

FIK Asian Zone Kendo Referee Seminar in Taiwan, March 2025 Participating Report

Queensland Kendo Renmei

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On the 8th (Sat) and 9th (Sun) of March 2025, the Republic of China Kendo Association hosted an FIK Kendo Asian Zone Referee Seminar in Taiwan at the Taiwan University Martial Arts Gymnasium. The seminar aimed to produce Kendo referees with a high level of Kendo shinai judging skills for the World Kendo Championships and to transfer new changes in judging skills, especially after the COVID pandemic.

There were high-level Kendo-ka from all around Asian countries. From Australia, two 7 dan Kendo-ka participated in this seminar, including myself. The main lecturers were Koda sensei, Yamazaki sensei, and Funatsu sensei from Japan, AJKF. The seminar started soon after a short talk by Ajiro sensei, AJKF president, and the chairperson, Koda sensei's instructions. The group was separated into two groups: one for 7 dan and 8 dan, and the other for under 6 dan participants, using two courts.

The selected Shiai-sha, young competitors, came from Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. The Shinpan trainees formed a shinpan group of three people and did actual judging of the young competitors. Our trainee judges were also evaluated by Koda sensei, the European zone chief judge, and the American zone chief judge.

Yamazaki sensei gave each of us precise advice individually, which was a great help in improving our judging skills.

Through this seminar, I learned the following important points as a Kendo judge:

Shinpan's Position During the Match

Once the Shiai begins, the competitors' movements become quick and dynamic. The most important thing for judges is to follow the competitors' movements and maintain good positions for making correct decisions. Even when moving quickly, the three shinpan must keep an isosceles triangle formation at the starting location where they can see both competitors and the two shinpan-in. Many shinpan trainees received cautions from Yamazaki sensei. Even some 8 dan trainees struggled with correct positioning. I believe positioning is a very basic yet crucial matter for shinpan-in.

Tsubazeriai

The Shiai-sha's Tsubazeriai position is very important, and the Shinpan must recognize the correct position; otherwise, the Shiai-sha must call Hansoku during the match. The Tsubazeriai time is around 3 seconds, and the shinpan-in must check the following three points: (1) Are the

Shiai-sha engaged in correct Tsubazeriai? (2) Do they demonstrate intent to strike? (3) Do they demonstrate the will to separate?

Hiki-waza Judging

During separation from Tsubazeriai, judges must check whether the Shiai-sha either proactively execute a waza or seek to break away from the tussle within 3 seconds. Proactive execution of a Hiki-waza by the Shiai-sha will prevent Tsubazeriai Hansoku. Therefore, judges must carefully determine Hiki-waza points from Tsubazeriai.

Judging Against Ni-To or Jodan Position

The important standing position for judges is to form an isosceles triangle with narrow base. Therefore, Fukushin's positioning is important which allows them to see Jodan or Nito competitors' Tsuki-bu. Fukushin's standing positioning of an isosceles triangle is the key point against Jodan or Ni-To matches.

Hansoku

To maintain good Tsubazeriai during the match, shinpan-in should carefully assess whether competitors are correctly engaging with each other. The Hansoku action from disengaging Tsubazeriai should take into account the following actions: Whether there are any improper actions during the process of resolving Tsubazeriai. Striking action while pretending to retreat. Placing the shinai on the opponent's shoulder deliberately. Actions involving slapping (harau), binding (maku), holding down, or hooking the shinai. Actions involving opening or lowering the shinai. Actions including intentionally bending or twisting the body. And other actions deemed inappropriate.

I'll attach the new revised copy of the Handbook for Kendo Shiai and Shinpan Management used in the seminar.

All Japan Kendo Federation

Handbook for Kendo Shiai and Shinpan Management (Revised September 1, 2024)

- Fundamental Points of Consideration for *Shinpan* -

III. Interpretation and Application of the Regulations

● pp. 9-10 About *Tsubazeriai*

Tsubazeriai represents the closest and tensest point between two opponents when they enter a close-quarters tussle with *tsuba* joined together. *Tsubazeriai* arises from attack and defense amid striking action.

When *tsubazeriai* is entered, *shiai-sha* must either proactively execute a *waza*, or seek to break away from the tussle. Notwithstanding, *shinpan-in* must make a comprehensive judgment based on the following points if *tsubazeriai* continues for a protracted period (one breath - about 3 seconds or more):

- (1) Are the *shiai-sha* engaged in correct *tsubazeriai*?
- (2) Do they demonstrate intent to strike?
- (3) Do they demonstrate the will to separate?

The above rulings and procedure are normally summarized as follows:

- Explanation of Common Cases -

I. *Shiai*

● P.23 (Case 7)

In the context of *nito*, single-handed, or one-handed *jodan*, would it be considered as *hansoku* if *shiai-sha* grips close to the *tsubamoto* (base of the *tsuba*) of the *daito* to hide his/her *kote*?

(Explanation)

- ③ Ideally, the grip on the *tsuka* should be close to the *tsukagashira*. However, determining whether this constitutes a *hansoku* can be challenging and potentially controversial if judged solely based on the grip position. Therefore, if a *shiai-sha* grips their *shinai* near the *tsubamoto* and adopts an excessively defensive or unsightly posture, it will be considered a *hansoku* under Article 1 of the Regulations, following a *gogi*.
- ④ Gripping the *tsubamoto* during close engagement such as *tsubazeriai* is not considered to be particularly problematic when taking into account sword usage (*toho*) and *maai*.

- Explanation of Common Cases -

I. *Shinpan*

● P.30 (Case 5)

The time taken to cease *tsubazeriai* should be approximately "one breath (about 3 seconds)". At what point should the *shinpan-in* determine that *tsubazeriai* has begun, and how should they determine *tsubazeriai* is resolved?

(Explanation)

- ① *Tsubazeriai* refers to a situation where both *tsuba* are in a competitive position. However, the *shinpan-in* should recognize the beginning of *tsubazeriai* when both competitors are at close range without engaging in attack or defense, even if their *tsuba* are not physically pressed together.

- ② The cessation *tsubazeriai* refers to 'Case 8' of 'I Shiai 2. Various Prohibited Acts'. It is essential for *shinpan-in* to closely observe the process of cessation. During the *shiai*, separation must be actively pursued until both *kensen* are completely disengaged. *Shiai-sha* should take *chudan-no-kamae* at a distance from where an immediate strike cannot be made.

● P.31 (Case 8)

What should *shinpan-in* keep in mind when determining the *tsubazeriai* cessation process?

(Explanation)

- ① The *shinpan-in* should carefully assess whether a competitor is engaging in proper *tsubazeriai* and whether they actively and swiftly disengage from *tsubazeriai* by utilizing the competitive force between the *tsuba*. This judgment should take into account the competitor's age, skill level, and overall proficiency.
- Whether there are any improper actions during the process of resolving *tsubazeriai*.
 - Striking action while pretending to retreat.
 - If the *shiai-sha* places deliberately their *shinai* on the opponent's shoulder.
 - Actions that involve slapping (*harau*), binding (*maku*), holding down, or hooking the *shinai*.
 - Actions that involve opening or lowering the *shinai*.
 - Actions that include intentionally bending or twisting the body.
 - Other actions that are deemed to be inappropriate.
 - If there are clearly improper actions during the process of ceasing *tsubazeriai*, *hansoku* will be applied based on *gogi*. In ambiguous cases, *shinpan-in* can call for *gogi* and decide to issue a *hansoku* to the *shiai-sha* if such actions occur more than twice.