

Flipping out over judo

By Tom Baer
staff writer

ASKED TO DEFINE judo, Ray Thibodeau will first tell you what judo is not.

"People always mix us up with karate," said Thibodeau, who teaches judo classes at the Farmington-area YMCA, "but we're entirely different."

"We do not punch, and we do not kick. We throw and we pin. Actually, judo is a lot like wrestling with your clothes on."

Thibodeau, a 56-year-old Livonia resident who drives a Wonder Bread truck for a living, is the head judo instructor at the Farmington YMCA. He has no special athletic background and didn't begin judo training until the advanced age of 39.

Thibodeau and his assistants are working with some 80 students (33 are beginners) who have paid good money to flip and be flipped in an attempt to learn the rudiments of what was originally an Oriental means of self-defense and has since evolved into an Olympic sport.

The judo classes, organized by Thibodeau 10 years ago, have become a popular part of the YMCA's curriculum.

"Usually they're looking for self-defense," Thibodeau said when asked about his students' motives in taking his courses. "Judo is a terrific form of

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Added assistant instructor Dave Wertheimer, "We get people from all walks of life. People who stick around in judo tend to become easy-going, self-confident types as a result. Judo builds confidence and self-control."

"It's also excellent exercise. I once read that judo is second only to swimming in exercising the most number of muscles."

JUDO HAS ITS origins in jujitsu, an often-deadly form of self-defense, practiced for centuries in the Orient. Using jujitsu as a model, a Japanese educator, Dr. Jigoro Kano, invented judo in 1882.

"Kano was a frail individual," Thibodeau said, "and he couldn't participate in the sports of the day. So he developed his own."

Judo, introduced to the United States in 1902, has become so popular in recent years that it was made an Olympic sport in 1964. Success is achieved by using a combination of strength and balance. Contests are won by displaying superior throwing and pinning techniques.

"The secret in judo is using the other person's movement and weight to your advantage in making a fulcrum of your own body to throw him," Thibodeau said.

A blending of mental and physical training is stressed in judo. Humility is emphasized by the contestants bowing to each other before the competition, which usually takes place on a 46-by-46-foot mat.

Then one contestant attempts to throw the other to the mat "with great force and impetus," Wertheimer said. Points are scored this way and also by holding, or pinning, the opponent to the mat for 30 seconds and by applying pressure to his throat or elbow.

BEGINNERS in the YMCA class first learn the proper way to fall so as to minimize the possibility of injuries after being thrown to the mat.

"You learn to absorb the shock of the fall throughout your body instead of sticking your arm to break it," Wertheimer said. "That knowledge can come in handy. I got hit by a car once on my 10-speed bike doing about 25 miles an hour. I ended up with just a little scratch because I knew how to fall."

Beginners, who dress in old clothes for the classes, also are taught five throws, two pins and several self-defense techniques.

The more advanced students must dress for the part and wear the traditional "judogi" — white trousers and jacket of heavy cotton and a belt which is color coded to reveal the wearer's proficiency in the sport.

"A lot of the more advanced techniques can't be performed without the proper clothing," Thibodeau said. "You use the uniform for grips and to pin. Plus it's padded, somewhat, so they don't get mat burns."

For the more advanced students, there are tournaments sponsored by the National Judo Institute.

The belt color codes for performers over 17 years of age are, in ascending order: white for beginners, three degrees of green, three of brown and 10 of black.

"Only six men have made it to the 10th-degree black belt," said Thibodeau, himself a third-degree black belt, "and the highest living right now is a ninth degree."

Thibodeau became involved in judo as a result of taking his son to and from activities at the defunct Detroit Judo Club.

WERTHEIMER, a Farmington Hills resident and an audio-visual technician for the Farmington Public Schools, got hooked on judo after witnessing an exhibition while in the Cub Scouts.

"I saw how it could apply to everyday situations, and a few years later I found a class and got into it myself," he said.

"The thing I like about it is that it's a give-and-take situation. When somebody tries to force you into something, you take control by conforming to it rather than using brute strength to resist."

Today, Wertheimer holds a first-degree black belt.

The oldest student to enroll in the YMCA classes was 62 years old; the youngest about 8.

"We have kids who weigh about 46 pounds and one guy who goes about 280," Thibodeau said. "We all get along fine."

Judo, as a means of self-defense, does have an understandable appeal to some women, although few have enrolled in Thibodeau's classes over the years.

"A woman'll sign up, but she'll be the only one there, so she'll drop out," he said. "If there are two of them there, usually they'll both stay."

For additional information about the classes, call the Farmington-area YMCA at 553-4020.



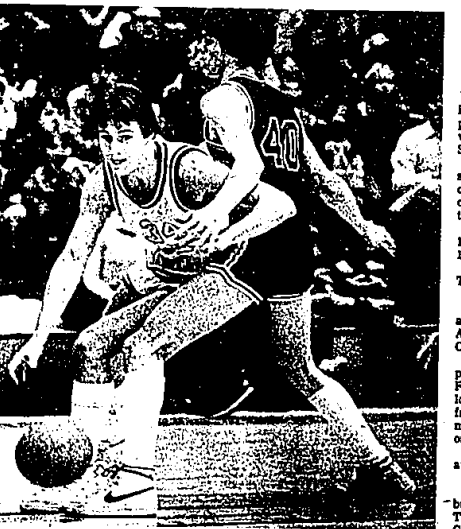
Deb Deremo (left) takes down John Wischman during a judo class at the Farmington-area YMCA.



Judo instructor Bill Signorelli wears the traditional white uniform as he demonstrates a hold to student Mitch Stevenson.



The judo classes aren't restricted to adults. Ten-year-old Todd Michael (left) and Todd Sepanske, 9, try their holds on each other.



North Farmington's Will Reineke maneuvers around an opponent during a recent game.

Boyle paces North Farmington

Ray Boyle, North Farmington's senior guard, scored 15 points Friday to pace the Raiders' 63-48 whipping of winless Redford Union in a Northwest Suburban League game on RU's court.

Mike Black and John Nowack each scored 12 points for North, which climbed to 2-5 in the league and 6-8 overall. RU is 0-13 overall and 0-7 in the conference.

Todd Diefenderfer led the losers with 16 points, Nick Williams followed with 12 and Pat Lowrey had 10.

North Farmington plays next on Tuesday at Brighton.

FARMINGTON FELL to 3-9 overall and 9-7 in the Western Lakes Activities Association by losing to Walled Lake Central, 64-45, Friday.

Dean Terprata led Central with 25 points. Matt Kamny scored 13 for Farmington, and Terry Gestler followed with 10. Both teams were slumped from the free-throw line, Farmington making nine of 10 and Central hitting on eight of 10.

Farmington plays next on Tuesday at Plymouth Salem.

FARMINGTON HARRISON was buried by Livonia Churchill, 65-25, Thursday in another WLAA contest. Coach Mike Teachman's Hawks fell to 2-7 in the league and 8-10 overall.

John Murren, Churchill's senior center, scored 19 points and picked off

nine rebounds. Dave Riley and Craig Hunter followed with 11 and six points, respectively. Wes Jones led Harrison with eight points.

Harrison is home to Walled Lake Western on Tuesday.

LUTHERAN NORTHWEST continued its losing ways Friday by falling to Southfield-Lathrup's 67-60 trimming Detroit Bethesda, 106-50, in a Michigan Independent Athletic Conference game. FLNW is 0-12 overall and 0-5 in the league.

Bethesda was led by Rod Mitchell (26 points), Pat Cason (24) and Tony Williams (22). Mike Aumann scored 20 points for Northwest, and Mike Rochrs followed with 18.

Northwest travels to Grosse Pointe on Tuesday to play University-Liggett at 7:30 p.m.

AN EXPLOSIVE third quarter and overall scoring balance were the keys to Southfield-Lathrup's 67-60 trimming of Bloomfield Hills Lahser Friday in a crucial Metro Suburban Activities Association basketball game.

Lathrup's victory, combined with Troy's 44-37 loss to Rochester Adams Friday, left the Chargers in first place all alone in the six-team MSAA, S-L has a 5-2 league record to go with a 9-5 overall mark.

Lahser, which owns a 4-3 conference record, is part of a four-way tie with Athens, Adams and Birmingham

Groves for second place.

Lathrup and Lahser were knotted at 16 after the opening quarter, and coach Jim Kourakis' Chargers trailed by four (30-26) at the intermission.

Lathrup came roaring back to outpace the Knights, 22-11, in the third quarter. All five Lathrup starters scored in double figures. Scott Shafer, a 6-foot-4 senior forward, led with 17 points. Curtis Riley added 15, Ron Smith and Morris Baxter each had 12, and Mike Carithers chipped in with 10.

Tim Haynes, Lahser's outstanding 6-

1 guard, led all scorers with 26 points, hitting on 12 of 15 from the field. Teammate Mike Davis added 16.

SOUTHFIELD TUNED up for its big game with Saginaw High tomorrow by crushing Royal Oak Kimball, 87-48, Friday in a Southeastern Michigan Association encounter in Royal Oak.

Coach Greg Silwka's Blue Jays are 12-1 (the lone loss to Lansing Eastern) overall and 10-0 in the SMA.

Guard Joey Walton led Southfield with 25 points.

Falcon matmen prevail

Farmington wrestler Lenny Pitel raised his individual record to 21-5 Thursday by winning the 110-pound match to help the Falcons down Farmington Harrison, 35-30, in a Western Lakes Activities Association meet.

Pitel, a senior, pinned Buddy Martin in 48 seconds. Another quick pin came in the 167-pound bout in which Farmington's Ab Hazel needed just 40 seconds to put down Pat Dugas.

Farmington won two more matches on pins. At 185 pounds, John Augustine pinned Dave Delect in 4:18, and Dave Cunningham used 5:41 to pin Brian Freeman at 138.

Farmington's Scott Denny won the 98-pound match by a decision over Todd Smith, 13-0. At 112, Darrel

Thornish of Farmington downed Rob Davis, 8-2. Farmington heavyweight Mike Pyoral won on a void.

Harrison won three matches on pins. Mike Dunn took Scott Martinuzzi in 1:17 at 145, Dave Dixon dropped Mike Niles in 3:21 at 155 and Steve Timmins stopped Mike Cody in 2:49 at 126.

Dennis Roms of Harrison won the 105-pound match, edging Dave Hove at 4-3. Jerry Elzen gave Harrison a win at 198 by blanking Dan Parillo, 7-0. Greg McCoy of Harrison won on a void at 131.

Farmington, now 3-5 in the WLAA, hosts Livonia Churchill at 7 p.m. Tuesday. Harrison meets Northville at home at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday.