

SPORTING LEGENDS: YASUHIRO YAMASHITA

SPORT: JUDO

COMPETITIVE ERA: 1976 - 1985

Yasuhiro Yamashita, born June 1, 1957 in Yamato, Kumamoto) is one of the most successful judo competitors of all time. He currently works as an instructor or advisor for numerous organizations, including T kai University, the International Judo Federation, and the All Japan Judo Federation.



He retired from competitive judo on June 17, 1985 after a remarkable career where he won five gold medals in international competitions and marked 203 consecutive victories (with 7 draws in-between) up until his retirement. He received the Japanese National Prize of Honor on October 9, 1984.

Yamashita began judo in primary school after being inspired by judo founder Jigoro Kano, and had already attained a black belt by the time he reached junior-high school. His streak of 203 victories began in October, 1977, in an exhibition match held in the Soviet Union, and ended with his final match in April, 1985, where he won the All-Japan judo championships for the 9th consecutive time.

Yamashita qualified for the Olympics for the first time in 1976 as a replacement during his freshman year at T kai University. At age 19, he became the youngest judoka in history to win the open category of the All-Japan Judo Championships in 1977. He continued his success by winning a gold medal at the 1979 World Judo Championships, and secured a spot on the Japanese Olympic team in a highly publicized draw against 1976 Summer Olympics bronze medalist Sumio Endo.

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Yamashita possessed excellent throwing skills.

Yamashita went into the final of the 1980 All Japan championships as the favorite, but Endo put Yamashita in a Kani Basami as he was taken down, breaking Yamashita's fibula. The match was declared a draw even though Yamashita was hurt and unable to continue. Kani Basami had been a legal move up until the match, but the seriousness of Yamashita's injury caused officials to prohibit its use in international competitions.

Japan boycotted the 1980 Summer Olympics in protest of the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and Yamashita was forced to look on as a spectator while his rivals competed on the Olympic stage. Yamashita won three more gold medals at the World Championships before qualifying for the Olympics for the third time in 1984.

In his first and only appearance at the Olympics, Yamashita tore a right calf muscle in the preliminary match against Arthur Schnabel. This put Yamashita at a huge disadvantage since he executed his throws by pivoting on his right leg. Though he managed to win the match with an Okuri-Eri-Jime, the injury caused him to visibly limp during the semi-final match against Laurent Del Colombo. Yamashita was thrown with an Osoto Gari only 30 seconds into the match, but managed to return an Osoto Gari and won the match with a Yoko-Shiho-Gatame (side four-quarter hold).

Yamashita's limp persisted during the Olympic final against Mohamed Ali Rashwan where Rashwan aggressively grappled with Yamashita from the very beginning of the match. Yamashita gained an opening as Rashwan lost his balance, and won with another Yoko-Shiho-Gatame to capture the gold medal. Yamashita remained undefeated in both domestic and international competitions, though he drew several matches with two-time Olympic gold medalist Hitoshi Saito. Yamashita faced Saito in the final match of the All-Japan Judo Championships for 3 consecutive years from 1983-1985, and emerged victorious in every single one of those matches.

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Scott Burton's Final Thought

Yamashita had a stocky build of 5 ft. 11 in. (180 cm) and weighed over 280 lbs (128kg) during his competitive years.

He stood with a left-handed stance, and his best move was the Osoto Gari mixed in with the Ouchi Gari. He also found the Uchi mata to be highly effective against non-Japanese opponents, and used it frequently during his later years.

He was also extremely effective on the ground, and many of his victories came with hold or choke moves. His proficiency from both the standing position and ground position allowed him to remain unbeaten for over 9 years.



Passing On The Skills To A New Generationō