

The Odyssey of Yukio Tani

By Graham Noble
Part 2

One of Yukio Tani's many, many music hall opponents wrote a memoir of their meeting in **Health and Strength**. Peter Parkey (a pseudonym) remembered strolling down the street when he noticed a theatrical poster advertising the appearance of Yukio Tani, and his challenge to all comers. Parkey actually practised jujutsu and wrestling and considered himself the top dog at his club. At the back of his mind was the idea of winning £25 by staying fifteen minutes with Tani, or even - just possibly - defeating him and winning £100. And in those days £100 was a lot of money, equivalent to maybe a year's wages. He paid his shilling entrance fee to the music hall that night and sat impatiently through the various acts, *"the knockabout comedians, the pretty dancers and the acrobat,"* until at last Tani's turn came. He began by giving a demonstration with an assistant of the various throws and locks of jujutsu, but interestingly Peter Parkey *"knew all of these by heart, as I had read Raku."* The latter was of course a reference to Sadakazu Uyenishi's **The Text**



Tani defending against a knife

Book of Ju Jitsu as Practised in Japan. After that, a powerful young wrestler, well-known locally, came up to accept Tani's challenge. *"Looking very fierce, very determined, he met Yukio Tani on the mat, but the little Jap, his face beaming like the rising sun that smiles upon the land from whence he came, calmly advanced towards the local giant, who promptly performed, to the immense amusement of the audience, a series of aerial gyrations. It was not a voluntary performance either; it was performed under the direct influence of 'The Rising Sun'. Then down he came with a resounding thud, and rising to his feet like a streak of greased lightning, he tried to get a grip on his opponent. Then followed a pretty little waltz round, at the end of*

which down came Mr. local giant again, with Jappy on top of him, grasping him in some mysterious manner, so that try as he would he could not get away. He made one or two spasmodic attempts to do so -- a quick turn and down he lay, helplessly held to the mat by the Jap, who calmly wipes his brow with one hand as the 'underman' frantically taps the mat, thereby acknowledging defeat."

Well, Peter Parkey thought he could do better than that, and the next night he found himself on stage, dressed in a jujutsu jacket and *"looking down on the plucky little fellow,"* as he called Tani. He was much bigger and heavier than the Japanese, and for just a moment he felt he *"was in for a walkover"* -- until he began to get thrown all over the stage. *"I put forth all my strength,"* he wrote. *"I could not get a grip on him any how. He wriggled out of my reach just as I thought I had made certain."* He could hear the audience shouting encouragement, *"like those distant voices you hear sometimes when you are just on the boundary of dreamland."* He heard the timekeeper shout, *"Three minutes."* After a scramble on the floor he found himself again facing Tani, who stood

there calm and smiling, waiting for him to attack.

"A sudden side pull on his part literally cut my feet from under me. It was a kind of outside stroke deftly applied with the bottom of the foot, and it brought me to the floor with a thud. I struggled like one in a frenzy, but it was no go. The Jap had hold of me in a twinkling and by means of his famous arm lock -- far too well-known to his opponents -- he had me helpless to the mat. It is a strange sensation -- that immediately preceding the moment of yielding. You want to get out, you try to get out, but you can't. You're a prisoner, you are held in a vice, and for anything you can do to prevent it, you might stay there forever and a day. It's a stuffy, humiliating kind of feeling, like being smothered and crushed at one and the same time."

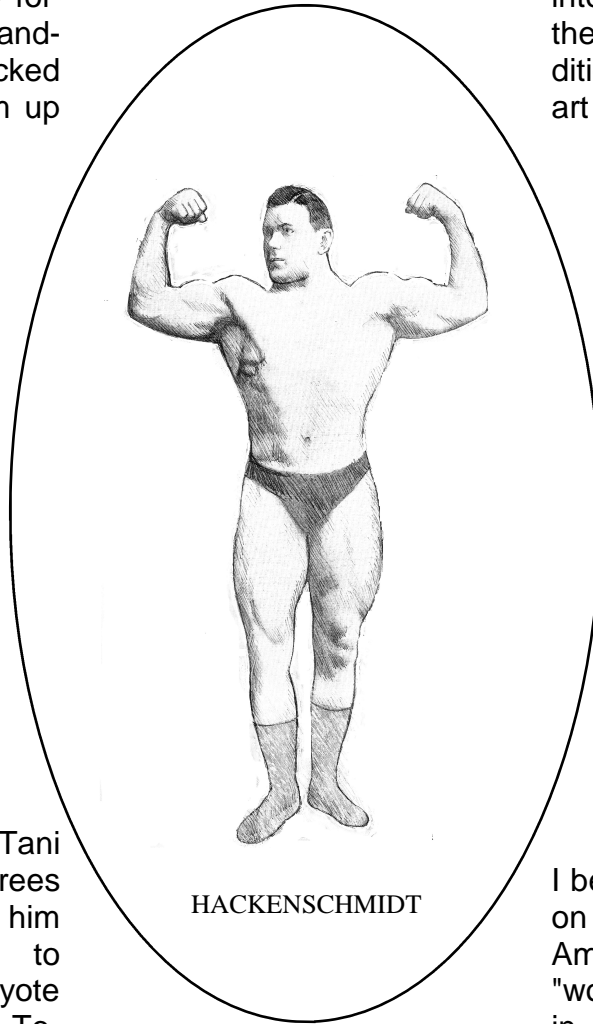
He struggled a little, then tapped out. He had lasted 4 minutes fifty seconds. Some contestants would keep coming back. Sam Croft, for example, was a well-known physical culturist in London who had experience in boxing, wrestling, and weightlifting. He had also trained with Alf Hewitt, who claimed to be the English jujutsu champion at one time. Sam Croft would often enter the informal weightlifting contests organised by professional strongmen at their music hall shows, and although he only weighed around 9 stones (126 pounds), his training often enabled him to win. So

when he saw Yukio Tani at the Canterbury Theatre of Varieties, he put himself forward as a challenger to the Japanese. Two others also accepted the challenge, but all were defeated in less than three minutes each. In fact Croft was beaten inside a minute and a half, so a few weeks later he again faced Tani at the South London Music Hall - and this time lasted 3 minutes 40 seconds. That was some improvement, and then when the two met for the third time at the Paragon, Croft managed to fend off Tani for almost six minutes. Although he suffered a badly torn biceps, *"This was the longest time of Tani's previous appointments, which were some 40 during the week."* Several people (including myself) have written that no one ever won prize money. Not so! The Budokwai's quarterly Judo of July 1950 carried a letter correcting a claim made for Tani by one of his pupils, novelist Shaw Desmond. Mr. George Lorn, from a Liverpool judo club, wrote that: *"There are still living ex-catch wrestlers who took prize money of £5 for lasting three minutes with the deceased champion. One resides in Wigan still who took £25 for lasting five minutes."* That is interesting, although I have problems with the amounts and the times quoted, since they disagree with the printed terms of Tani's challenges. Maybe some of those old-time wrestlers were exaggerating their ex-

ploits. Anyway, Mr. Horn went on to say, *"We in the North, particularly miners, dales and fells men, as catch men find many of the 'chips' and 'hanks' similar throws. A clever catch man of the old school was a delight to watch with his slickness -- Yukio Tani is well remembered 'Up North' for his fighting spirit and well respected."* Going through the old sporting newspapers and magazines you might occasionally find accounts of men staying the fifteen-minute distance with Tani (but not defeating him). A Lancashire lightweight wrestler called Bobbie Bickell went the required distance, as did the Scottish heavyweight Alec Monro. Monro weighed around 15 stone (210 pounds) and was well known as a professional wrestler. He stood up against Tani for fifteen minutes at the Glasgow Coliseum, then dashed over to Kilmarnock on the same night where he also stayed fifteen minutes with another top Japanese, Taro Miyake. Miyake seemed a bit upset about this and challenged Munro to a rematch, undertaking to defeat him in thirty minutes or forfeit £40. (**Health and Strength**, February 6, 1909.) If the rematch did take place, however, it was not reported in later issues of the magazine. Yukio Tani had a lot of success against professional wrestlers, although these bouts might sometimes be rough as the wrestlers tried, not only to win the prize, but

also to save themselves from defeat at the hands of a much smaller foreigner. The rules of fair play might occasionally break down, as they did in Tani's contest against the well-known Tom Connors at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester. Immediately following the customary handshake Connors attacked Tani, intending to lift him up bodily and dash him to the ground with all his strength. Tani however swung out of the hold - - and both men went over into the orchestra pit. As they remounted the stage Connors struck Tani with his fist, a foul for which the audience booed him. When they came to grips again Tani took hold of Connors by the collar of his jacket, brought him down on top of himself and secured a strangle hold. Connors lost his temper and again struck Tani with his fist. The referees were about to disqualify him when he succumbed to Tani's hold. [Probably ryote jime, "two-hand choke".] Total time, 1 minute, 55 seconds. Connors left the stage to a chorus of booing. In its report of the Tani/Miyake match of December 1904, **The Sporting Life** referred to an earlier bout between Tani and wrestler Joe Carroll at the Empress Theatre, Brixton. Tani seems to have lost this one under controversial circumstances: "On that occasion two of his

[Tani's] teeth were sent down his throat, and he walked off the stage and refused to wrestle any more. Joe was asked to meet him the following evening, but, although the Englishman was present, his [Japanese] rival did not



turn up." Nevertheless, Tani's success against wrestlers led him to challenge such famous heavyweights as the Indian, Gama, when he was in London in 1910, and for a period of years, George Hackenschmidt, the biggest name in the turn of the century professional wrestling. In retrospect, the early propagators of jujutsu

in Britain were fortunate in their timing. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Japan had emerged as a major world power and victories in wars with China in 1895 and Russia ten years later aroused international admiration for the "plucky little Jap". In addition, efforts to launch the art coincided with a vogue for physical culture and professional wrestling. This was, in the view of many writers, the golden age of professional wrestling, a period, which lasted from around 1898 to 1913, and the retirement of the then "world" champion Frank Gotch. It was a golden age, in a way, with names that are still remembered today: Hackenschmidt, Zbyszko, Gotch, Gama, Padoubny. But here were probably few genuine contests, or "shoots."

I believe the big tournaments on the Continent and in America were "worked" (prearranged), and in Britain professional wrestling was largely a creature of the music hall and theatre. Still, bearing that in mind, there were some good wrestlers and strong athletes in those days. George Hackenschmidt, the "Russian Lion", was born in Estonia in 1878. He was a terrific natural athlete and strongman who, at an early age, was taken in hand by the famous St. Petersburg authority on

physical culture, Dr. V. von Krajewski. Hackenschmidt won the Russian weightlifting championship in 1898 but by then his interest in wrestling was beginning to take precedence over weightlifting: in the World Weightlifting Championships held in Vienna in 1898 he took third place in weightlifting but first place in the wrestling tournament that took place at the same time. From then on Hackenschmidt embarked on a career as a professional wrestler. The level of interest in wrestling can be gauged by the list of tournaments he entered (and mostly won) during the next few years: 1899 -- Helsinki and Paris 1900 -- Moscow, Dresden, Chemnitz, Budapest, Graz, Nuremburg, and Paris 1901 - - Hamburg, St. Petersburg, Vienna, Stettin, Berlin, Moscow, Munich, and Paris (130 entries) 1902 -- Brussels, Liege, and Namur. In his book, *The Way to Live*, Hackenschmidt recalled the crowd reaction after he won the Budapest tournament: *"Never, while I live, will I forget what then took place. The whole audience rose like one man and thunders of applause echoed through the building. I was seized, carried shoulder high, and decked with flowers. For fully a quarter of an hour I was borne like a victorious general through the streets, kissed, embraced, etc., etc."* Hackenschmidt came to Britain in 1902, and after defeating the top men, established himself as the greatest wres-

tlar of the day. After a couple of years he switched his wrestling from the Greco-Roman (actually French, but the Germans didn't like that name) style used on the Continent, in which no holds below the waist were allowed, to the freer, more versatile British catch-as-catch-can style. The early 1900s were a time of great enthusiasm for wrestling matches in Britain and Hackenschmidt's contests against opponents such as Pierri the Greek and Madrali, "The Terrible Turk" created intense excitement. The sportswriter Norman Clark recalled, *"I don't think it any exaggeration to say that Hackenschmidt's matches with Madrali and others at Olympia and the Albert Hall created popular excitement such as no form of athletic contest has ever surpassed in this country."* In fact, over the years, Hackenschmidt's contests against big-name opponents do not seem to have been all that frequent. His main source of income came from his appearances on the music halls, and like the jujutsu men he would offer prizes to anyone who could stay fifteen minutes with him without being pinned. When he first arrived he appeared at the Tivoli in London and broke the box-office record. As a result his fee was raised to £150 a week, which was really something for an athlete in those days, but the Tivoli audiences soon lost interest in the way he simply overpowered his opponents in two or

three minutes. Hackenschmidt was rather a modest and serious person, not really a flamboyant show business type. But he gradually learned to hold back and add a little showmanship in order not to lose any bookings. And he acquired considerable popularity through his music hall appearances. A challenge to the great Hackenschmidt must have seemed like a natural progression for Yukio Tani. Still, the hand of his manager, William Bankier, can be seen in all this. Bankier was a well-known strongman who appeared under the name Apollo, and in the strongman world of that era, challenges always seemed to be flying about the pages of the sporting papers and physical culture journals. Bankier had a particular bee in his bonnet about Eugen Sandow, the most famous of the old-time strongmen. For example, this appeared in the **Glasgow Evening Times** on March 6, 1899: *Sir, I hereby challenge Sandow to a contest of strength for £100 a side, for which I send £25 now to show business: The contest to consist of weightlifting from the ground, 6 feats each. If Mr. Sandow refuses to meet me on these terms I hereby challenge him to an all round athletic contest consisting of weightlifting, wrestling, running a one-mile race and jumping with 56lb weights, for £100 a side, the winner of three events to be adjudged the conqueror. This is no bombastic chal-*

lenge, but simply a desire to prove to the public that there are better athletes in Britain than ever came from Germany. I hope to hear from Sandow by return -- Yours strongly, Apollo, The Scottish Hercules. Like most other strongman challenges this came to nothing. No matter, what is important is that challenges were a feature of the day, used to whip up publicity, and just as part of a rivalry to secure bookings and to be billed as "The World's Strongest Man" (there were numerous of these), "The World Wrestling Champion", the "World Champion Club Swinger" - the world champion on anything. So, while Tani and Bankier's challenge to Hackenschmidt was thus a publicity ploy, it was also a fairly seriously thought out matter. A hundred pounds was deposited by Bankier with **The Sporting Life** to try and secure a match, and at the conclusion of Hackenschmidt's match with Antonio Pierri in November 1903, both Bankier and Tani jumped on the stage and repeated the challenge in front of a crowd of 3,000 people. Throughout all this Hackenschmidt kept mum. He was making his way as the top man in the game and Yukio Tani was an irritation he could do without. Hackenschmidt probably never believed for a moment that Tani could beat him in any form of contest. But there was always the off chance, no matter how slight, that the "jolly little Jap" could apply

one of his clever oriental tricks and win the contest. And apparently this was a risk that Hackenschmidt was not prepared to take. When he started out, Hackenschmidt was ready to meet anyone in a wrestling match. In fact, he made his name in Britain by jumping on the stage and accepting the challenge of Jack Carkeek, the self-styled "King of Wrestlers," and during the next two or three years he established himself as Britain's top star in pro wrestling. But then he gradually seemed to grow, not soft, but a little complacent and increasingly cautious. In an article published in **Health and Strength** in 1909, responding to questions about his recent lack of competitive matches against other top pros (Frank Gotch and John Lemm in particular), Hackenschmidt wrote: "*You must remember that a match with Lemm, whether I won or lost it, would not yield me any substantial financial profit. In any event I should be compelled to sacrifice several weeks engagements in order to train for the encounter, and by so doing I should lose quite as much money as I shall receive for my share of the purse. In addition to which there would be, of course, my training expenses, to say nothing of the really heavy financial loss I should incur in the event of my being defeated. Quite a number of people seem to fancy that a professional boxer or wrestler should al-*

ways be willing to accommodate any rival who wishes to challenge him, without the slightest regard for his present or future career. They conveniently forget that a professional wrestler or boxer is quite as much a business man as any tradesman or professional in any other calling, whether it be law, medicine, engineering, music or architecture. Wrestling is my business and I have always tried to conduct it in a business-like fashion. I am certainly very fond of the sporting element which enters into it, but should be absurdly careless if I allowed my tastes in that direction to interfere too seriously with my career in life."

So Tani was a bad business risk. Hackenschmidt's reputation and drawing power was based on a long undefeated run of matches. If he met Tani and won, that would represent just another in the series. But if he lost, his reputation would be badly tarnished. Viewed this way, there was no reason why he should step outside wrestling and engage in a mixed style match. It's hard to imagine a man less than 9 stone, however skilled, beating a 15 stone wrestling champion -- and Hackenschmidt was a real powerhouse. The report of the match with the American champion Tom Jenkins in New York in 1905 stated, "*Jenkins was handled like a pigmy in the hands of a giant. Hackenschmidt broke holds as if they were the clutchings of children."*

Yet William Bankier knew the sporting and physical culture world inside out. If he made the challenge, then he must have felt that Tani's technique and knowledge of leverage would nullify Hackenschmidt's tremendous advantages in size and strength. Bankier had trained with Tani, and although a strongman himself he could never get the better of the Japanese. Although Bankier may not always be a reliable witness, in his book **Jujitsu: What It Really Is**, he noted that Tani always kept tricks up his sleeve and never taught the full extent of his knowledge. On one occasion the two men bet "a sumptuous dinner" on whether or not Bankier could last 15 minutes with Tani in a contest. *"The match came off at once," wrote Bankier, "and sad to relate, after all my practise he beat me in exactly three minutes with a hold I had never seen him use. It was then that I found out that he keeps a good deal of knowledge in reserve for emergencies."*

Hackenschmidt did offer twice to wrestle Tani in the Greco-Roman style, but that was ridiculous. If Tani and Bankier managed to arrange a match they would be sure it was under jujutsu rules, with which Hackenschmidt was totally unfamiliar. In the book he wrote in 1909, **The Complete Science of Wrestling**, Hackenschmidt recommended the study of jujutsu trips and throws for all wrestlers. In 1903, however,

when Tani issued his challenge, Hackenschmidt had no knowledge of jujutsu technique and in fact was still wrestling mainly in the Greco-Roman style, a form that requires strength and endurance but is limited in its technical range. (Hackenschmidt only switched fully to the catch-as-catch-can style with his 1905 contest against Tom Jenkins.) Tani, however, had had a lot of success in matches, using his own rules, against wrestlers, some of them top names. Thomas Inch wrote how the well-known Maurice Deriaz tried to win Tani's £25 by staying 15 minutes with him. In some ways Deriaz was a slightly smaller version of Hackenschmidt (5' 4¹/₂" and around 190 lbs. against 5'9" and 210-220 lbs.) and a top wrestler and weightlifter on the Continent. Yet he failed to make the 15 minutes. According to Inch, *"The small Jap won fairly easily and Deriaz put up with some severe punishment before he collapsed, though he lasted very nearly to the time limit."*

So who knows? You could argue either way. You could say that Hackenschmidt's size, strength, and wrestling ability would have been too much for Tani. Over in France the jujutsu teacher Regnier challenged Ivan Padoubny, the Greco-Roman heavyweight-wrestling champion, but found Padoubny's physical advantages just too great. And you can jump forward ninety years and make an argument for Tani on the

basis of Royce Gracie's victories in the early Ultimate Fighting Championship® (UFC) contests. Gracie, you will recall, was the Brazilian jujutsuka who beat much larger opponents, including wrestlers Ken Shamrock and Dan Severn. That's not to say it was always easy. In the Severn match, Severn seemed to dominate the action without, however, having the technique to finish off Gracie. So after a struggle of fifteen minutes Royce was able to apply a sankaku-jime, meaning a triangular leg choke, and make Dan tap out. That defeat was largely due to Severn's lack of experience in submission fighting. Wrestlers seek to establish dominance by pinning their opponent on his back, but that result means absolutely nothing in jujutsu. In fact, it only allows the jujutsu man opportunities to apply locks and strangleholds. So, while Hackenschmidt was a wrestler through and through, it was always possible that he might get caught by one of those moves and be defeated. Well, it was all a very long time ago, and it doesn't matter now. A Tani-Hackenschmidt match would have been a minor sensation, but it never happened. And, a hundred years later the *"Which style is best?"* argument has moved on. Both men were top-class performers and we will just have to leave it at that.

When Gunji Koizumi founded the London judo club known as the Budokwai in January

received individual instruction, which meant that Tani would often be on the mat for four or five hours at a time. In person he was friendly and cheerful, but on the mat he was a strict taskmaster. One of his pupils, Marcus Kaye, wrote: *"Throughout all his instruction there ran a steadfast devotion to the realities of judo, with a corresponding avoidance of anything flashy, unsound, or easy."*

Tani was a man who believed in learning by doing, and students remembered the effects of his throws, particularly his hane-goshi [a spinning hip throw]. But it was in groundwork where his real skill was felt. At Barton-Wright's lecture to the Japan Society of London in 1901, given just after Tani arrived in London, the quality of his groundwork was noted against the much heavier Yamamoto. Richard Bowen, the historian of British judo, picked up an echo of Tani's skill when he did randori with Len Hunt, a veteran British judoka, during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Hunt had started training with Uyenishi's student William Garrud during the 1920s before moving over to Tani and the Budokwai. Dicky Bowen told me that *"Hunt, in his mid-seventies, could even deal with some of the young internationals on the ground -- it was Tani's groundwork. It was astonishing. I mean, I'm a former international and he just tied me in knots when he was in his late sixties or early*

seventies."

We know little about Tani's early training. Apparently his father and grandfather were teachers of jujutsu and he started training at a young age. So this must have been around 1890. Shingo Ohgami told me that Tani trained with Fusen-ryu groundwork specialists Torajiro Tanabe &/or Matauemon Tanabe. This is supported by information in Takao Marushima's Maeda Itsuyo: Conte Koma (1997), where it is said that Matauemon Tanabe was a friend of Tani's father. This is interesting because the latter Tanabe, the fourth headmaster of the Fusen-ryu, features in the early history of Kodokan judo. In the September 1952 edition of Henri Plée's Revue Judo Kodokan, Kainan Shimomura, 8th dan, wrote:

"Encounters between professors of the state were the exception. However, public opinion got so worked up that in January 1891 an inter-group combat took place in which Tobarī (then 3rd dan judo, he died an 8th dan) for the Kodokan opposed Tanabe, expert of the Fusen-ryu school. One must not commit the error of considering the ancient jujutsu as being a priori inferior to modern judo. Straightaway Tanabe sought the combat on the ground, but Tobarī succeeded in remaining standing up. After a fierce fight Tanabe won by a very successful stranglehold on the ground. Tobarī, bitterly disappointed by the de-

feat, began to feverishly study groundwork. The year after, he challenged Tanabe again. This time it was a ground battle and once more Tanabe won. He was now famous and, in the name of the ancient schools, challenged the members of the Kodokan, and even Isogai (then 3rd dan, at the time of his death he was a 10th dan) was put in danger from his ground technique. The Kodokan then concluded that a really competent judoka must possess not only a good standing technique but good ground technique as well. This is the origin of the celebrated 'ne-waza of the Kansai region'. And in conclusion to all this one may very well say that Matauemon Tanabe, too, unconsciously contributed towards the perfecting of the judo of the Kodokan".

So this may go some way towards explaining Tani's skill. All those years on stage must have had an effect, too. In those matches a clean throw was not enough to win: challengers had to be subdued by an arm lock or stranglehold, and moreover Tani always had to work hard against the clock, too. When he practised groundwork with a student his method was to pick a weakness and work on it. Trevor Leggett, the late British Judoka, recalled that his neck was relatively weak when he began his own study of judo. So Tani would take him to the ground and apply a stranglehold, then release it

just as he was about to tap. Leggett would begin to fight back and then the hold would go on again. This was repeated time after time. Leggett wrote (Judo, July 1955):

'No, you're still alive!' he would say. When I thought I was absolutely exhausted he would give up on the necklock theme and come down over my face in a hold-down. It used to drive me nearly frantic but after some years I appreciated the training. I now know instinctively how to get out of a necklock. I can feel the slightest hint of weakness in the attacking method and am also fairly difficult to hold.

As for contests, Leggett continued:

We were told to attack all the time. In one of my early contests at Cambridge I scored quickly with a foot throw. Then we went to the ground, where I got astride. He started to push at my throat with both hands, and I knew I ought to go for the armlock but was afraid of the risk of losing my position. So I clung on for the rest of the time, pretending to try for necklocks. With my one point I won the contest. Mr. Tani wouldn't speak to me after the contest or on the way back to London with the team. But just as we were all separating to go home, he said, 'Coward.' It took me some time to get over that, but it was a good lesson.

How good was Yukio Tani? Percy Longhurst thought his numerous music hall con-

tests didn't amount to much because his opponents were obliged to play by his rules. Longhurst thought this was analogous to novices facing a boxing champion under the Marquis of Queensbury rules. This was true, and not all Tani's opponents were big men, at least by today's standards. At a time when people were generally smaller than they are today, many of the contestants were lightweight, around the 10 stone mark. So in the terms of jujutsu or judo the competitive level was not high. Yukio Tani may have paid the price for that when he faced Taro Miyake at the Tivoli theatre in December 1904 and was repeatedly thrown, although the much heavier Miyake would always have beaten him anyway.

For the record, Tani did win a "World Championship" contest against another Japanese, Katsukuma Higashi. The match took place at Bostock's Hippodrome in Paris on November 30, 1905. Tani was clearly the superior jujutsu man, but the contest ended unsatisfactorily after two minutes when the fighters went to the ground and Tani's foot caught Higashi in the groin. (The latter had to be taken to the hospital.) But it was a meaningless title, and Tani himself probably knew it. Even the **Health and Strength** report of the match (January 1, 1906) noted *"that Tani proved himself to be the better of the two would appear to render the alleged cham-*

pionship at stake to be somewhat of a farcical nature. For there are two other Jap wrestlers now in this country both of whom are admittedly his superiors; and it is more than probable that there are better exponents of the science than any we have seen who have never hitherto quitted their native islands."

In a rather angry letter to **Health and Strength** in 1909, Taro Miyake, a one-time colleague who had fallen out with Tani, wrote that there were "thousands" of judoka in Japan who could defeat him. In the first 1913 edition of the famous book **The Fighting Spirit of Japan** (these lines were deleted from later editions), E.J. Harrison wrote: *"The West already knows what can be done even by second and third rate men. The well known Yukio Tani, for example, who for a long time had everything his own way on the boards in England... had no special standing in Tokyo, where scores of young students might have been found to throw him."*

Tani himself always admitted that there were many in Japan better than he was. In fact, in all the material I have looked at I cannot find any reference to him exaggerating his abilities or boasting about his exploits. If it is any indication, in 1920 when he and Gunji Koizumi affiliated with the Kodokan, Jigoro Kano awarded him a second-dan in judo, but you feel he would have been a really

strong second-dan. His "*Jujutsu World Championship*" in 1905 may not have meant anything, but in 1904 he did beat Jimmy Mellor in a £100 match for the lightweight wrestling championship, catch-as-catch-can style. Mellor was Britain's best lightweight, and claimed the world's championship. So this victory was a terrific performance by Tani, as the newspapers of the time recognised.

The Sporting Life praised "a thoroughly genuine sporting match," and then going on to say, "*The little Jap showed what a wonder he is by beating the Englishman at his own game. Two falls to one was the decision, though the fall given against Tani was questioned by many*".

Probably quite a few of the Japanese who came to Britain to be wrestlers during the early 1900s, men such as Uyenishi, Miyake, Ohno, and Maeda, were better judoka than Tani, yet they never attained his popularity with the public. It's easy to forget, but Tani was only around 5 feet tall and weighed just 9 stones, and when he first arrived in England he was only nineteen years old. Yet almost straightaway he was thrown into the world of music hall challenges. He stayed true to his art, but he also had to make it work in a strange and turbulent environment. So, although other Japanese may have had greater ability, they could never match his impact. And his years on the stage never

made him soft or complacent; he remained a martial artist all the way through. "*One evening I had a slight headache and decided to leave the dojo early,*" Trevor Leggett remembered. "*Mr. Tani noticing me asked what was the matter. I told him and said that I would come on Wednesday, the next practice night. 'If a man comes to rob you on the street,' he said, 'can you say you have a headache and ask him to come back on Wednesday?' I never left early after that.*"

Tani was only in his fifties and still training vigorously when he was crippled by a paralytic stroke. That was in 1936, and for such a man it must have been heartbreaking. But he never seemed to show any self-pity. His days on the mat were over but he still tried to attend the dojo when he could and the well-known judo teacher, Eric Dominy recalled, "*He sat in his chair by the side of the mat and discussed and criticised my judo with me, and encouraged me.*"

Tani also attended the Budokwai annual shows right up to 1949.

This great budoka died on January 24, 1950.

