European Kendō Renmei

Chairman: Count Robert von Sandor
Secretary: Roald M. Knutsen

Please reply to:
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Dear Mr. Odinot,

Very many thanks for your prompt reply to my letter. I hope that I haven't sent you too much material at the beginning, but I thought you ought to have a full picture of the Kendo in Europe at the present time.

A few more points come to mind to possibly assist you. Do you know of the monthly Judo magazine named JUDO which carries a series entitled "Kendo Forum"? This is written, or rather I should say edited, by myself and in this we try to present up to date information covering all the Kendo world so far as we are able to gather information. This is published by Judo Limited, 91 Wellesley Road, Croydon, Surrey, England. I also take for the Renmei two budo newspapers from Japan, mainly devoted to Kendo and allied arts: these are NIHON BUDO and BUDO HYURON (?)(My spelling!) Perhaps Mr. Morioka can assist you in taking these if you feel you would like to. They are both in Japanese language but I am sure that with the assistance of Morioka Sensei you would glean many items of great interest to yourselves.

Kendo here is tremendously active this year and we can boast of four new dojo. These are at Llangollen and Wrexham in North Wales and organised by my colleague Vic Cook, shodan; in the South we have the new Bristol Dojo with some ten students, and the Nenriki Dojo in London which is organised jointly by five yudansha, Messrs. Osaki Shintaro, sandan, Knutsen, sandan, Lidstone, nidan, Self, shodan, and Grey, shodan. The membership here is about thirty but rising rapidly. The active members vary but usually we have around twenty for the one session each week. Already we have had one sandan visitor and this week we expect several high ranking masters who are in this country for filming at Shepperton Studios near London. These include Mr. Tamba who has made many samurai films, eighty, I believe. He is also sandan, though the others are considerably higher.

At my dojo in Brighton, the Butokukan, and the Nenriki Dojo, our summer training this year started in July in preparation for Mr. Arai's visit but has since continued until we have reached the point where very hard training is now normal and special training is something to be 'feared'! But I would say that our Kendo has benefitted from this and all the members above sankyu have tremendously improved all round.

The most influential style in British Kendo at the present time is Mr. Osaki's Ono-ha Itto-ryu as he was trained in this by Mr. Ono Terao, 7th dan Kyoshi, in the Seijudo Dojo in Tokyo. This style is one of 'soft' movement and I, personnally, find it very interesting indeed when applied to my own technique. Mr. Watanabe's style, on the other hand, is that of the famous Waseda University, with strong decisive Kendo, and this would naturally appeal to European Kendoka who tend to like their Kendo hard. But I feel that in Kendo it is not necessary to strike very hard with the sword in order to cut. It is necessary to cut properly. Therefore I teach relaxed movement first and concentrate on good form and waza before permitting the student to use any strength. We have a Kendo saying which states: First the eyes, then the feet, then the spirit, and last of all the strength. This is proper Kendo. Of course, in a highly developed art such as Kendo where there is a tremendously long tradition, there must be many many different ideas and, to tell the truth, no-one is wrong. Any master can say his way is right - and prove it with ease. In this lies the essential of Kendo. It is basically simple but at the same time immensely complex.

I would greatly appreciate some information about your Kendo activities in Holland, as you can guess. If you like I will use this information in JUDO magazine in order to tell people about you. Kendo in Sweden has been active for about eighteen months or so. In Germany and Belgium for about one year. In France I have heard of Kendo over the past eight years but I am of the opinion that this has been chiefly commercial and so we have deliberately avoided active contact; but now I have received a letter from a serious Aikidoka, Mr. Alain Floquet, and he is trying to form a proper Federation in Paris. Our Kendo here has been active for the past nine years. The number of Kendoka here is around three hundred. Rather small, but not too bad when you consider that in the U.S.A. Kendo has been active for fifty years and they still only have some thousand practicing students. In Japan there are probably around a quarter million yudansha.

I would be grateful if you would contact Mr. Jacques Dupont in Brussels who is a very keen and active Kendoka. He is 4th kyu, by the way. I would like to visit Belgium again in the early New Year if I can arrange the time off from my work, and perhaps we can fix for a meeting in Brussels if this is convenient for you? Incidentally, the Brussels dojo is for Aikido and Judo and so the Kendo is conducted on Tatami. You should use a wooden floor as I expect you are aware.

If you have any points or questions you would like to pose please feel free to do so, I welcome active questioning. Points such as clothing, colour differences between ranks, techniques, basic training, and so on.

With sincere good wishes,

Ronald M. Knutsen