

# 10th Kodokan Ladies Kendo Seminar Setsuko Kobayashi Fine Ladies Kendo Seminar

With Sensei Kazuyo Matsuda 6th Dan Renshi

24-26 June 2016



## 1 ❀ INTRODUCTION – LADIES KENDO

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Having attended two Kobayashi Sensei seminars, I have found them extremely helpful. Not only it was the only seminar to date run by Japanese female senseis, but also it brought to my attention kendo from a female perspective.

Bates Sensei and my fellow Ichi Byô Shi members appreciated the progress shown in my kendo after each seminar. I felt very privileged and wanted to involve our Hemel Hempstead young ladies. I was very happy to introduce Miranda to the teachings of Kobayashi Sensei. She enjoyed it immensely and has signed up for Matsuda Sensei's seminar in York with me.

This year Matsuda Sensei, who is herself a pupil of Kobayashi Sensei, has taken the lead of the seminar. She is one of the most gracious Japanese Kendo Sensei that I have had the pleasure of practicing with. I really like her style which is fluid and seems effortless. She explained during the course of the seminar the necessity to address kendo from a feminine perspective. We usually practice this martial art in a primarily male dominated environment and thus, learn to move and fight like our male sempai. However, our bodies differ and this difference means that at times our technics may need adjusting in order to measure successfully against a stronger and taller opponent.

## 2 ❀ THE KOBAYASHI METHOD

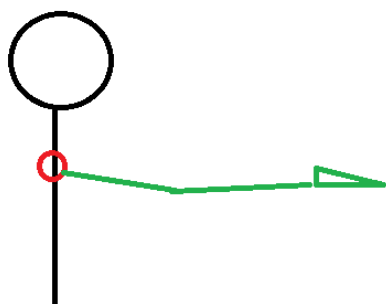
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The first time I attended the seminar in 2014, I was struggling to define the right Men Uchi movement. I remember waiting into the queue for Inoue Sensei and discussing it with one of the other attendees [Jessica (Cheltenham Shudokan Dojo)]. She had the most amazing description of the Kobayashi method: **Barbie doll arms...**

Only a woman could have really thought of this description and I must say it hit the spot. The method revolves around the movement of the shoulders. The arms do not move until the strike and then extend at that point with Tenuchi.

The way Matsuda Sensei decoded the movement was by asking us to extend our arms in front of us as if we were carrying laundry. So shoulder level with elbow slightly bent (fig 1). Then joining our hands together without changing the morphology of the arms. This is the striking position.

From there, bring your joint hands between your shoulder blades. The movement makes the shoulder rotates backward folding the elbow when they are at forehead level approximately.



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The emphasise was made on the fact that the movement back and forth from this position should not lead to strenuous movement. It should be kept effortless and fluid.

This method means that I have been able to strike correctly (IPPON) from a much closer distance than what I would normally be asked to. Which as a woman I tend to do, mainly facing a bigger and taller opponent as my sense of distance is threatened by his presence.

### 2.1 EXERCISES

**Men Uchi** – We did numerous Shomen Suburi using our hands joined together, using Suri-Ashi. Once we were more aware of the movement we carried on with our shinai. Then we used the same technic and performed Suburi from Shodan. The aim was to cut men on the right foot movement and using the shoulder as the key element. Eventually we moved forward with two consecutive Men Uchi and moved backwards with two consecutive Men Uchi. A kind of doubled Zenshin Kotai Shomen Suburi. This had to be in time as we were in rows of three and also taught us rhythm. Men strikes with this method means that you lift your shinai high enough for your left hand to be level with your forehead.

**Kote Uchi** – Same as above. Difference is that Kote Uchi only requires you to lift up your shinai level with your sternum.

**Do Uchi** – As above

**Rei – Sonkyo** We had a short break at this stage and when we got back we took a little while to go over the correct posture. How to rei and Sonkyo properly.

The second part of the morning was using the learnt method with correct footwork.

We spend a little time doing footwork in front of the mirror in the shape of a cross holding Shudan position. One Suri- Ashi forwards, then backwards, then right and finally left (I can only remember the words Migi and Hidari).

We were asked to stay in groups of three. I was paired with Emilie Knight (Hull Genbudo dojo & GB Squad) and Michelle Hayes (York Do Shin Ken Yu dojo) Each one after the other (so in three lines) we did several Suri- Ashi dashes from one end of the dojo to the other.

We added Fumikomi – Ashi then sub categorised this exercise with the following:

- Men – Kote – Do Uchi – Forward to the end of the dojo and back.
- Men – Kote – Do Uchi to the end of the dojo and Iki Men – Kote – Do going back.
- The same as the above but with Kote-Men and Kote-Men-Do.

At this point we worked in groups and performed the same type of exercises by relaying the role of Motodashi and Kakarite. We finished this second part of the morning with Kirikaeshi exercises.

### 3 KATA

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This year we had an element of Kata added to the seminar which Kobayashi Sensei normally did not include. As I love Kata that was really welcomed. We paired by level and worked with Michelle Lim (Oxford Kendo dojo) which I had not seen since April when she came to train with us in Aylesbury.

We worked our way through all 7 Bokken forms and I did not feel confident enough to take on the 3 Kodachi forms as I only know Ipponme correctly and Sanponme to a basic degree.

Budden Sensei took the Kyusha group of 4 young ladies and so Miranda was really well looked after.

### 4 MOCK GRADING – BUDDEN SENSEI

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Kodokan dojo Budden Sensei presided the panel for this mock grading and we were asked to treat this as if we were going for our next grade.

Very kindly, he told us that as a grading panel member he never fails an Ikkyu grade as for him it is a way to encourage a newcomer to the world of Kendo to carry on. He would also never fail a Shodan as this is his way to thank the person to persevere. However, from Nidan onwards, he needed to be shown that the examinee was technically ready for the grade they were hoping to get.

I was in hot water as I only passed Shodan and was nowhere ready for Nidan.

Miranda, she took her Ikkyu grading with gusto. She did very well in the etiquette and posture. She did a good Men Uchi. Matsuda and Budden Sensei advised her to carry on doing what she did. She was not there yet but with practice and confidence she would make it.

For myself, there was no negative comments in the sense that my posture, my Bogu, my spirit were not questioned. The start of the Jigeiko was very good and left Matsuda sensei disappointed as she was expecting a big outcome but we could only manage a busy demonstration without securing Ippon.

To be honest, I know that this is my biggest challenge. I detest all forms of confrontations and this exercise is often becoming more of a shiai under the pressure of the examination. Which takes away my confidence and my abilities to see an opportunity to score. I need to work on this.

## 5 MOTODACHI - GEIKO

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All senior grades present (Juliette Li Wan – Yutaka Zenon – Emilie Knight for those that I can remember) joined Matsuda and Budden senseis as Motodachi. We queued for a 2 minutes jigeiiko with them.

Emilie told me that I am not holding my centre too high and that I tend to point it to the right. Which makes sense as I am usually against taller and stronger opponents in the dojo and automatically compensate. I need to be aware of this and change it according to the person I train with.

Then afterwards, all Motodachi organised themselves into a Mawari-Geiko and it was very nice to be able to watch their individual style.

I did not take part in the Kobayashi Cup the next day as my knee just gave up by the morning but made the most of the seminar. It was a great opportunity to meet again with familiar faces and get to know some a little bit more than the previous year. I enjoyed the way Matsuda sensei took us from just touching our hands to striking men. Subtle and efficient.

We only have three active female members in our Dojo but if possible, I would like us all to attend next year. I will make the arrangements for all of the information to be fed through our page. Please watch this space....



Garance Watford

Aylesbury dojo – Shodan