep your anger in check



FRIENDSHIP

It's the purest of all human feelings



JUDO VALUES AS LIFE INSPIRATION

Judo as a Path to Recovery

In July 2025, during the Kata for All & Judo for Security seminar held in Santo Domingo, one testimony moved participants deeply, that of Tania Cuevas, a veteran judoka from Barahona whose journey illustrates resilience, empowerment and the healing power of judo.

At 47, Tania has built a distinguished career in education, human resources and healthcare. Yet beyond her professional achievements lies a personal story marked by hardship and renewal, with judo as a constant source of strength.

Her connection to the sport began at the age of ten, inspired by a school demonstration. Despite her father's initial reluctance to allow her to

train, she persisted. Although family responsibilities prevented her from competing internationally, her commitment to judo never faded.

After years away from the tatami, she returned in 2020 during a particularly difficult period that followed a serious motorcycle accident involving her son. "Coming back to judo gave me strength again, physically and emotionally," she explained. Her involvement in the Dominican Judo Federation's Veteran Programme and later in the Judo for Security seminar, organised by the IJF Academy and Fedojudo, became a turning point.

In a courageous testimony, Tania shared that she had been the victim of a violent assault near



her home. The experience left lasting emotional scars. Reflecting on the seminar, she noted that the knowledge and self-defence skills she gained helped restore her confidence and sense of control. “Judo gave me tools not only to defend myself, but to rebuild myself,” she says.

For Tania, judo represents far more than physical technique. It teaches discipline, resilience and self-belief. Today, she dreams of becoming a certified instructor and creating a safe space dedicated to women and girls where they can train, grow and feel empowered. As a physiotherapist and volunteer within the Dominican Judo Federation, she continues to contribute to the sport actively.

Her message is clear, “Never give up. Falling is part of the journey. What matters is rising again.”

It's a Question of Responsibility

Ahead of International Women's Day 2025, Assmaa Niang reflected on a journey that has taken her from the Olympic tatami to a new mission centred on mental health and social impact.

For more than a decade, Assmaa was one of the leading figures of Moroccan judo. A two-time Olympian, grand slam medalist, repeat grand prix winner and five-time continental champion, she dedicated much of her life to elite performance. Competing at the highest level until the age of 41, she concluded her international career after the Paris 2024 cycle, proud of what she had achieved and ready to embrace a new chapter.

For Assmaa though, sport has always meant more than medals, “I see it every day, many women are sedentary. Life often dictates their priorities and unfortunately sport is not part of their routine. But sport brings so much. It is not only useful, it is necessary.” She believes that encour-

aging women to practise sport begins with a deeper sense of purpose. “We need to feel responsible. Since the dawn of time, women have carried life. That is not insignificant. We need to feel useful to society.”



kilometres in the desert. “It made all the difference,” Assmaa explains. “When you feel useful, you can do much more than you imagine.”

For her, this sense of responsibility is one of the keys to increasing female participation in sport. When women feel that their effort serves a purpose beyond themselves, when it builds confidence and contributes to something meaningful, engagement becomes natural and sustainable.

JUDO VALUES

Assmaa is also convinced of sport's vital role in the management of mental health issues. "Physical effort is a catalyst," she says. "It has always been something I used in my life."

Today, she no longer needs the goal of becoming world number one. Instead, she is driven by impact. "I need a 'because,' that is what keeps me training, even without competitive objectives."

Since stepping away from high-level competition, she has channelled her experience into supporting others. During the Paris 2024 Games, she accompanied athletes in their mental preparation, a field that has become central to her work.

Now a therapist, mental trainer and speaker, she has also created an association dedicated to making mental health support accessible, without discrimination or borders, particularly for athletes who lack the resources available in wealthier sporting systems.

Her path has never been linear. Before fully committing to judo, she worked as a Parisian firefighter for ten years. She began performing at elite level relatively late, at 29, choosing to pause her professional career to pursue her Olympic dream. Today, she has resumed her professional life with the same determination she once brought to competition.

"The end of my sporting career was not sad," she reflects. "I am fulfilled. Now I want to share." Judo, she says, changed her life. It taught her resilience, the ability to fall and rise again with clarity and purpose.

"When I am standing, I know why. I will always remain a judoka." For Assmaa Niang, responsibility is not a burden but a source of strength. Through sport, she continues to serve, proving that impact does not end with retirement, it simply takes a new form.

Investing in Women

In January 2025, the momentum generated by the IJF Academy's 2024 visit to Sierra Leone continued to bear fruit, particularly in the development of women's judo. During that visit, IJF Academy expert Slavisa Bradic led practical sessions and engaged directly with female judoka, gaining valuable insight into their experiences and challenges.

Training took place in modest conditions, in an open-air dojo where a small women's team demonstrated their skills proudly. Conversations with four female judoka revealed both the obstacles they face and the strength they draw from their practice. In Sierra Leone, being a woman in sport can involve social barriers and lingering stereotypes. Yet, all agreed that judo provides a powerful pathway to confidence, discipline and resilience.

For many, judo is not only a sport but also a tool



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for self-defence and self-respect. Prejudices that question whether combat sports are suitable for women tend to disappear once the athletes demonstrate their technical ability and determination. Unanimously, the judoka cited Koroma Mariama, Sierra Leone's Olympic representative in Paris, as a role model who proves that international achievement is possible.

The key challenges remain access to high quality training conditions and educational opportunities. Nevertheless, ambition is strong. The athletes aim to achieve sporting success and also to gain knowledge that can be passed on to future generations.

With around 20 active female judoka, the Sierra Leone Judo Federation is committed to expanding participation. Through continued collaboration with the National Olympic Committee and the IJF, the federation is investing in women as a cornerstone of judo's sustainable future in the country and the region.

The IJF Self Defence Programme

The IJF Academy has been extending its activities for more than a decade and this self-defence project has huge potential to improve the lives of those at physical risk around the world, particularly women living in violent regions.

This programme allows the judo community to use many years of judo training and competition as the catalyst to create a system of self-defence that is accessible, teachable and functional; a system to be used by everyone, for people to be able to protect themselves when it matters most. Judo is the base, but self-defence is for all, not just sportspeople, martial artists, judoka.

Judo is a very technical sport in the physical



sense but much has also been written about the judo values and how they can impact all of society. Now we have the opportunity to show that judo can bring a physical element, alongside the judo values, to mainstream populations, to people of all socio-economic backgrounds. Combining the values with a physical education stream in this way can provide vulnerable people with the tools to live more confidently, even in places where violence and risk are present.

The programme has been written and the videos are almost ready to be released. An IJF Academy course will also be available soon, a new arm to the growing educational catalogue of the IJF.

Salima Souakri Encourages the Youth

In June 2024, Salima Souakri, who was an IJF Development Director and member of the IJF Executive Committee (until 2025), visited the Lycée International Alexandre Dumas in Algiers to meet students and teachers as part of the initiative 'Mai des Langues et de l'Année Olympique' (May of Languages and the Olympic Year).

The event offered students the opportunity to hear directly from one of Algeria's most inspiring sporting figures. Salima shared her journey as an athlete, a woman and a leader, speaking openly about the challenges she faced both on and off the tatami.

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“I told the students about my sporting, social and professional rise,” she explained. From her first steps in judo to becoming a minister in the Algerian government and later joining the leadership of the International Judo Federation, her story is one of determination and resilience. She emphasised how judo played a central role in her development, integration into society and personal success.

For Salima, judo is far more than a sport. It is a powerful tool for social integration and education. Through discipline, respect and the moral code, children learn values that shape their character. “We are not born champions,” she told the students. “We become champions through work and perseverance.”

She recalled how, at the age of nine, she had to fight simply for the right to practise judo. In a society where combat sports were not considered appropriate for girls, she even cut her hair and called herself ‘Sali’ to be allowed to train. The anecdote brought laughter from the audience, but also admiration for her courage.

Salima stressed the importance of self-belief. “The only secrets are work and confidence in yourself and, above all, having a dream,” she said.

Through judo, she achieved what once seemed impossible, including becoming the first Algerian woman to compete at the Olympic Games, in 1992, at just 17 years old. She went on to participate in four Olympic Games and won the prestigious Paris Grand Slam title, a first for the African continent, men and women combined.

During the meeting, students were able to ask questions and even learn basic self-protection movements, reinforcing the practical and empowering aspects of judo.

The school representatives praised the atmosphere of the event, noting how Salima’s presence helped students conclude their academic year with motivation and inspiration.

Feedback from parents and attendees reflected the impact of the visit. Many described Salima as generous, humble and deeply inspiring.

By the end of the day, it was clear that the students had not only met a champion but discovered new ambitions of their own. Through her words and example, Salima Souakri demonstrated how judo can empower the next generation to dream bigger and move mountains.

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Everything Is Possible !

On 23rd May 2024, while elite competition was taking place at the Mubadala Arena in Abu Dhabi, the International Judo Federation organised its first-ever Self-Defence for Women event at La Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi. The initiative marked an important step in the IJF's ongoing commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Larisa Kiss, the project co-ordinator and now Director Olympic Games and Olympic Movement for Judo, introduced the programme, "The IJF promotes gender equality through various initiatives with our member federations. Self-Defence for Women is designed to contribute to women's empowerment worldwide and to attract women who may not otherwise have contact with judo."

The event gathered students alongside distinguished guests, including IJF Secretary General Dr Lisa Allan, Gender Equality Director Dr Sanda Corak, IJF Executive Committee members Salima Souakri and Erdenet-Od Khishigbat, Olympians Hedvig Karakas and Sabrina Filzmoser, as well as Denisa Deliu, assistant to the IJF president.



For many students, the session was a first encounter with judo. Nicole and Chiara from La Sorbonne described the initiative as both necessary and inspiring. "Talking about empowerment through sport is important. Beyond theory, it shows us that we have power. Hearing real-life stories was touching. It makes us believe that anything is possible."



Elenita Merle, former French national team member and now a sports teacher at the university, emphasised the programme's relevance. "Gender-based violence is a reality. Through sport, women gain tools and opportunities. In this region, we must challenge stereotypes. Self-defence gives women practical skills and confidence."

Shirin, an Emirati participant who already practises muay thai, admitted initial hesitation. "I was afraid of falling but once I allowed myself to fall, I felt safe and overcame my fear." For Shyma, a volunteer with the UAE Judo Federation, the session challenged a perception of judo as male-dominated. "We have to fight prejudices. Today we were inspired to go further."

The practical session was led by Hedvig Karakas and Denisa Deliu, who guided participants through self-defence-orientated judo techniques. Denisa highlighted the transformation she observed. "Some girls were shy at the be-

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ginning but became enthusiastic and confident. Judo delivers courage and develops self-belief.”

Beyond technique, the event featured powerful testimonies. Salima Souakri shared her life story, while Sabrina Filzmoser spoke about confronting the impossible, drawing parallels between elite sport and climbing Mount Everest. Their words reinforced the idea that resilience and determination extend far beyond the tatami.

Hedvig Karakas underlined the programme’s philosophy, “Through self-defence-based judo practice, women learn physical techniques and develop courage, self-control and respect. This project connects judo values with practical tools for everyday life.”

Alexandre Blaise, Head of Sport at La Sorbonne Abu Dhabi, welcomed the initiative enthusias-

tically. “This is what we need. The interest was high, even just after exams. We are proud to contribute.”

For Larisa Kiss, the project is deeply personal. “I have learned so much from judo, even without competing. I live by the principles I see on the tatami every day. The stories of women in judo deserve to be shared because young girls around the world need role models.”

The launch in Abu Dhabi marked just the beginning. By combining judo’s moral code with accessible self-defence education, the IJF aims to create a global platform, empowering women with both confidence and practical skills. The message resonated clearly throughout the day: when women are given tools, knowledge and inspiration, everything is possible.

JFPSA Is Promoting Gender Equality

In March 2024, the Judo for Peace South Africa (JFPSA) programme demonstrated its strong commitment to gender equality and social development. Supported by the International Judo Federation, in collaboration with UNHCR and partners including Nike, Three2Six, Future Families,

Grassroots Soccer and Judo South Africa, the initiative continues to expand its reach. Today, judo activities are delivered across six clubs and eleven schools under the co-ordination of IJF Academy alumnus Roberto Orlando.

A highlight, that year as every year, was the celebration of International Women’s Day on 8th March. At the main dojo in Berea, the event brought together girls from the programme in a supportive and festive atmosphere. With the support of UNHCR, participants received dignity packs, while male judoka offered roses in a gesture of respect and solidarity. The initiative underlined the importance of recognising and empowering girls within the community.

The following day, in partnership with the Japanese Embassy, JFPSA organised a seminar at the Alexandra Dojo. Young judoka had the opportunity to meet two inspiring athletes: two-time Olympian Marlon Acácio and Paralympian Jacque Joubert.

Through open discussion, they shared lessons learned from sport, including discipline, resilience and leadership, leaving a lasting impression on the participants.

JFPSA teams also competed in the Masakhane Team Event in Pretoria, earning good results across many categories, including podium finishes for men, women and youth teams.

The month concluded with participation in International Mother Tongue Day celebrations at the French Institute, where JFPSA members delivered an interactive judo demonstration, reinforcing the programme’s role in cultural exchange and community engagement.

Judo Girls Rock !

During International Women's Day celebrations in 2024, celebrating the achievements of women and girls and reflecting on the continued pursuit of gender equality was paramount in judo communities all over the world. The 2024 theme, Inspire Inclusion, highlighted the importance of creating welcoming environments and breaking down barriers to participation.

While judo is fundamentally a sport for everyone, female participation at club level often remains lower than that of men. In Scotland, where girls have been under-represented in sport historically and frequently drop out during their teenage years, JudoScotland recognised the issue early and acted decisively. The result was the launch of the Judo Girls Rock programme.

First introduced nearly a decade ago as a pilot initiative supported by local partners, Judo Girls Rock was designed to remove barriers and create inclusive spaces for women and girls. The programme introduced girls-only sessions combining time on the tatami with off-mat workshops promoting healthy lifestyles and confidence. Its early success led to expansion across the country and it remains a central part of Scotland's judo landscape today.

Edinburgh University Judo Club is one of many clubs engaged with the programme. Under the Judo Girls Rock banner, the club runs beginner-friendly sessions led by female coaches, aimed at introducing newcomers to judo while also celebrating existing female members.

On the eve of International Women's Day 2024, the club hosted a successful session that welcomed 11 women trying judo for the first time, alongside an equal number of current members. The session was led by Xavière Hermant, a former Scottish champion and 2nd dan, and Kirsty Marsh, also a 2nd dan and a Scottish representative at the 2022 Commonwealth Games.



For club president Hannah Wilson, female-only sessions are essential, "It's a great opportunity to celebrate the women we already have and encourage new women to join. Some of those who came today might never have tried judo otherwise."

Jess Chen joined the club only a month before the new initiative launched and she highlighted the importance of inclusivity, "Everyone accepted me immediately. I didn't feel like I had to prove myself. Seeing so many girls on the mat is amazing. More sessions like this would definitely help."

Role models also play a significant role in encouraging women to stay involved. Elsa, who began judo in Paris, spoke about the influence of elite athletes, "When you see a woman succeeding at the highest level, you realise you can do it too." Hannah echoed this, recalling how an older female judoka at her previous club mentored her and made her feel supported.

For first-time participant Thea Moreno, the visibility of female coaches made a strong impression, "If you don't see someone like you in leadership, you might not think it's possible. Seeing women leading the session was really inspiring."

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She also appreciated the positive framing of the programme. “Instead of focusing on disadvantages, it celebrates strength. ‘Judo Girls Rock’ sends a powerful message.”

Alex Crane, six months into her judo journey, emphasised communication as key to increasing female participation, “We need to tell women that this is a sport for them. Judo builds confidence and control. Knowing what your body can do is empowering.”

A recurring theme among participants was the sense of community judo provides. Emma Wilkes, the club’s women’s captain, summed it up, “The best thing about judo is the friendships. Some of my closest friends are

people I met through the sport.” She also noted that university clubs can be ideal environments for women returning to judo after teenage drop-out, offering both social connection and sporting opportunity.



The Judo Girls Rock programme has opened doors for a new generation of girls and women in Scotland. JudoScotland remains committed to building on this momentum, particularly by increasing the number of female coaches and expanding opportunities nationwide. Through

initiatives like Judo Girls Rock, the message is clear: inclusion is not just an aspiration, it is an action. In Scotland, women in judo are proving that they truly rock!





Seeds of Judo

Seeds of Judo No. 1 marks the beginning of an ambitious journey in which everyone can play a role, because as judoka, we have the duty to sow the seeds of a brighter future for our children.

