

Judolandia: Bringing 20,000 People Together Through Judo in Madrid

In conversation with Ms. Neli Lorenzo Abad, 8th DAN, President of the Madrid Judo Federation, and Mr. Raúl Camacho Pérez, 8th DAN, Director of Club de Judo Newton, IJF Referee Director and former Olympic referee

In December 2025, Judolandia welcomed over 20,000 visitors in Madrid for two fun-filled weekends of judo in a Super Mario Bros-themed world. Organised by the [Madrid Judo Federation](#) and Club de Judo Newton also participating, the event offered families a playful introduction to judo, celebrating its lifelong values and the JOY Project spirit. Children ran across tatami, parents tried judo for the first time, and grandparents guided little ones, proof that judo can connect generations.

Judolandia is huge and full of energy! Did you always imagine it this big, or did it grow naturally over the years?

Neli:

Judolandia has been growing in our imagination for many years. Behind an event of this magnitude, there is always a large group of people working together. We believe judo connects not only athletes, but entire families. The idea was to create a playful, pressure-free space where children could discover judo, and parents could share that excitement. Themes like Super Mario Bros this year, and Harry Potter or Pirates of the Caribbean in the past, help us speak the language of children. When they enter a world they recognise and love, their curiosity awakens. From there, judo does the rest.

Raúl:

What brings us back year after year is simple: Judolandia represents what judo can be when it opens its doors to everyone. For nearly 25 years, we've seen children take their first steps on the tatami, parents discovering the sport for the first time, and entire families returning because they feel part of something meaningful. For Judo Club Newton, Judolandia is not just an event; it is a tradition, a moment to reconnect with the roots of our work: education, community, and joy.

With 20,000 people joining the fun, how do you make everyone feel part of the action?

Neli:

We focus on making everyone feel at home. Whether a child is stepping onto the tatami for the first time or a parent is watching from the stands, we want them to feel included and safe. Volunteers, clubs, and coaches play a fundamental role; their enthusiasm is contagious. They guide, encourage, and celebrate every small achievement. When visitors feel that warmth, they return, and bring more people.

Raúl:

On the tatami, Judolandia feels like pure enthusiasm. Children are curious and eager to try everything. There's no pressure or competition, only discovery. Coaches become guides, parents become play partners. Beyond the tatami, families laugh, share experiences, and clubs connect with new people. Bonds form that last long after the event ends.

How do intergenerational learning and the values of the JOY Project come alive at Judolandia?

Neli:

You see grandparents tying belts, parents practising ukemi with their children, and black belts kneeling to teach a five-year-old how to bow. This mix of generations shows that judo's values: respect, courage, friendship, are lived through shared experiences.

Raúl:

The intergenerational aspect is one of the most beautiful parts of Judolandia. Parents helping children bow, veterans teaching beginners to fall safely; judo is a language passed between generations. The JOY Project reinforces this idea, encouraging us to value every stage and create spaces where generations learn together. Judolandia is a perfect example.

Big events always have surprises, Neli; what funny or unexpected moments popped up this year?

Neli:

There's always a child trying to hide to stay longer, and grandparents wanting to repeat the activity because they enjoyed it so much. These activities often include surprise performances with characters, and the children's faces are priceless. This year, during the final photo, they didn't want to leave. Those smiles at the end are the greatest reward.

When visitors leave, what do you hope they take with them?

Neli:

A sense of connection, not only with judo, but with each other. If a child goes home proud, a parent feels inspired to be active with their family, or a visitor discovers a new club where they feel welcome, that is the real success. Judolandia is a celebration, but also an invitation to keep exploring, learning, and growing together.

Raúl:

Judolandia shows visitors that judo is about belonging as much as training. It bridges clubs and communities, and those connections often continue long after the event. For clubs, this is invaluable.

After such a huge turnout, what's next for Judolandia and judo in Madrid?

Neli:

We want to expand Judolandia, strengthen educational programmes, and create more opportunities for families throughout the year. We are also working with schools and local institutions so that judo is seen as a tool for personal and social development. Its essence will always remain: joy, community, and the belief that judo can change lives.

Raúl, you've seen judo from so many angles; what's the moment at Judolandia that really stays with you?

Raúl:

What moves me most is seeing the spark in a child's eyes when they discover this side of judo for the first time. After decades in this sport, I feel very fortunate to have witnessed high-level competitive judo; Olympic Games, world championships, but nothing compares to the purity of that first moment of joy. ***Judolandia reminds me why I started judo. It brings me back to the values, friendships, and sense of belonging that have shaped my life.*** Every year, when I walk into Judolandia, I feel that same emotion again.

Interview conducted by
Ms. Špela Lampe Cakići (Judo Club Golovec)