

Attitudes to Shiai (試合)

Attitudes to Shiai Part 1

Introduction

In the previous two articles (BKA news April and June 2004), attitudes to Jigeiko and how Jigeiko in Kendo should be approached were covered. In this BKA news and the next one, Shiai in Kendo is examined from various angles. Kendo can be either a competitive sport or a Budo (武道) according to a Kendo-ka's understanding of Shiai, and his or her attitude to fighting, watching and supporting. Having a proper comprehension and attitude to the Shiai should bring about a better understanding of the essence of Kendo as a Budo and the wonderful relationship between you and other **Kendo-ka** (剣道家, kendoists). The purpose of this article (part1) is to examine 1) the purpose of Shiai in Kendo, 2) competitors' attitudes, 3) spectators' and teammates' attitudes and 4) teachers' attitudes towards Shiai.

1. The Purpose of Shiai in Kendo

Shiai means, "to try each other." In Kendo, Shiai means "to try skills, manners, attitudes and spirit learned and acquired in Keiko, with each other in a competitive situation." Inoue (1994, p. 162) explains, "The purpose of modern Kendo is to refine one's heart which is invisible by training in Waza that are visible. Shiai in Kendo has to take place in line with this purpose." We, as Kendo-ka, therefore have to recognize Shiai as an important opportunity to develop our skills and personality and to acquire the correct attitudes to Shiai. Attitudes of high school students to Shiai, whose only aim is to win at any cost, are quite often criticized in Japan. It is quite embarrassing to take myself as such an example, as my biggest purpose in Kendo was also to win competitions when I was a high school student. My Kendo at that time never deserved to be praised, and I did not care what people thought about my kendo, I only cared about winning. Of course, there is nothing wrong with trying to win in Shiai. You have to do your best to win if you are taking part in a Shiai and it is also quite impolite to your opponent if you fight without doing your best. As mentioned earlier, however, aiming to develop the skills to win and to develop an understanding of the essence of Kendo and one's personality is strongly related to the concept of Shiai, how to fight in the Shiai and the results of the Shiai. Moreover, there are manners which one is expected to follow when doing one's best to win in Kendo as a Budo. The following points discuss the various attitudes to Shiai that we are expected to take from the standpoint of competitors, supporters, and teachers.

2. Competitors' Attitudes to Shiai (before, during and after the Shiai)

It is not my intention to discuss how to fight in a Shiai. It depends on who you fight against and the particular situation. Also, all of the decisions should be left to the competitor(s) once a Shiai starts. It used to be quite often the case that Japanese high school teachers were constantly giving their students advice or orders on how to fight before and during a Shiai. That is an act that ignores the students' autonomy and hinders the smooth running and progress of the Shiai or the Taikai (大会, event). From my experience, nowadays such actions do not seem to occur at official Taikai, but it can still be seen at practice matches. I would now like to discuss attitudes to Shiai that competitors are expected to take before, during and after the Shiai. Irrespective of what the stage is in the Shiai, the most important thing is to control you. How can you control your opponent without controlling yourself? You need to calm your excitement to a certain extent before the Shiai. You need to focus only on the person in front of you during the Shiai. You should again calm your excitement and reflect clearly on how you fought after the Shiai. You should also show gratitude and appreciation to the opponent who you just fought. It is important to be able to do all of these things if you are to be good at Shiai and learn something from the Shiai. I will now describe these concepts outlined in more depth. The important point before Shiai is, firstly, to imagine your best Kendo, increase your confidence and start focusing only on your match (in the case of a team fight, the team's score also needs to be kept in mind). Here, if you think too much about winning, you will lose patience and also be lured by your opponent's trickery and start attacking too hastily. Haste makes waste! Tell yourself that a satisfactory result will follow if you do your best and believe this, rather than thinking of winning. It is also important to know who you are fighting against and like what your opponent's Kendo is. Undoubtedly some people believe that it does not matter who they fight against and that just trying to do their Kendo is the best approach. Thinking this way is also important, especially for beginners who can use only a few techniques and may not have the much tactical ability. For others, I would still recommend increasing their concentration, imagining their best Kendo according to the opponent's type of Kendo and making tactics (but do not think too much and end up by confusing yourself) before the Shiai. By doing these things again and again before, during and after the Shiai, you will start realizing what you need to think about before the Shiai and what tactics you need to adopt.

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Secondly, during the Shiai, you are often driven by the necessity to modify your tactics and to control emotional stress. Of course, this has to be done within a moment. The ability to cope with this is not something that you can acquire sufficiently in Jigeiko, but you can acquire it by taking part in Shiai and gaining a lot of experience under pressure. What competitors should concentrate on during the Shiai is: try to make the best decisions and perform to their best ability against their opponents in each particular situation. An act, such as looking at Shinpan to confirm if you or your opponent has scored, should not be done during Shiai. Even if you think that you made a perfect strike, you should concentrate only on your opponent until the opponent turns their eyes and Shinai away. In a high-level Shiai, both you and your opponent will try to control each other, and you can hardly see an opportunity to score. In this situation, the winner or loser can be decided by a small tactical error, made either by you or your opponent, such as dropping concentration during the match. It is important to develop the ability to keep your concentration for the duration of the whole match and to make appropriate decisions under pressure by gaining experience in the Shiai. Thirdly, it is also important to get into the habit of reflecting on how you fought after each Shiai. In the case where you have your next match in a short period, it is recommended that you quickly and simply reflect on your previous Shiai and get ready for this next match. It is quite often the case that you do not remember how you fought if you were very nervous or you won a very close and long match. It is very important, however, to reflect on how you fought when you were under a great deal of pressure. It would be ideal if you could watch a video someone taped. If this is not possible, ask people who were watching for their comments, and reflect again on how you fought. In a Shiai there are always winners and losers. What we aim for is to become a good winner and a good loser. As the author (2003, p. 141) discussed elsewhere, a good winner means one who fights with the spirit of **Sei-sei-doh-doh** (fair and square), is modest and has an understanding of the meaning of Shiai. Even if one wins a Shiai, one is aware of the loser's feelings and never shows off one's victory. A good loser is a person who did not win the Shiai but still displays the same attitude and understanding as the good winner. On the other hand, a bad winner is someone who shows off his or her victory, and a bad loser is someone who shows off his or her frustration as the result of losing and cannot praise the opponent's victory. These are people who have forgotten the essence of Shiai in Kendo. We are only able to do Shiai and learn something from Shiai because there are other competitors who we can fight with, Shinpan to judge our Shiai, people who support our Shiai; recorders, time-keepers, and ribbon ties. We should never forget the purpose of the Shiai and show our gratitude to these people.

3. Spectators and Teammates' Attitudes to Shiai

At a Taikai, we are not supposed to give competitors vocal support and advice, or to make sounds to cheer them up; we are instead supposed to support them by only clapping our hands. Spectators and teammates should be considerate so that competitors and Shinpan can focus only on the Shiai in the Shiai-jo (court) and enable the management of the Taikai to proceed smoothly. It is quite understandable that everyone wants to give competitors as much support and encouragement, cheering and giving advice. However, as described earlier, all decisions should be left to the competitors once the Shiai starts. Moreover, competitors are expected to show mental strength by coping with all stressful situations by themselves as they experience the Shiai. The most annoying thing for Shinpan in Shiai is a camera flashlight. It is again understandable that you want to take photographs of your club member's fighting and that you want someone to take photographs of you fighting, but the Shinpan might miss a critical moment if you take a photograph with a flashlight as the competitors attack. Competitors, Shinpan, spectators and Taikai officials should all have the feeling that they want the Taikai to be a wonderful experience, which they can all enjoy. The clapping of hands with all your heart and showing consideration to the Shinpan are the attitudes, which spectators should adopt. In team fights, the correct etiquette is for team members, the manager, and coach to watch or wait for their match in Seiza. It would be awkward, however, to do a Shiai if you kept sitting until it was your turn and kept rubbing your numb feet again and again while you were watching and waiting. That also does not look good. Nowadays, it is usual for team members, manager and coach to do Seiza only when Senpo and Taisho fight (and when there is a fight-off as well) and the member who fights next will wait in a standing position (of course this does not apply to people who have difficulty in doing Seiza). In team fights, it is important to feel involved when you watch your teammate's fighting. Although I previously stated that competitors are expected to cope with all situations by themselves when all team members become as one' and support their teammates, it's as if they were also fighting; the competitor will feel the strength of this support behind them and this gives the competitor both courage and confidence. If you feel as if you are also fighting, you will find yourself moving your hands and upper body in spite of yourself as you observe your teammate's every action. One's victory is everyone's victory in team fights.

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4. Teachers' Attitudes to Shiai

It is the responsibility of teachers to make their Dojo members fight fairly, encouraging them and giving them feedback. The important thing for teachers to demonstrate during Keiko in their Dojo is how to fight and support correctly. When giving feedback, teachers should consider giving the appropriate amount of feedback according to the members level. According to Aoki (1996), it is the most effective if feedback is given immediately after each performance in practice. In the case of Shiai, however, feedback needs to be given at an appropriate time when their members are ready to accept it, taking into account the result and content of the Shiai, each member's personality, situation and so on.

5. Summary

It should now be fairly evident that Shiai is not everything in Kendo, but another part of it. The results of Shiai do not show everything about a Kendo-ka. What is important is the way in which a Kendo-ka deals with their Keiko, fights in the Shiai reflects on the Shiai and approaches the Keiko again, aiming to score the Ippon he or she dreams. It depends on each Kendo-ka's attitude whether they develop character through doing Shiai. I would also like to mention that it is important to try to enjoy your Shiai without thinking too deeply about what I have discussed in this article. Shiai is fun and exciting. There is nothing wrong with thinking that. We feel like we are in seventh heaven when we score the Ippon we have dreamed. One who has experienced this would dream of having this same feeling again and again, doing Keiko very hard, repeating the same practice hundreds of times or even thousands of times. I hope that many Kendo-ka will become interested in taking part in Shiai and that Taikai will become fascinating events when lots of Kendo-ka have the opportunity to learn and experience many valuable assets to add to their kendo. In the next article, I would like to introduce some ways of doing Shiai practice in the Dojo. I would also like to introduce some forms of Shiai practice that take place at squad training and explain the aims behind these Shiai practices.

Attitudes to Shiai Part 2

Introduction

In the previous article, I discussed attitudes to Shiai regarding competitors, supporters, and teachers. Reflecting on these briefly, Kendo can be either a mere competitive sport or Budo according to a Kendo-ka's understanding of Shiai, and his or her attitude to fighting, watching and supporting. Whether you can enjoy Shiai, build up a wonderful relationship with others and make Taikai memorable depends on your attitude to Shiai. In this article, I will introduce some ways of practicing Shiai in your Dojo and the purpose of each Shiai practice. I will also introduce some Shiai practices that take place at squad training. Moreover, I will also introduce what squad members are expected to learn through Shiai practice and how and with what attitude the GB Kendo team is aiming to fight at various international Taikai.

1. Shiai Practice in the Dojo

Here I would like to introduce three kinds of Shiai practice. The first one is an effective way of Shiai practice based on the official rules and regulations of Shiai. The other two are different from the official one, and Shiai practice takes place using modified rules with some particular purposes in mind.

1-1. Several Phases of Shiai Practice (especially for beginners)

It is important for Dojo leaders to organize Shiai practice regularly at their Dojo so that beginners can experience Shiai and learn the rules and etiquettes essential for Shiai. It is also useful for both Dojo leaders to see how the beginners are progressing and analyze what needs to be worked. It is quite time-consuming, however, to do Shiai practice using only one Shiai court in the Dojo and Dojo members will spend much more time waiting than fighting. The following example of several phases of Shiai practice probably depends on the number of Dojo members and the number of Kendo-ka who can referee. If it is possible, however, it may be better to start by dividing Dojo members into a couple of groups, having one referee for each mini Shiai court and having Shiai practice in a relaxed atmosphere. By doing this, Dojo members will be able to experience many Shiai by rotation within a limited time. At the beginners' level, once Shiai starts, they are only able to focus on attacking and defending and not being able to have time to think of rules and manners even if they fully understand them when they are not fighting.

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It is important for Dojo leaders to create lots of opportunities for beginners to experience Shiai and learn the rules and etiquettes by making mistakes again and again and being corrected during each Shiai practice. Of course, it is also necessary for Dojo leaders to give feedback about technical and tactical points (at an appropriate time) as well. After beginners come to understand the rules and etiquettes, Shiai practice moves towards a more formal type, and beginners should be expected to learn new things such as **Jōgai Hansoku**, **Wakare** and to take positional advantage in the Shiai court. It is also important for Dojo leaders to create an opportunity for beginners to experience fighting under pressure by having everyone watch them. After getting used to this type of Shiai practice, members of an intermediate level should be encouraged to do refereeing while Dojo leaders observe them and support the smooth running of Shiai and referee practice. That does not just mean encouraging them to learn how to referee but is a means of encouraging them to learn what is Ippon and where and when there are opportunities to attack.

1-2. Shiai with a Handicap

There are some ways of doing Shiai practice by modifying the rules and giving more experienced members a handicap if there is a big difference in level between members. That is not only to prevent the Shiai finishing within a few seconds but also, by modifying the rules, Dojo leaders can intentionally make Dojo members realize certain points that they want their members to learn. For example, experienced members are told that they can only use Tobikomi-men and Debanamen. By doing this, less experienced members can challenge more experienced members in Shiai with confidence. Less experienced members are advised to try to use all the techniques they possess without hesitating. At the same time, they are also given an opportunity to learn how to use Ashi-sabaki, Tai-sabaki, and Shinai to control and defend the attack of experienced members (they are not expected to use Oji-waza at this level). As the target to be attacked is only men, they will be able to deal with the attacks of experienced members without confusion and with confidence. On the other hand, experienced members are required to focus on how to create opportunities to strike Tobikomi-men and Debanamen. Beginners tend to be very defensive even if an opponent only shows a small intention to attack and their men striking tends to be quite big. The experienced member will end up hitting the less experienced member's Shinai that he /she swings up even if the experienced member's attack is faster in the case where an experienced member and a less experienced member try to strike men on each other at the same time. Through this type of Shiai practice, experienced members will also be able to learn a lot of things such as distance and when and how to make less experienced members attack.

1-3. Modified Shiai

In this handicapped Shiai, Dojo members are divided into two groups. One group is the attacking side, and the other group is the defending side. Shiai time is set for about 30 seconds to 1 minute. The attacking side has to try to get Ippon by using any means of attacking without worrying about Oji-waza within this short period. On the other hand, the defending side has to focus only on defending by using Ashi-sabaki, Tai-sabaki and Shinai control. Winning and losing is decided when the attacking side scores Ippon or the defending side keeps defending for the whole Shiai time. This Shiai practice will be useful for Dojo members to develop their skills in Renzoku-waza (continuous attacking), Tai-atari, making feint attacks and surprise attacks, and defense. In the case of the defending side, they have much more experience than the attacking side, but the area that the defending side can move within is limited. In the case that the attacking side they have much more experience than the defending side, but the targets which they can attack are limited. The attacking side should not fall into the trap of starting to strike lightly and swing the Shinai randomly as a result of getting too excited and trying too hard. The purpose of this Shiai practice is not just to compete with winning and losing in mind, but to acquire and develop the skills of Renzoku-waza, Tai-atari, making feint attacks and surprise attacks, and defense. It is the Dojo leaders' job to point out and correct any attacking and defending methods that are against the essence of Kendo.

2. Shiai Practice at Squad Training

Shiai practice for squad members during squad training involves modified matches, team matches, and squad league matches on a regular basis. Shiai practice is important for selecting team members to take part in various international Taikai. More importantly, however, it takes place to improve technical and tactical abilities, forming teamwork and making fighting spirit stronger, and also for bringing about the proper attitude of Kendo-ka through Shiai practice. I would now like to briefly introduce three types of Shiai practice that take place at squad training and the purpose of each Shiai practice.

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2-1. 3~5 Minutes Shiai

In this Shiai practice, no matter how many times you score or are scored against, competitors continue fighting until the Shiai time runs out. Shiai time is usually 3~5 minutes, but this changes according to the number of squad members and guests, their levels, their physical condition at the time, and what international Taikai the team will take part in next. The purpose of this Shiai practice is to give squad members a chance to fight to their heart's content. And to make their bodies remember what a 3~5 minute Shiai feels like, to make them develop their concentration so that they never get distracted whatever might happen, and to make them develop their spiritual strength so that they never give up the fight right up until the end. In Shiai, it is sometimes the case that referees do not raise their flags even if a competitor thinks that he or she has made a perfect strike. It is also the case that an opponent does strange, violent or annoying Kendo. So anything can happen in Shiai. But whatever happens, being upset and annoyed by the referees' judgment and by an opponent's Kendo and attitude will always result in one not being able to do one's own Kendo. It is impossible to control an opponent without being able to control yourself.

2-2. Conditional Shiai

This Shiai practice begins with one competitor already having Ippon and only 60~90 seconds left in Shiai time. The purpose of this Shiai practice is to develop squad members' tactical ability of how to fight in such a situation and to make them realize what techniques they need to acquire to deal with such a situation, also to make them able to fight without losing their heads and make them develop their never-give-up spirit. As I described in the previous article, I believe that all decisions should be left to competitors once a Shiai starts. Therefore, I do not tell squad members what to do with this type of Shiai practice. Of course, I will warn them if they become too keen on winning and fight in a way which is against the spirit of Kendo, which will make them give up their Shiai before the Shiai time is up, and display bad attitude to anyone because of their unsatisfactory result. I also give advice such as "You could do or could have done this and that in the situation." "You can take (could have taken) advantage if had done this," and "You need to acquire this technique if you want to do that." It is not my intention to keep actual advice secret, but I have to omit it here due to limitations of space. Shiai time in this type of Shiai practice is quite short. Squad members are required, therefore, to fight again and again at short intervals. They are also advised to keep thinking positively and to take part in the next Shiai whatever happened in their previous Shiai. In fact, the interval between Shiai becomes shorter as one or one's team keeps winning. This type of Shiai practice is quite important for training to be able to keep one's feeling positive before a Shiai.

2-2. Team Shiai

This Shiai practice is the closest to real Shiai as it adopts the official rules, has the same size of Shiai court as the official one and has three referees. The purpose of this Shiai practice is to make squad members experience Shiai in an atmosphere that closely resembles the real international Taikai. And to make them learn how they are required to fight as a team, how they are required to fight in the various situations in each position within the team and how to support their team members. In fact, how to fight as a team is emphasized the most in this type of Shiai practice. In a team match, just winning one's Shiai does not mean that one has done the job perfectly. How one passes a baton of fighting spirit onto the next competitor in one's team is equally important. Generally speaking, one has passed the baton on successfully if one can make the next competitor feel that you have done your best. Doing your best means ideally that you have fought so that you do not feel that after a Shiai you should or should not have done that or one could have done that. In reality, however, this is quite difficult or may be almost impossible to achieve. In the case of team members, they have been doing Keiko and having Shiai practice together for a long time, and they know each other's best Kendo. They can also see, therefore, whether or not other members are trying to do their best Kendo in the Shiai. In the team, therefore, successfully passing the baton of fighting spirit is not based on whether they could do their best Kendo in Shiai, but succeeds only when one of the team members makes the next member feel that they tried his or her best to do their best Kendo. As for supporting other team members, squad members are required to change their way of thinking and "do their best" to support their team members whatever the result of each member's result (see BKA news August for how to support members in team matches).

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What I had placed the most emphasis on and spent the most time in training on before the 12th World Kendo Championships was how each member should try to do his or her best. That is to fight as a team in each situation in each position within the team and how to pass the baton of fighting spirit, support each other. In fact, I believe that the men's and women's teams both fought wonderfully and that all the team members got to know each other's strengths and weaknesses, encouraged and helped each other, and developed together through the team Shiai practices.

3. Conclusion

Shiai has been discussed from many angles in both articles. What I would now like to emphasize again is, as described in the summary of the previous article, that Shiai is not everything in Kendo, but only a part of it. But I do not wish to belittle "Shiai," by saying that it is just a part of Kendo since it is such a very important part of it. It would, however, give me great satisfaction, if Kendo-ka came not to think negatively about Shiai and not to harbor the wrong ideas about the purpose and nature of Shiai, also that they come to a deeper understanding of the effects of Shiai and Shiai practice through these two articles.

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