

JOY Talk No. 10

Mesut Kapan: Judo as a Shared Culture of Life

What happens when judo is not just part of your professional world, but something that also lives in your everyday life?

Mr Mesut Kapan, 7th DAN, Technical Director of the Turkish National Judo Team, IJF Academy Expert, and Executive Board Member of [İzmir Alsancak Jimnastik İhtisas Spor Kulübü](#), offers a personal perspective on judo as a shared culture that is lived every day.

In this JOY Talk, he opens a window into how judo extends beyond the tatami and into everyday life, shared at home with his wife, son, and daughter.

In the JOY project, we often talk about judo as a lifelong journey. From your perspective, what makes judo such a special space for connecting different generations?

One of the most important features that makes judo unique is that age and generational differences disappear on the tatami. A child, a parent, and a master who has dedicated years to this sport can all come together around the same values: respect, discipline, solidarity, and continuous development.

Judo is not just a physical sport; it is a form of life education that shapes a person's character. Therefore, people can practise it not only during a certain period of their lives, but at different stages throughout their lifetime.

It offers a unique environment where generations can learn from one another and grow together.

Coaches play an important role not only in developing athletes, but also in shaping values, relationships, and community. In your opinion, what is the most important role of a judo coach in intergenerational practice today?

Today, the role of a judo coach goes far beyond technical training. Coaches are also educators, guides, and leaders of their group.

In intergenerational practice, the coach's role is to bring different age groups together into a shared culture, build trust, and make sure everyone feels seen and valued.

A big part of modern coaching is also finding ways to bring judo into everyday life and helping athletes build real, meaningful connections with each other.

In 2024, Türkiye hosted a large coaching congress where the JOY project was introduced to many coaches. What kind of reactions or reflections did you hear when discussing intergenerational judo with them?

At the coaching congress held in Türkiye, the feedback on the JOY project was very positive. Many coaches appreciated the idea of judo being developed not only as a performance-oriented sport, but also as a way to strengthen social connections.

The concept of involving families, experienced athletes, and elite judoka within the same system was especially well received. It encouraged coaches to reflect more broadly on judo's long-term impact on society and the role it can play beyond competition.

One of the key outcomes of JOY is the development of online learning tools and resources for coaches. How do you see digital learning supporting coaches in working with different generations and age groups?

Digital learning tools play an important role in coach education, especially in the context of modern competitions and training. They make it easier for coaches to access knowledge and experiences from different parts of the world, all in one place.

This is especially valuable when it comes to finding practical pedagogical solutions, improving safety practices, and adapting communication to different age groups. In this way, digital learning supports a culture of continuous learning and helps coaches stay connected, informed, and up to date.

Many coaches work with very diverse groups; children, parents, older practitioners, and recreational judoka. What challenges do coaches face in creating an inclusive and supportive environment for everyone on the tatami?

This is both a great opportunity and a significant responsibility for coaches working with groups of different ages and expectations. Children have different motivations and needs, while older practitioners may face specific physical limitations. At the same time, recreational judoka often come with their own personal goals and expectations.

The real challenge for coaches is to create an environment where everyone feels confident, free, and included in the process.

In your personal story, judo connects your family across generations. Could you share a bit more about that and what it means to experience judo as part of family life?

For me, judo is not just a sport, but a strong bond that links our family. Over the years, it has helped us share the same values as a family. On the tatami, time, discipline, mutual respect, solidarity, and fighting together all come together in a very natural way.

Experiencing judo as part of family life has created strong communication between generations. For us, judo is not just about competition, but also a shared way of life.

Looking ahead, what kind of coaching culture would you like to see grow in the European and Turkish judo communities?

In the future, I would like to see a more inclusive, education-focused, and human development-centered coaching culture in Europe and Türkiye. Of course, success and performance remain important, but the development of athletes' character should also be a key part of the process, while preserving the fundamental values of judo.

Coaches are increasingly growing not only as results-oriented professionals, but also as leaders who carry social responsibility. More collaboration, knowledge sharing, and the development of international training networks are already emerging.

Finally, if you could share a message with young coaches who want to use judo beyond performance, to build stronger communities and connect generations, what would it be?

I believe the most important message for young coaches is this: judo is not a sport practised to win medals. It is a powerful educational tool that brings people together, builds trust, and creates lifelong friendships.

I trust that if, as a coach, you pass on not only technical skills but also respect, patience, and solidarity, you can create an even greater impact. Strong communities and healthy generations can only grow from this understanding.

*Interview conducted by
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