

The limits of Kata

Last Modified: 15th April, 2014, 10:34 AM

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When [\(Choki\) Motobu](#) was about 18 years old, he met Komesu Magii from the Gaja District in Nishibary village, who was the strongest wrestler in all Okinawa. Motobu, the son of a nobleman, asked Komesu to a bout, but Komesu was a commoner from a peasant's family who knew that it would be improper to injure a nobleman in a fight, thus he politely declined. Also, Komesu was about fifteen years older and much taller than Motobu. But Motobu convinced Komesu that he was merely interested to analyze the differences between wrestling and karate. Thus, Komesu accepted the offer and since Motobu didn't have a proper belt (obi) needed for such grappling bouts, he made one out of a straw rope and taught the young Motobu how to grip onto his obi.

[Motobu](#) hoped to punch his opponent with his iron fist, but Komesu was too big and too powerful for the much smaller Motobu. After Motobu was defeated, he asked Komesu what one could do if one was grabbed from behind on his topknot. Back then it was the custom that men wore their hair in the topknot style. Komesu grabbed Motobu by his topknot and even though Motobu was struggling vigorously, he was helpless and unable to regain his stability.

This wrestling experience taught Motobu that regardless of one's prowess in karate, it was not possible to beat an opponent who is much larger and stronger. Sensei Motobu started to understand that kata has its limits, and he said that kata was not developed to be used against an experienced fighter, but against an unskilled fighter. Motobu sensei recited a poem which was handed down in karate history: "Kata and waza are both limited by themselves. They are useless until one learns how to apply them in any situation".

From the [INTERNATIONAL SEISHINKAI KARATE UNION - ISKU](#)