



# **AN ANALYSIS OF NEWAZA IN COMPETITIVE JUDO**

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By Steve Scott

Newaza has been used for years as a general term for groundfighting. Specifically, the term *katame waza* (translates to “controlling techniques”) accurately describes all aspects of grappling on the mat. The term “groundfighting” is a descriptive name for all grappling and fighting on the mat or ground. In mixed martial arts, this includes both grappling and striking, so it’s accurate to call it groundfighting because that’s what it literally is; it’s fighting on the ground. While many people call grappling on the mat “groundfighting,” some call it “groundwork,” “ground grappling” or “ground play” and in judo, the term *newaza* does a good job describing grappling on the ground.

Groundfighting in modern competitive judo takes place in many positions and from many situations. Often, the tempo in groundfighting in judo is fast, especially in contrast to the tempo in other forms of submission grappling. And, as in the standing aspect of competitive judo, groundfighting has changed over the course of judo’s history, both from external sources such as western style wrestling and sambo, and from a natural development of this aspect of judo.

### **Newaza, the Guard and Groundfighting**

The earliest position for grappling on the mat in judo was “*newaza*” or “*newaza no semekata*.” *Newaza* translates to “supine techniques” and *newaza no semekata* translates to “attack forms of supine techniques.” (This phrase “*newaza no semekata*” was popularized in the book “*Newaza of Judo*” by Sumiyuki Kotani, Yoshimi Osawa and Yuichi Hirose that was published in the 1960s. From a technical standpoint, *newaza* in judo, places emphasis on *osaekomi waza* (pinning), *shime waza* (strangling) and *kansetsu waza* (joint locks). Early in judo’s history, striking, leglocks, neck cranks, wristlocks and other submission techniques were permitted, but as injuries increased and the safety of the contestants was constantly at risk, the rules gradually changed. Kodokan Judo’s emphasis was (and continues to be) placed on *nage waza* (throwing techniques) over *katame waza* (grappling techniques). All contests start standing up, but in reality, this simply reflects the nature of real fighting. I’ve always believed that the rules of judo mirrored what actually took place in a self-defense situation. If you throw an assailant hard onto the ground, you will injure him and it often ends the fight. In the rules of judo, if you throw an opponent hard onto the mat, it ends the match with *ippon*. If for some reason, in a street fight, you throw your opponent but not with enough control or force to injure him, you may have to engage him in fighting on the ground. Your goal then is to control him and pin him until you can get help or inflict further damage on him (*osaekomi waza*), lock his arm and end the fight (*kansetsu waza*) or strangle him to end the fight (*shime waza*). Looking at it logically, the rules of judo simply reflect what can take place in real personal combat.



**Newaza Position:** Unlike western wrestling, where being on the back is considered to be a disadvantage, judo views fighting off the back, backside buttocks or flanks as just another opportunity to beat an opponent. Kyuzo Mifune in his classic book “*Canon of Judo*” featured most of the groundfighting techniques from this position. The exponents of Kosen judo in pre-World War II Japan were highly skilled in all phases of

groundfighting but especially in fighting from this position. The Kosen Judo movement was organized at a number of Japanese universities and emphasized the groundfighting of Kodokan Judo over the throwing techniques. After the war, only a few universities continued Kosen Judo, but its influence on Japanese judo remained. One of those influences is probably why, in judo, the term “newaza” has become the general term used to describe all ground grappling. This newaza position is called the “guard” in Brazilian jiu-jitsu and mixed martial arts. Call it what you want, it’s an effective position for groundfighting.

## **Position in Judo**

Before you can pin, choke or armlock your opponent, you have to control his body. The better you limit his movement by controlling his legs, hips, arms and pretty much everything about your opponent, the better you will be able to defeat him. This control of an opponent is called “position.” Position is being in the right place at the right time and putting your opponent in the wrong place (for him) every time. You want to limit his movement, limit his options, and nullify what he can do. Not only do you want to limit his movement (or mobility), you should try to “shut him down” so that he can’t put you in a bad position. Good groundfighting is moving from one position to another position to even another position and trying to control your opponent and ultimately make him give up to you. Use your position to set up your breakdown and use the breakdown to get him onto his back or side and pin him. Think of it as a chain of events; position to breakdown to pin.

## **Hairi Kata: Breakdowns and Turnovers**

No opponent will ever lie down and let you pin, choke or armlock him willingly. You have to put him there. The way to do this is to break your opponent down from his stable base or position and put him into an unstable position where you can apply a pin, choke or armlock. What are called hairi kata (entry forms) used in judo are the breakdowns and turnovers that put an opponent in a vulnerable position.



A breakdown is generic term to describe taking an opponent from a stable position to an unstable position in order to put him in a vulnerable position in order to apply a pin, choke or armlock. Many people in judo call these moves “turnovers” but a turnover is more specific than a breakdown. In a turnover, the attacker turns his opponent over on the opponent’s back or back side in order to apply a pin, choke or armlock. When using a breakdown, you may not turn him over onto his back; you may simply put him flat on his face and apply a submission technique or work for a turnover where you can put him on his back and pin him.

A breakdown or turnover is very much like a throw. One instant your opponent is stable and secure, and then he’s on his back. You put him there. Good breakdowns require plyometric power and explosiveness. Sure, there are time when you roll your opponent onto his back in an almost gradual or incremental way, but usually you break him down or roll him onto his back with sudden and controlled force, much like you do when you throw him from a standing

position onto his back. You actually break an opponent's balance when you break him down for a pin in much the same way you would if you throw him. There are several phases that take place in groundfighting, regardless of your starting position or your opponent's starting position. He can be on his knees, between your legs in your guard, or any groundfighting position, and these principles of groundfighting come into play.

1-**Kuzushi:** Control your opponent by how you grab him and how you use the handles on his (and your) body or judogi. Control your opponent's position and balance. By controlling how he moves, you dictate the terms of the fight. You break your opponent's balance by taking his supporting arm, leg, knee (or any body part), from him. Breaking down a human body is like breaking down a table. If you pull in one of the supporting legs of a table, it will collapse. So will a human body. You have fit your body into place to best break him down and are about to execute the breakdown.

2-**Tsukuri:** Start to form or build your technique after breaking your opponent down. This is when you start moving your body into position and actually start applying the pin, choke or armlock. This phase of the action flows direction from the kuzushi phase and flows directly into the next phase; the kake phase.

3-**Kake:** Execute your specific breakdown: This is when you manipulate and use your arms, hands, legs, and feet as well as body position to perform the actual breakdown. At this point, you are breaking your opponent down and putting him to the position you want him to be in.

4-**Kime:** Finish: You've followed through from the breakdown and have him in the pin. At this point, you tighten the control of the pin and immobilize him. It's now a matter of controlling him for the time required to score ippon or apply a submission technique if necessary.

## The Concept of Shiho

Shiho translates to "four corners." You've no doubt heard and read about pins such as yoko shiho gatame, tate shiho gatame or kami shiho gatame. The defining feature of these pinning techniques is the "shiho" in the name. This concept of "shiho" describes the major controlling points of the human body. The use of these points was initially developed in Kodokan judo as a practical method of controlling an opponent when pinning him as well as when engaged with him in groundfighting (or even in standing situations as well). The four corners are the two shoulders and the two hips. While there are other parts of the body used in controlling an opponent, controlling one or both of the opponent's shoulders and hips work with a high rate of success.



**Shiho:** This athlete is using the concept of shiho (four corners) with good effect. He is controlling his opponent's shoulders and hips with this yoko shiho gatame (side four corner hold).

## Transitions from Pin to Submission Technique

Transitions can take place in any situation in judo, including groundfighting. In many cases, a judo athlete will transition from a pin and apply an armlock or a choke in order to finish an opponent. This usually takes place if the judoka pinning his opponent senses that his pin isn't going to hold his opponent for the required time to score ippon. In other cases, such as in sambo, a pin or hold for time doesn't win the match and a submission technique must be applied to secure the victory. The most common submission techniques used when making a transition from a pin are armlocks, but strangles are used as well. It's a smart tactical idea to have at least one or two transitions that you can use when necessary.



**Pin to Armlock Transition:** A common (and effective) armlock that is used as a transition from a pin is ude garami (arm entanglement) as shown in this photo.

## Strategies for Groundfighting

Following are some strategies that have proven over time to be effective for successful groundfighting at all levels of competition. Many (if not all) of these strategies are interdependent and form an overall plan of attack based on efficient movement. Always remember that efficient movement translates to effective control.

### Fitness is a Weapon

Groundfighting is tough, physically demanding and not for the faint of heart. The better conditioned you are in all aspects of fitness, the better you will control your opponent and apply your technical skills. An athlete with superior fitness will better be able to reflexively apply his technical skills over an opponent who may be technically more skilled but isn't fit enough.



### Make It Tough for Your Opponent

Make life tough for your opponent and do everything you can (within the rules as well as being safe) to wear your opponent down so that he not only gives up physically, but mentally as well. Impose your will on your opponent and make him fight under your terms. In the same way a snake squeezes its victim, keep the pressure on your opponent. From a psychological point of view, he's thinking of how bad it is for him rather than how he can beat you.

### Work to Control the Position

Always work to control the position that your opponent is in. If you are in a superior position in relation to your opponent and to where you are located on the mat, you will have a better chance of securing a winning move. The old saying "control the position and get the submission" is true. Mobility is essential in effective groundfighting, both for you and your opponent. Always work

of have as much freedom of movement as possible for yourself and always work to limit your opponent's freedom of movement.

### **Shiho: Control the Four Corners**

Always work to control your opponent's head, shoulders and hips. These are the key control points of the human body. Almost always, by controlling these points, you will control the rest of your opponent's body and by doing this, control his movement. In Kodokan judo, the concept of "shiho" or "four corners" is applicable here. This is where the attacker controls the defender's hips and shoulders (the two hip and two shoulders are the four corners) is useful in controlling an opponent.

### **Use Time Holds**

Think of a pin as a "time hold" where you hold your opponent to the mat for a specific period of time (in the current judo rules, it's 20 seconds) to secure the victory or control him long enough to apply a submission technique. Additionally, think of a "ride" as a controlling position. In amateur wrestling, a wrestler can gain points from a ride, but in all other grappling sports, as ride is used to control an opponent in an effort to apply a submission technique or pin. All effective rides operate on the basis of controlling an opponent's head, hips and/or shoulders.

### **Improve Your Position: Keep Working to Get Better Control**

After controlling the position, immediately attempt to control your opponent better. Constantly probe, pry, grab or manipulate with your hands, arms, elbows, feet, legs, knees, or even your head to better control your opponent. Continually work to break your opponent down from a stable to an unstable position or situation.

Even if you are in a defensive position, look to see how you can improve your position and gain further control.



### **Break You Opponent Down**

A breakdown is when you take your opponent from a stable position or situation to an unstable position of situation. A breakdown is taking your opponent from his stable base and gain control over him. You may break him down to a flat, face-down and prone position in order to apply a submission technique or gain further control of him. You may break your opponent down from a all-four or turtle position and turn him over onto his back for a pin. By continually working to break down your opponent, you will improve your own position and control your opponent.

### **Constantly Try for a Submission**

The ultimate goal is to force your opponent to submit or tap out. If pinning an opponent for 20 seconds insures you the victory in a judo match, take it, but in other forms of submission grappling, a submission technique guarantees your victory. If you make an opponent give up to you, he'll never forget you and never forgive you.

### **Everything is a Handle**

Use every part of your opponent's body or uniform as well as every part of your body or uniform to grab, grip, hold and manipulate to get control, maintain control and get more control of your opponent.

### **Always Work to Gain a Stable and Fluid Base**

Use all the parts of your body to provide a stable base from which you can work. A stable base permits you to generate for force and control and a fluid base permits you to flow from one move to another, all the while maintaining control of the situation.

### **Kobo Ichi: Adapt to the Situation and Work to Control It**

Use the concept of kobo ichi where you turn a defensive situation into an offensive one. Kobo ichi means that defense and offense are on in the same thing and work fluidly together as the situation dictates. Move seamlessly and fluidly from defense to offense and back to defense and then to offense as necessary and as the situation arises. This is the ability to have an "aggressive defense." Develop the ability to turn a defensive movement into a counter-attack.

### **One Thing Leads to Another**

This is the ability to move from one situation to the next as fluidly as possible. One thing always leads to another, so make sure that you have control of what is going on. Much like putting pieces of a puzzle together, work so that one move fits into the next in a sequential manner.

### **Have a Back-up Plan**

In other words, have a "plan B" or "backdoor" skill or tactic available. Not everything works as planned, so plan for when it doesn't work.



### **Avoid a Scramble**

A scramble takes place when neither athlete has the advantage and both are working to gain control on pretty much equal terms. Scrambles are inevitable and when one takes place, work to gain control of the position and situation.

### **Work to Get to the Top Position**

Continually work to get to the top position where you have more freedom of movement and mobility. Think of the mat as a wall. No one wants to fight with his back to the wall.

### **Work to Get to a Stable Base**

When on the bottom (especially when you are on all fours in a turtle position or lying flat on your front in a prone positions), work to get to a stable base and then work to get to a better position. One of the worst places to be in a match is flat on your face and prone with an opponent on top of you working to apply a scoring move.

### **Don't Get Your Head Trapped**

When you are on all fours or face-down in a prone position, make sure that you don't get your head trapped between your opponent's knees or legs. Get your head out of the middle so you can see what you are doing and use your head as a weapon.



### **If Your Opponent is Flat and Face Down on the Mat, Take Control**

The flat, face-down and prone position is known as *utsubuse* in judo and when an opponent does this, he is either doing it because he has been put there temporarily and is working to get to a stable (and better) position, or (and often more likely) he does this because he is waiting for the referee to call a halt in the action and get him out of trouble. In either case, you are in control of the situation, so start working to get your hooks in and take advantage of it.

### **Your Head is Your Third Arm**

Your head is your “third arm” in the sense that you can use your head to control and steer your opponent (as well as use as a base for stability). Your appendages (including your head) are your “hooks.”

### **Get Your Hooks In**

Use your feet and legs in the same way that you use your hands and arms. Use your feet and legs to control and manipulate an opponent but also be sure to get your hooks in using your hands as well. If an opponent is balled up defensively in a turtle position and you are unable to get a foot or leg in to get control with your legs, use your hands and arms to “swim” in (slide your hands and arms into a gap in your opponent’s body) and use a wrist ride or shoulder grip to control him.

### **Control Opponent’s Lower Body**

Often, controlling an opponent with your feet and legs will put you in a better position to apply a submission technique or break an opponent down. There are two old sayings when applying chokes that pretty much mean the same thing; “all chokes start with the legs” and “before you can control an opponent’s neck you have to control his legs and hips.” The best way to do this is to get your hooks in with your feet and legs to control his lower extremities (hips and legs). If you control your opponent’s lower extremities, you’ve taken control of his ability to get to a stable base or escape.



### **Get Your Opponent’s Back**

Work to get behind your opponent in a ride or controlling position. He doesn’t have eyes in the back of his head and can’t see what you are doing. Keep glued to his back and control him as long as necessary to break him down or turn him over to apply a submission technique or pin.

### **Stay Round**

In many situations, you will roll your opponent into a choke, armlock or pin. Sometimes you will need to be more linear in your movement, but if you are too linear, you are not flexible or adaptable in your movement. By staying round, you have more flexibility of movement and freedom of movement.



### **Be Compact**

Do not extend your hands, arms, feet and legs too far (and this includes your head, so keep your chin tucked). Never reach out too far or extend an appendage because doing this allows an opponent to use it as a handle to work against you. Keep your elbows in close to your body and when reaching to gain control of your opponent, make your movements sharp and deliberate.

### **Where You Look is Where You Go**

Keep your chin tucked and point your head in the direction where you want your body to move. Keep your eyes on your opponent and where you want to take your movement. Where your head goes, your body follows; but more importantly, where you look is where you go.

### **Always Know Where Your Head, Arms, Feet and Legs Are**

Don't lose sight of where your hands and arms are unless you are using them to manipulate and control an opponent and you know where they are and what they are doing.

### **Work Off Your Flanks**

When working off the bottom newaza (bottom guard) position, work off of your flanks (buttocks and hips). Position yourself so that you have as much freedom of movement as possible. Mobility is essential. As mentioned earlier, think of the mat as a ball. You limit your movement when your back is flat on the mat. There are times when it's necessary to lie flat on the mat, but for the most part, doing so limits your mobility. You can launch an attack from this bottom position only if you have mobility and as much freedom of movement as possible.



### **Stay South of the Border**

When between an opponent's legs (when he is in the bottom newaza or guard position), do not reach out and extend your arms. If you reach out too far, he can better control your arm and put you in an armlock or triangle choke. Stay positioned below his hips or belt line (south of the border) and control his hips by pinning them to the mat with your hands and arms (or knee and leg) and then work to get past his legs.

### **Take Your Time, But Do it in a Hurry**

In other words, work efficiently and don't rush things, but just as important, don't waste movement. Everything you do should have a purpose. Move as efficiently and effectively as possible from one situation to another and always work to control the position and control your opponent's body.

It's estimated that 70% of judo consists of nage waza (throwing techniques) and 30% of judo consists of katame waza (grappling techniques). While that statistic is generally accurate, those who know how to use groundfighting are dangerous opponents.

