A History of Northern Ireland Judo

(*Revised 1st February 2021*)

Judo was created by the Japanese educationalist Dr Jigoro Kano in 1882 and was derived from the martial arts. It was introduced to the UK in 1918 by Gunji Koizumi 6th Dan (later to become 8th Dan) who established the London-based Budokwai and the first Judo club in Europe. A demonstration sport at the 1940 Tokyo Olympics Judo became a core Olympic sport in 1964. Northern Ireland Judo began in 1952 four years after the formation of the British Judo Association in 1948 and was later developed further in NI through the efforts of George Glasgow using a grant from the Central Council for Physical Recreation (CCPR). This body (which later became the NI Sports Forum) was also founded in 1948 by the Ministry of Education for the development of after school sport. New sports such as Basketball, Fencing, Netball and Judo were introduced by inviting "expert" coaches to run residential Easter and Summer Schools. In 1952 there was such a Summer School for Judo in Portrush under the leadership of Gunji Koizumi, who was a visiting 'judo disciple' from Japan.

Belfast

Shortly after the Portrush Summer School in 1952, the Belfast Judo Club was formed. It was initially based in a school room but later moved to a hut at 1a Hertfort Street. The Club had a makeshift mat comprising of a wooden frame filled with 3-4 inches of sawdust covered by a taught canvas which had to be removed every few months to rake the sawdust flat. Mrs Leslie Murray was the Honorary Secretary and the Club was supervised by Matt Doherty, who was the CCPR Technical Representative until 1954. The post was then filled by George Glasgow who was appointed in 1955. Throughout these early days Gunji Koizumi continued to offer judo support from his London base and regular school courses provided an opportunity for more people to take up Judo. In the meantime, Raymond Christy formed a club in Bangor while Charles Simms (who was later associated with Aikido) established the Royal Ulster Constabulary Club, known as the "Blue Light" Judo Club. The Ulster Judo Club sprang up around 1954 and was based in Corporation Street. The Club was headed by green belt, Gerry Nevin who originally came through the Belfast Club. Gerry went on to become the first Dan grade on the island of Ireland in 1956 when he reputedly cycled to Glasgow to compete for his 1stDan which he won by completing a line-up of 6 brown belts; the only way in those days. As well as judo, Gerry Nevin and George Glasgow competed on the Irish Canoe Team! By 1957 a few clubs were established and George Glasgow took the initiative of establishing Northern Ireland as an official Area of the British Judo Association with himself as the interim Chair, a position he held for 12 years! For his services, George was made a life member of the BJA even though he had never actually practised judo! Raymond Christy was the first Northern Ireland Hon. Secretary and there were numerous Hon. Treasurers before the appointment of the popular Maurice Scott, the judo coach of Stranmillis and St Joseph's Colleges. As a Dan grade, Gerry Nevin was entitled to grade players up to green belt and later to brown belt (1st Kyu). He also promoted judo by inviting coaches to the Province on a regular basis. One of these was Yamada after whom the Yamadakwai was named and was an

amalgamation of Belfast and Ulster Clubs and became established in Gardiner Street off Peters Hill. The club had two dojos, one downstairs for the lower grades and one upstairs for high grades. Downstairs players included Sean Montgomery, Thomas (Tucker) McGeough, Mickey Kearney, Gerry McEldowney, Oliver Brunton, Eric Small and Walter McFarland. All of whom were 1st Kyu (brown belts) at this time due to the infrequent promotion opportunities. Oliver Brunton moved into Karate and became the highest graded exponent in the country. Walter McFarlane took time out of judo to play full time soccer at which he had a distinguished career playing for Crusaders and North Down. Walter later returned to judo, gained his 1st Dan and established the Abbey Judo Club where he coached for 25years. Walter went on to win a silver medal at the World Veteran's Championship in 1999, gold in 2001 and was elected Vice President of the NIJF. The Abbey Club which is based at the Valley Leisure Centre still thrives today under the leadership of William Cully. Eric Small also took time out from judo to play high level soccer and like Walter returned to judo in the 1980s, gained his 1st Dan and competed for a number of years in both Senior and Veteran events as well serving as a National Referee. In the early days, the upstairs dojo at the Yamadakwai was the practice ground for the few black belts around at the time. They included Gerry Nevin, Tom Smeltzer, Joe Brady, Raymond Canning, Sidney Glenn, Roy Hanna Jack Carabine and Paddy Agnew. Following a distinguished judo career Paddy moved away from Judo to play rugby and was later capped for Ireland. When the 'troubles' made attendance difficult, the Yamadakwai moved to premises in Royal Avenue where in addition to judo several of their members played chess! Later some of the higher grades participated in the judo sessions at Queen's University, much to the benefit of the student players. At about this time Victor Catling joined the Yamadakwai and also trained at QUB which enabled him to rise quickly through the grades to become the Irish Heavyweight Champion, a title he retained for several years. Although Dan grades were scarce in the early days of judo they were especially scarce among females of which there were only three, Carol Castles (who was also a National Referee), Marietta McGrellis and Gwyneth Barker who was the first female Dan grade in Northern Ireland.

Another leading Belfast club in the 1960's and 1970's was the Belfast YMCA under the guidance of coaches Herman and Derek Harpur. Herman later became the NIJF Director of Examiners. It was from this club that Richard Briggs, Sean Greg, Campbell Hamilton, Alan Pearson, Frankie Gargan, Tony Best, Alan Murdoch, Bill Taggart, Colin Savage and many others emerged. After a year at the YMCA Richard Briggs became a student and joined the Queen's University Club in 1968. Tony Best went on to make valuable contributions to the Blue Light (RUC) Judo Club along with Tom Monaghan who still attends the Abbey Judo Club and is still a regular spectator at Dan gradings. Tony Best came out of retirement in 2013 to win a medal at the World Police and Fire Games Judo event hosted by Northern Ireland in Shankill Leisure Centre and was facilitated by Tom Monaghan who was on the WPFG Organizing Committee.

Among other early Belfast clubs were the Mariners JC in Nelson Street, coached by Jimmy Houston and St Mathews JC based in the Short Strand area and coached by WW2 veteran Micky Owens. The Queens University Club was founded in 1955 and coached by Gerry Nevin who was followed in 1968 by Jack Carabine. After an earlier a career in the Belfast ship yard, Jack Carabine became full-time Coach Development Officer for Northern Ireland Judo, a post he held until his retirement. Jack's position was then filled by former British Squad member Dermot Heslop from Yorkshire who made a significant impact on Northern Ireland judo. The

first Queen's University student to gain a black belt was Colin Gray in the mid-sixties. Colin was a leading Northern Ireland International and in 1964 was the first student to be awarded a University Full Blue for Judo and graduated with a first class honours degree in Psychology the same year. The QUB Club originally met in the Sans Souci gymnasium off the Malone Road but moved to the current QUB PE Centre when it opened in 1972. Jack Carabine was the ideal coach for Queen's, combining a high level of technical knowledge with an appreciation of the social needs of students! He had a fine singing voice and was an accomplished tin whistle player which went down well on long trips to competitions. Between 1968 and 1975 Queens won the Irish Men's Intervarsity team trophy 6 times in succession and also won the women's team title several times. This was during the era of Richard Briggs, Tom Boyle, Michael Watt, Jaroslav Zdan, John Stewart and the flamboyant Ojide Okunaiya from Nigeria. There was also a strong female component including Margaret Cosgrave, Loraine Burnison, Anne Little and Mary O'Hare. It was during this period that a full Irish Universities Team was selected to compete at the 1972 World University Championships. From Northern Ireland, Terry Watt (TCD), Richard Briggs and Harry Crooks were selected along with Irish Judo Association players Tommy Rea (Galway) and Gerry Keys (Dublin) with Phelim Woods (Dublin) and Reggie Temple (Londonderry) as reserves with Irish Olympian Matt Folan (Dublin) as Team Manager. In the 1980s another group of strong players emerged from QUB and dominated College judo. These included Greg McMahon, Dominic Sherlock, Hugh Quinn, John (Junior) McLaughlin, Eamonn McCreavey, Aidan Mitchell, Paul Stewart and Una Monaghan the first woman to be awarded a Full Blue for judo. Following Jack's retirement from the club a number of coaches took over including Eric Small, Kevin Farry, Gerry McCabe, Jim Toland, Ciaran Ward, Stephen McCluskey and Chris Donnelly with more recent input from Jonathan Cook and Harry Gribbon. These coaches were important in the development of the Queen's club by producing many outstanding players including Paul Green, Paul Stewart and Lisa Bradley. Lisa was awarded a University Full Blue in 1993 which was re-awarded several times. She went on to win a silver medal at the 2002 Commonwealth Games, and graduated with a PhD the same year! Coaching during Lisa's studentship was by double Olympian (Barcelona 1992 and Atlanta 1996) Ciaran Ward who produced another run of 6 consecutive Intervarsity team titles. Ciaran originally came from the Yamakwai (Black Mountain Judo Club) which was then under the leadership of his father, Jimmy Ward who started judo later in life after a distinguished career in Gaelic Football. He gained his 1st Dan and went on to run one of the most successful clubs in Ireland. The Yamakwai produced many outstanding players including the 1989 World Schools Champion, Stephen McCluskey who followed Ciaran as the QUB Coach and now runs the highly successful Judo Academy in the Lisburn area. Another Centre of Excellence in the 1980's was the St Peter's Judo Club which produced Olympian (Atlanta 1996) Sean Sullivan and former NI International Gerry McCabe, both of whom still coach at the club. Another Belfast club coached by Jack Carabine was St Joseph's College which was joined by Gregory Butler and Martin Savage who attended a class for Student PE Teachers in 1972 and from this they formed Seijinkwai in 1973. Jack continued to coach there until 1974 and was replaced by Sean Gregg and Maurice Scott for a short time. Joe Rea was one of the Club's most successful players at that time and the youngest Northern Ireland Dan grades. During the early 1980s the Glen Judo Club was established by Sean Gregg (originally from the YMCA and Seijinkwai) who emigrated to New Zealand and Thomas 'Tucker' McGeogh (Originally from the Yamada-kwai). Tony Best (originally YMCA) and Joe Rea (originally St Josephs) were prominent members of the Glenn Judo Club along with Kevin McKenna, a teacher at St Augustine's Secondary School, who made a significant contribution to schools Judo and was an active referee.

Also during the 1980s was the Murakwai, founded by Billy and Ellen Coulter at Ballybeen and had over 100 members with several Commonwealth medallists within their membership including Scott Mayne who competed at the 2002 Manchester Commonwealth Games. In addition to coaching at the club Ellen followed Herman Harpur as the NIJF Director of Examiners. Susie Maitland also contributed valuable coaching input to the club and bridged the era between the Coulters and Scott Mayne who later became the Head Coach. The club had many visiting coaches including Jane Bridge, Loretta Doyle and Neill Adam's. Murakwai is still thriving today, though in 2015 it merged with the highly successful Hazama Club to form Simply Judo under the leadership of Hazama Head Coach Mark Montgomery and Murakwai Head Coach Scott Mayne. Simply Judo now includes several satellite school clubs and together forms one of the largest groups in Northern Ireland with 4 British Squad members and 5 players on the NIJF Performance Pathway. Another large multi-club group is the Kookateki under the leadership of Jonathan Cook and former NIJF Secretary Wendy Cook who fills an administrative role. Kookateki was the first Northern Ireland club to receive Clubmark accreditation and is one of the Province's leading clubs embracing several satellite school clubs in addition to a strong senior and veteran membership.

Northwest

While judo was developing in Belfast and surrounding area, other clubs sprang up with Londonderry becoming a dominant hub. In the early 1950s Terry Doherty, who had a wrestling background introduced Judo to Londonderry. The first club was started in 1954 and was named the Kosaka which came from Steve Kingalis's club in Glasgow known as the Osaka Judo Club. Steve made a valuable contribution to Northwest judo in those early days by providing classes and promotion examinations. Following on from Terry Doherty the Kosaka Head Coach was Bobby Brady who also had some wrestling knowledge and introduced Terry Watt to Judo in 1962. Terry gained his 1st Dan in 1967 along with Teddy Brown (Russell Brown's father) from Limavady. Terry Watt who is now graded at 7th Dan rose to become the first Northern Ireland judoka to win a place on the British Squad and went on to win a bronze medal at the 1968 World Student Championships. Terry represented Ireland at the 1972 Munich Olympics and is still competing at International Veteran events with a number of World and European titles to his credit making him the longest active Northern Ireland competitor. Following Terry's promotion to 1st Dan, Northwest judo blossomed with clubs being established in Londonderry, Ballykelly, Omagh and Strabane with Coaches Jimmy Lyttle, Hugh 'boots' McCann, Marietta McGrellis, John Rogan and Brian Houston making valuable contributions in the early days and more recently Paul Green, Ron Magowan, Gavin Abel and Jim Toland. Kosaka Coach Marietta McGrellis was the first Northern Ireland Kata guru and served on the British Judo Association's Management Committee as well as being Chair of the western region for several years. The Northwest Open Championship initiated by Michael Friel and Terry Watt in 1967 was still going strong in 2019 (53 years). In the early days prior to the establishment of Leisure Centres the Northwest was held in a hotel and over the years had many venues including Lough Swilly, Buncrana, Letterkenny, Lifford and Eniskillen. In those days a mat was laid in the Hotel Ballroom and when plyers had finished their contests they could retire to a bar stool to watch the event whilst enjoying a pint!! The Northwest was organized for many years by Marietta McGrellis and concluded with a dinner dance which invariably ended with a late night

sing song with Marietta on the guitar! When Marietta retired the Northwest Open was taken over by Lisa Bradley and Jim Toland who have maintained the event's traditions.

Other Clubs

During the 1970s and 1980s the Antrim Forum Judo Club became a Centre of Excellence for squad training where the Thursday randori sessions were famous. Among the senior players were Raymond McKay, Brian McAlynn, Rodney Coleman, Jack Larkin, Marty Allen, Kenny Hollinger, Victor Catling, Hank Wade, Eric Small, Colin Savage, Richard Briggs and the legendary Roy Scott. Having practised judo in Canada, Roy came to the Antrim Club as a green belt who crashed his way to 2nd Dan within a couple of years and represented Ireland at a World Championships where he came within a whisker of defeating a Japanese Champion, immortalised by a photograph in a popular judo book. Roy's son Ross followed his father into judo, training mainly at Coleraine and QUB where he was a student.

The eighties saw a resurrection of the Bangor Judo Club headed by Carl Rathzell who coached Clair Rainey through to 1st Dan and Northern Ireland representation. It is Carl who established a HM Prison Service Judo Club which ran for a number of years. Another hub of judo in the early days was in South Down where Martin Savage started judo in the Bosco Youth Club in Newry in 1966. Like other early clubs there was a sawdust and canvas tatami and. Although there were no Dan Grades in those days the Club had competent coaching input from Cecil Stevens and Frank Watson. When Martin Savage became a student at St Joseph's College in 1972 the club became defunct for a few years until Martin revived judo at the Bosco Club in Newry during the summer of 1974. He named it Budokan and it produced Paul McConville, Eamonn Rooney, Kevin McEnteggart and his sisters, Siobhan Finnegan along with her brother Bill and sister Margaret. Kevin O'Callaghan, John O'Hanlon and Paul Clark were prominent members who medaled at events consistently. The club moved to new premises, an old wooden hut with a permanent Milom mat in 1978 but this was destroyed in a fire in 1981. In the intervening years from then to 2004 the club moved to Warrenpoint and had several venues becoming Shinken Shobu Ryu where Kata became its strong point with Paul Brady, Dermot McCaul Nigel O'Neill as well as the Smyth brothers Brian and Peter medalling at British Championships. Paul Brady and Martin Savage were also members of the British Kata Team which competed in European and World Championships between 2005 and 2011. Following Martin's move to France Shinken-Shobu-Ryu has been coached by Dermot McCaul who is following in Martin's footsteps with sound technical input. Despite his move to France Martin regularly visits Shinken Shobu Ryu to see family and run kata courses which are much appreciated by the NIJF membership. Another long running club is the Tyrone based Ren-bu-kan in Dungannon, founded by Harry McGuigan who introduced Averil and Joyce Malley to Judo. More recently Harry has had a distinguished career in Veteran's judo and his Ren-bu-kan is still one of the leading clubs in Ireland. Harry is currently Director of Examiners for the Irish Judo Association.

In the early 1970s clubs were established at Ulster University's Coleraine (UUC) and Jordanstown (UUJ) campuses. The UUC club was founded and coached by Marietta McGrellis who was one of the only three female black belts in Northern Ireland at the time. Marietta continued to coach the Club until the mid1980s when

Richard Briggs took over the coaching role having moved to the Coleraine area in 1975. Richard was still an active competitor at that time but assisted Marietta at the UUC Club. He became the main coach when Marietta was elected to the BJA Management Committee, completed a Master's degree at Coleraine and embarked on a teaching post in Londonderry. The UUC Club has always had a significant presence in the University with a steady flow of Judo talent including Reggie Temple and Eoghan Barr, John Gibson, Michael McMillan, Shane McManus, Vivian Moorehouse and Joyce Malley. Joyce's success whilst at Coleraine included a Bronze medal at the World University Championships and was the only student to ever to receive the prestigious President's Plate twice (1981 & 1983). Following on from Joyce's success was John Gibson who was on the British Cadet Squad and awarded the President's Plate in 1985. The Coleraine Judo Club was founded by Richard Briggs as an offshoot of the UUC Club and was originally based in the 1st Coleraine Scout Hall during the late 1970's but moved to the Coleraine Leisure Centre when it opened in 1985. The Club now has a thriving Junior Section and a senior section with 9 active Dan grades, most of who are qualified coaches. A dominant student club during the 1990s was at Jordanstown (UUJ) with a number of talented players including Commonwealth Games (2002) Team Members Mark Montgomery, Scott Mayne and Chris Donnelly along with Joe Fegan and Ailsa Millar, most of whom are still active in judo. Ailsa is one of three NI Competition Controllers having being the first to qualify in 1988. The other two Controllers are Lisa Bradley and Averil Taggart who have been invaluable to the running of more recent events. Another prominent Club in the Coleraine area is the Causeway Judo Club founded by Willie Kerr in Bushmills and taken over by Alan Ashcroft who re-located the Club to Ballymoney. The Causeway Club is still active and now headed by Marshal Craig. Another and relatively new club in the north of the Province is the Coleraine based Triangle Judo Club led by former Royal Marine Gary Jackson.

Coaching and Gradings

The main technical input to NI Judo during the fifties and sixties was judo books and visits from the BJA National Coach Geoff Gleeson, who travelled to the Province with his wife in a campervan to run judo courses. From the mid-970s to the 1980s Northern Ireland judo coaches and officials benefitted from valuable technical input through the Old Bushmills Sports Academy, which was an annual multi-sport summer school at Ulster University (Coleraine Campus) where judo was always included and attracted high level coaches who ran courses on coaching and refereeing. By 1977 the Academy had 31 Courses with 450 participants from a range of sports. Visiting judo coaches included Colin McIver, Roy Inman, Neil Adams, Steve Gawthorpe, Mick Leigh, Peter Bent, Graham Turner and many others. In the early days the coaching scheme was very basic in that the highest grade in the club did the coaching. Although a structured coaching scheme was introduced in the 1960s comprising of Club Coach and County Coach Awards these were mainly based on judo knowledge with little emphasis on First Aid or Safeguarding. In the 1980s new requirements were introduced leading to Club Coach and Senior Club Coach Awards. More recently the BJA introduced the current scheme of Levels 1, 2 and 3 coaches with Levels 2 and 3 being UKCC accredited qualifications. This scheme includes modules in First Aid, Safeguarding and the need for a Disclosure and Baring Service clearance certificate (DBS). Further development for coaches is now available in the form of a European Judo Union accredited Foundation Degree. This was instigated by Professor Mike Callan and based at the University of Bath. Northern Ireland coaches completing these studies included Jim Toland, Joyce Malley, Terry Watt, Zane Lightfoot and Russell Brown.

In the early days of Judo all grading examinations were based on competition success with a gradual introduction of technical knowledge requirements over the years. Any Dan grade could grade players up to 1st Kyu but later pathways for Area Examiners who could grade up to 1st Kyu and Senior Examiners who could authorize Dan Grades were introduce by the BJA. It was not until 1972 that Northern Ireland had 'home grown' Senior Examiners and no longer depended on examiners from the UK mainland to run Dan gradings. The last Dan grading by Senior Examiners from 'across the water' was in February 1972 with Examiners Tony MacConnell and Jeff Hawksby officiating.

International Judo

Over the years Northern Ireland has hosted many prestigious National and international events including the British Police Championships in Bangor during the 1980s, two Commonwealth Championships (1988 & 2006), the World Veteran's Championships in 2002 and the World Police and Fire Games Judo Tournament in 2013. The first Home International was held in the Ulster Hall in 1964. Countries competing were England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Ireland. The English team included Brian Jacks, Sid Hoare, George Glass and Ray Ross. The most notable player on the Scottish team was George Kerr (now 10th Dan). Ireland had Noel Whelan, Anto Clark and Paddy Murphy while the Northern Ireland Team included Gerry Nevin, Raymond Christie, Paddy Agnew and Jack Carabine. One of the most memorable contests was between George Kerr (Sco) and Ray Ross (Eng) both of whom had recently returned from training in Japan where they were promoted to 4thDan. George Kerr eventually won by Ippon from a left handed Uchi-mata. Another memorable match was between lightweights George Glass (Eng) and Anto Clark (Ire). Anto threw George with left Seoi-nage for Waza-ari. George then returned the compliment with a right handed Seoi-nage for Ippon.

Another memorable Home International was staged in the Ulster Hall in 1971 between Wales and Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland team were Gerry McEldowny, Frankie Gillespie, Terry Watt, Richard Briggs and Victor Catling. Gerry and Frankie were beaten and Richard drew with a higher graded Welsh player. Terry then threw his opponent for ippon with uchi-mata and Victor had a convincing win against the Welsh heavyweight who he threw for ippon with Tomoe-nage, leaving the overall result a draw. It was agreed that the drawn match would be re-fought so Richard had fight his Welsh opponent again, a contest he eventually won by ippon from osaekomi giving an overall 3-2 victory for Northern Ireland. Richard was so exhausted that he bowed off to the very supportive crowd rather than to his Welsh opponent!!

Northern Ireland has maintained success in Commonwealth Judo with podium places at all Commonwealth Championships which have taken place every 4 years since their inception in Edinburgh at the 1986 Commonwealth Games where judo was a demonstration sport. Northern Ireland hosted the Commonwealth Championships in 1988 (Coleraine) and 2006 (Londonderry). The 2016 Championship in Port Elizabeth, South Africa was especially successful when the NI team led by Coach Scott Mayne won 14 medals. Judo was included at the Commonwealth Games in Auckland 1992), Manchester (2002) and Glasgow (2014) with Northern Ireland winning medals at all three. As from the 2022 Birmingham Games Judo will be a core Commonwealth sport and will feature at the Games thereafter. Mark Montgomery represented Northern Ireland

3 times at the Commonwealth Games (twice for Judo and once for wrestling) and was the Northern Ireland flag bearer at the Delhi Games in 2010 where he competed as a wrestler because Judo was not included. Avril Malley was the most successful Northern Ireland judoka to date, having been number one on the British squad at less than 72kg for a number of years and British Open Champion along with a plethora of international podium places including European, Commonwealth and World Championships. At the first Woman's World Championships in 1980 (New York) Avril won a Bronze Medal and was Commonwealth Champion in 1988 followed by GB representation at the1988 Seoul Olympics where Women's Judo was represented for the first time. She is currently on the Irish Endurance Horse Riding Team! Avril's sister Joyce was also a British Squad member and won medals at home and abroad, notably a Bronze at the World Student Championships in 1982 and at the 1992 Auckland Commonwealth Games. Joyce is still an active competitor and along with Terry Watt, has won Gold medals at European and World Veterans events. Double Olympian (1992 and 1996) Ciaran Ward had podium places at many International events including the Commonwealth Games in Auckland in 1992. Other successful international players include Olympian (Atlanta 1996) Sean Sullivan who is still an active coach at St Peter's Judo Club, Lisa Bradley who won a silver medal at the 2002 Manchester Commonwealth Games and Mark Montgomery who won a Gold medal at the World Police Fire Championship in 2013. More recently Lisa Kearney from the Belfast Ward School of Judo competed at the 2012 London Olympics and later at the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games where she won a Bronze medal. The current performance squad under the leadership of Ciaran Ward assisted by Chloe Cowen-Vickers and Paul Green is maintaining a steady representation and podium places at international events with the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham being a major target.

Veterans Judo

Masters (Veterans) Judo became established in 1984 with Terry Watt playing a leading role and winning a number of titles at National, European and World events. To date 3 players have won European titles and 7 have won World titles. Notably Terry Watt and Joyce Malley have won multiple British, Commonwealth, European and World titles. Joyce now serves on the EJU Veterans Commission while Terry is a member of the BJA Masters Commission. These positions enable Northern Ireland to continue to have an influential place in international Veterans Judo. Other veterans who have achieved prestigious podium places are Jim Toland, Harry McGuigan, Gavin Abel, Walter McFarland, Bernard (Beano) Sheerin and Russell Brown.

Final word

Although Northern Ireland Judo harks back to the 1950's, the Judo Federation as an autonomous governing body within the BJA was not formed until the 1970's. This change took place under the Chairmanship of Londonderry man Peter McKee. It was about this time that the old NIJF logo appeared as the result of a competition which was won by the late Joe Rea, a protégé of St Joseph's College Judo Club and the Glenn Judo Club. After Peter McKee, Herman Harpur took on the Chairmanship and was followed by Richard Briggs who held the position until Antonio Lupari was elected in 1993. Antonio stood down in 1999 and Robbie Irwin became Chairman until the end of 2010 when Ricky Sloane was elected. Ricky was succeeded by Bill Taggart in 2012 who remained in office until 2020. Following Bill's retirement, Vice Chair Mark Harris from Ballycastle moved into

the position of interim Chairman.The first President of Northern Ireland Judo was Erik Utitz from Shrigley Mills who was elected in the early 1950s. When Eric retired, Gerry Nevin became President, a position he held until his untimely death in 2000 whereupon Richard Briggs was elected. In addition to the coaches and players Northern Ireland Judo has been strongly supported by volunteers including administrative backup and include, Marie Murphy, Alan Chowney, Sarah Beattie, Lenore Mc Donald, Lisa Bradley, Wendy Cooke and of course Robin Newett, who has been a very effective Honorary Treasurer for over 20 years. Smooth running of judo owes much to professional administrators Carol Castles, Anne Long and more recently Averil Taggart. From an organization in the 1950s run solely by volunteers under the leadership of George Glasgow, by 2019 the Federation had grown and developed the need to employ professional officers. These included an Administrative Officer, Averil Taggart, recently replaced by Gail Reid, a Club Workforce Officer Vicki Kennedy, a Commercial & Marketing Manager Mark Donald and a high Performance Lead Ciaran Ward, assisted by part-time employees Paul Green and Chloe Cowen-Vickers. The most recent Chair, Bill Taggart is our first IJF Referee and Chair of the BJA refereeing Commission with a seat on the BJA Board of Directors. Our President Richard Briggs is Vice President of the Commonwealth Judo Association and a former Director of the NI Sports Forum and NI Commonwealth Games Council a position recently filled by Lisa Bradley. Despite modest beginnings, Northern Ireland Judo grew to over 2,000 members in 2019 and is now a limited company by guarantee. Unfortunately the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic at the beginning of 2020 has led to judo grinding to a halt with clubs being suspended until it is deemed safe to resume. Although the elite squad under Ciaran Ward's leadership is continuing to train as a "bubble" the pandemic is likely to have a devastating effect on Judo but thanks to the resilience and enthusiasm of our members we will hopefully bounce back to our former glory.

Richard Briggs
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NOTE: This is an ongoing account which is continually being updated with new and revised information. Please contact Richard Briggs with comments or additions (especially dates): rpbjudo@hotmail.com