

Judo

Many years ago, some friends and I decided to enrol in Judo lessons. They were offered in Fairview, and we attended once a week. There were people in the class of all ages, from kids to older adults. Some were very good; others, like me, had no experience whatsoever.

I'd love to say that I excelled at the sport and quickly became a black belt expert. Unfortunately, that's not exactly what happened.

In the first few lessons we learned many 'throws'. After most of the class was familiar with them, the standard procedure at the end of the class was to practice these throws by having everybody line up. When your turn came, you would work your way down the line, letting everyone have fun throwing you to the ground using any one of the many techniques we'd learned. Most of which were painful.

I am someone who is over six feet tall, and you need to understand how unnerving it is to have a four-foot-tall grade seven girl pitch you over her shoulder so that you go flying through the air and onto the mat with a resounding thud. Not to mention how embarrassing it is. Especially when they're in your math class. But I persevered.

The instructor's philosophy was that we should all participate in Judo *tournaments*, even though some of us didn't have our first belt yet. Little did I know what was in store for me!

In Judo tournaments, you're matched against someone your own weight. Skills don't matter. In my first tournament I was matched against a guy who had a blue belt. He was good. I knew just enough to last about ten seconds before being thrown.

Somehow in that first tournament I ended up with a 'greenstick' fracture in my left arm. Nothing serious, and no treatment was necessary. I was just supposed to keep it from being stressed.

At least it kept me out of tournaments.

By the time my arm was feeling better several months later (I stretched it out as long as possible!) my instructor enrolled me in yet another tournament. What fun! I still hadn't earned my first belt. White belts don't count.

You need to know that the reason I signed up for Judo in the first place was just for something fun to do with friends once a week, that would help keep me fit. I really didn't care if I ever got good at it. I just wanted to have fun.

In the first match of the tournament, against some would-be bully with a blue belt, I somehow jammed my little finger; I found out later it was broken. It was hardly swollen at all.

Near the end of my second match, against a very sadistic green belted opponent, I found myself pinned to the floor with my opponent sitting on my face. I don't think that was an approved hold. I think he was just showing off.

It was about then that I remember asking myself '*Am I having fun?*'

That was my last Judo experience. I didn't go back, even though the instructor told me that I was very close to earning the first belt ... "*if only you'd get over the fear of being thrown!*" Hah!