



# Improve Your Judo Throws

3 Judo Techniques That Will Revolutionize Your Judo Training



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## Every sport produces its superstars

—athletes who transcend time, so to speak. Basketball has Michael Jordan, and boxing has Mike Tyson. In the judo world, it's Neil Adams. As a competitor, his record was outstanding: He was the European champion five times, the world champ in 1981 and an Olympic silver medalist in 1980 and 1984. Since retiring after the 1988 Games, his career has been equally impressive. He served as both the Welsh and British national coach and now lives in Antwerp, where he works with the Belgian national team.

On top of his numerous duties, Adams has launched his own company, Effective Fighting Ltd. Through it, he hosts judo and mixed-martial arts seminars worldwide and offers personalized video commentary and online match analysis for judo players seeking to improve their game. *Black Belt* was fortunate to catch up with him in Zele, Belgium, where we asked him to explain some of his favorite techniques—to give readers a mini-seminar, if you will.

### GET A GRIP

While Adams' arm-lock roll and *tai otoshi* (body drop) have become the stuff of legend, one of his greatest, although of-

ten-overlooked, contributions to the art of judo is his gripping game. He was one of the first *judoka* to refine and develop *kumikata* (gripping techniques) on a systematic basis. Indeed, he wrote the first English-language book on the subject.

His interest in *kumikata* arose from a defeat at the 1977 European Championships to world and Olympic judo champ Vladimir Nevzorov of Russia. Although Adams was only 18 at the time, he lost by a small margin. Following that experience, Adams "began a serious and in-depth study of *kumikata*," he said. He realized that you must have the right grip before you can turn in for a throw. That may seem obvious, but if you've ever tried to effect this simple move on a high-level competitor, you know that it's not as easy as it sounds. At the top level of the sport, gripping becomes as complex as a chess match, with both players vying for dominance. National and international players know that by preventing an opponent from gripping properly, they can effectively nullify any threat that person poses. Of course, the reverse is also true, and from a young age, Adams set about developing a *kumikata* style that allowed him to remain aggressive yet gave him minimal exposure to counter-techniques.

Adams favors a traditional sleeve-and-lapel grip, with his left

**Neil Adams (right) and his opponent assume the traditional sleeve-and-lapel grip (1).** Adams steps back and breaks the man's hold on his left lapel (2), thus achieving the "two on one" (3). The opponent reaches for Adams' lapel, and Adams uses the back of his hand to prevent him from getting a grip while he grasps his sleeve (4). Adams then uses both hands to shove the opponent's hand away from his body and locks the arm out (5) before taking control of the lapel with his right hand (6). In this way, Adams achieves the two-on-one again, significantly increasing his offensive options while reducing the threat his opponent poses.



hand on his opponent's sleeve and his right hand high on his lapel. However, he puts great emphasis on the need for a "two on one" situation. That entails placing both your hands on your opponent while preventing him from getting his hands on you through the proper use of control. A simple way of achieving this is demonstrated in Sequence 1.

### BREAK HIS BALANCE

Now that your grip is established, you need to move your adversary to toss him. Adams emphasizes the importance of *kuzushi*, or breaking an opponent's balance, before turning in for a throw. When done correctly, a judo throw should feel effortless because the other man's balance has already been broken.

Although judo throws are usually executed while you're on the move, you can practice *kuzushi* with a static partner. In this case, the clearest evidence of effective *kuzushi* comes when you succeed in pulling your partner onto his tiptoes if you're going to throw him forward or pushing him onto his heels if you're throwing him backward. You need to pull or push with

your whole body to develop good *kuzushi*, but the arms play a subtle and important role in transmitting your force to him.

### HANDS-ON

When throwing, the hands serve distinctive purposes. The *hikite* (literally, "the retractor"—in this case, the left hand if you're right-handed) is the pulling hand. Its job, while gripping the sleeve, is to pull the opponent off-balance. As can be seen in the accompanying photos, the *hikite* hand pulls at right angles to the opponent and along the horizontal plane. During *uchikomi* (training drills), this movement is exaggerated, meaning that the pull is slightly upward. Adams says that the function of this hand during a throw is to guide the opponent while he's airborne by continuing to pull in a wide arc.

The right hand is the *tsurite*, or lifting hand. It's used to effect the lifting and driving action during the throw. It's important to note that the force of the throw doesn't come from the arms in isolation; rather, once the elbow is bent and the arm is cocked into position, power is transmitted from the legs and torso. This

**BODY DROP:** Neil Adams (right) starts the *tai otoshi* in a neutral right-handed posture (1). He drops his center of gravity and begins the action/reaction mechanism, after which he breaks his opponent's balance and enters with his right foot (2). With his right arm locked, Adams pivots and brings his left foot into position while continuing to pull with his left hand (3). Next, he extends his right leg, further dropping his body into a low crouch (4). He continues to drive forward, pulling with his left hand and thrusting forward with his right. To finish the throw, Adams completes the torso rotation and pulls with his left hand while straightening his outstretched leg (5).





**MAJOR OUTER REAPING THROW:** To set up the *osoto gari*, Neil Adams (right) assumes the sleeve-and-lapel grip (1). He steps past his opponent with his left foot and swings his right foot by as if he's kicking a soccer ball (2). Adams then reverses his motion and reaps his opponent's leg out from under him, simultaneously using his arms to force him backward and to his right (3). Reverse angle: Adams uses his right hand to bend the opponent's body backward (4). He completes the throw by sweeping with his right leg and pushing with his hands (5-6).

is akin to the movement used by weightlifters during power cleans and snatches. In the photos, note how Adams' right arm is locked in place in a way that resembles the movement used by boxers executing a hook punch or in the early stages of a reverse punch (*gyaku tsuki*) in karate—with the force coming from the whole body.

## MAXIMIZE AND MINIMIZE

Although it can be beneficial to practice with a static partner, in both *randori* (sparring) and *shiai* (competition), your opponent will be moving. That adds a new dynamic to the setup of the throw. Ideally, you should dictate the direction of your opponent's movement as much as possible, and, to minimize energy loss and maximize efficiency, you should do this in line with the guiding principle of judo—namely, *ju*.

One of the main manifestations of *ju* is the idea that when you're pushed, you don't directly resist the force. Instead, you use it to your advantage by pulling. Adams makes use of the principle in his action/reaction mechanism. It's essentially a feint that triggers a forward or backward movement in an opponent. When used in conjunction with *ju*, it yields an explosive

result: improved *kuzushi*, greater power and a sensation of effortless throwing. Adams says it works like this:

When you want to throw an opponent forward, you first give him a strong push to the rear. As he reacts and begins to push back, you use his forward pressure to facilitate your pulling action. That makes it easier to break his balance and throw him.

Other factors play an essential role in throwing. For example, ordinarily it's necessary to get under your opponent by bending deeply at the knees. Coordination, timing, belief, speed and momentum also demand repetitive practice. Of course, the mechanics of the throw are crucial. Refer to the photo sequences for Adams' preferred methods.

## STEPPINGSTONE

When you're learning to throw—whether it's to compete in judo or to augment your stand-up skills—there's no substitute for practice. Practice *ad infinitum*, *ad nauseam*. Practice until your arms grow exhausted and your heart is pounding, then practice some more because the key ingredient to all throws is being instinctive, seeing an opportunity and seizing it. When the moment comes, you need to know you can trust your technique. ✂