

The 16th World Kendo Championships and training camps

report for the Canadian Women's Team

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The Canadian Women's Team performed well at the 16th World Kendo Championships (WKC) in Tokyo Japan.

I heard many positive comments from Japanese kendo senseis, my senpais (seniors), and kohais (juniors). My senpai who is teaching a strong high school kendo team in Osaka was impressed by the Canadian women's performance in the quarter final against Team USA because the Canadian women never gave up in any of their matches. He hopes for the same spirit in his students.

Another sensei from Tokyo told me that the Canadian women's willingness to learn new techniques means that their kendo will continue to improve.

At the 15th WKC in Italy, I felt the judges gave ippon (point) for many Hiki-waza. Team Japan especially earned many points from Hiki-waza. I also felt differences between the World Championship level and Team Canada was speed. In the team Korea vs. team Japan match, I found how team Korea competed against team Japan: It was ma-ai (distance). The Korean women kept a safe distance from their opponents. Thus team Japan could not aggressively attack team Korea. We reviewed the above points with video after the 15th WKC. I thought about how the Team Canada Women could improve their kendo and compete against the stronger nations.

There are three points on which the Canadian women need to work hard: 1. Hiki-waza, 2. Speed, 3. Distance.

1. Hiki-waza – from reviewing the video, the judges gave ippon easier than I expected. The Team Japan women struck Hiki-waza many times without initiation. In other words, they were careless about their opponents' movement. Because of this, during training I taught and focused on Hiki-awase (deban)-waza - how to strike when the opponent attempts to strike

Hiki-men, kote, and dou. Hanaca Yamada showed us this waza against Takami (team Japan). When Takami tried to strike Hiki-dou, Hanaca struck Hiki-men faster than Takami's Hiki-dou.

2. Speed – Strong players, such as those on Team Japan or Korea, have fast body movement and shinai swings because they have practiced every day from their childhood; however, for our Canadian women it is impossible to practice kendo every day. Even though the women worked very hard at suburi and in practice, they could not develop the fast speed that Team Japan and Korea possesses. Therefore, I thought carefully about how our women could compete against these players. I concluded that if the Team Canada Women mastered Kaeshi-waza they could still score ippon, even if the reaction to their opponents' striking was a little late. I thought Debana-waza, Suriage-waza, and other wazas would not be effective against faster players. As a result, I taught how to strike men-kaeshi-dou, men-kaeshi-gyakudou, kote-kaeshi-men, dou-kaeshi-men, tsuki-kaeshi-men
3. Distance (Ma-ai) – At the 15th WKC the Canadian Women's Team members were very afraid against Team Japan in the quarter final, even though I said they were not monsters. Our women simply tried to keep attacking without initiation, so the Team Japan members easily found the space to strike. Accordingly, I wanted to compare how Team Canada and team Korea competed differently against Team Japan. We watched the video of the final team match, Japan vs. Korea at the 15th WKC, because the team Japan members had difficulty scoring ippon against the Korean women. I found Team Korea members did not just attack hard and did not strike a lot. I assumed team Korea tried to bother team Japan by using a safe Ma-ai. After watching this video, I taught the Team Canada women how to keep a safe distance from their opponents.

I taught these three points at the training camps (gasshuku).

Just seven days before the 16th WKC, we arrived in Japan and had a three-day gasshuku at Moriya High School, four-time winners at the All Japan High School Championships in the past decade. As well, there were two other strong kendo high schools, Hiyoshiogaoka in Kyoto and Kyoai Gakuen in Gunma, visiting

Moriya high school. We were very lucky to have many shiais with these high schools. I believed our women got more used to the speed of strong players. Tsukamoto sensei, Moriya, and Kawasaki sensei, Hiyoshigaoka, mentioned that the Team Canada women were very obedient to the senseis and both senseis could see our women wanted to learn how to improve their kendo from this opportunity. They also said that of the teams in attendance the Team Canada women were the most effective and the most improved at the shiai gasshuku. The three high schools had this gasshuku because they were very close to their prefectural tournament, a qualifying tournament for the all Japan Inter High School Tournament. Only one team from a prefecture can make it. They offered us this opportunity even though they were about to compete in very important tournament. I really appreciated the opportunity these high schools provided. This gasshuku had not only a training purpose, but also it was a chance to make good friendships with the Moriya, Hiyoshigaoka, and Kyoai High School kendo girls. I heard Moriya and Hiyoshigaoka won their respective prefectural tournaments, but Kyoai gakuen finished in second place.

If the CKF has enough funds for Team Canada, I strongly recommend having future gasshukus in Japan. The need to train with kendoists cannot be overstated. I am confident that given these opportunities Team Canada members will improve their kendo. Having gasshukus only in Canada with Team Canada members only will not strengthen the national team members to a point that they will be competitive against the likes of Japan and Korea. Team Canada needs more shiai experience against strong players from other countries. I also recommend that young developing Canadian players learn kendo in Japan.