



# UNITED STATES JUDO ASSOCIATION

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***For Immediate Release***

***January 22, 2011***

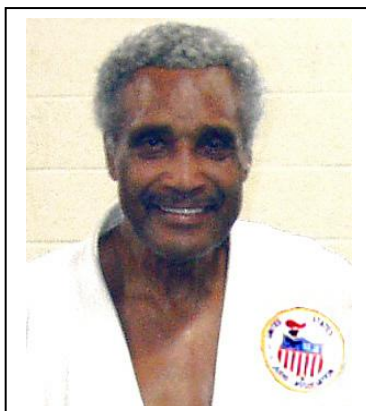
I am pleased to announce that the United States Judo Association has promoted George Lee Harris to Judan (10<sup>th</sup> Degree Black Belt) effective January 15, 2011, which would have been his 78<sup>th</sup> birthday. This honor was approved unanimously by both the USJA's Promotion Board and Board of Directors. Mr. Harris passed away on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011. This is the first recognized 10<sup>th</sup> dan promotion by one of the 3 major judo organizations in the United States.

Sid Kelly, the Chairman of the USJA's Promotion Board stated, "Mr. Harris placed 5<sup>th</sup> in the 1956 World Championships, won six Air Force judo championships, four US National titles, two Gold Medals in the Pan American Games, and represented the United States in the 1964 Olympics. After his retirement from competition, Mr. Harris became a goodwill ambassador for judo." He was one of the leaders of the Armed Forces Judo Association (AFJA) that became the United States Judo Association (USJA) which he and several others founded in 1968. Mr. Harris served as one of our early presidents and chaired our promotion board for several decades.

In addition, Mr. Kelly said, "Mr. Harris was one of the founders of the YMCA International Judo Camp which is now in its 39<sup>th</sup> year. He also has assisted the directors of the AM-CAN International Judo Challenge every year since its inception. Mr. Harris is known not only in the United States but in many other countries for his judo accolades and his service to judo. For this he was one of the first in the United States to be promoted to Kudan, 9th Degree Black Belt on October 24th 1997."

A formal presentation and tribute to Mr. Harris will be held during the opening ceremonies at this year's Joint USJA/USJF Junior Nationals on July 2<sup>nd</sup> in Toledo, Ohio. For further information please visit our website [usja-judo.org](http://usja-judo.org).

Thank you,

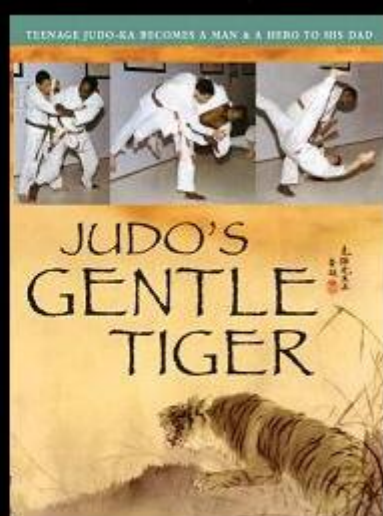


## George Harris Mourned

George Lee Harris passed away Friday January 7, 2011 and was laid to rest on January 14, a day prior to his 78<sup>th</sup> birthday. He will be remembered as an American judo icon and one of the USJA's most beloved founding fathers. The family requests donations be directed to the [Disabled American Veterans](#) (DAV) in the memory of George.

## [Judo's Gentle Tiger - DVD](#)

This feature film is quite possibly the forerunner of the KARATE KID it was shot in the late 1970's and tells a story of a young boy who studies Judo to find himself. The young boy who is Japanese is training in Judo and becomes a champion not just on the mat but also in life as his teacher Judo's legendary George Harris (1964 Olympian) teaches him not just the art and science of Judo the Gentle way but also the art of happiness and his teaching of the phrase Shabummi to his students makes the difference. The boy who was born to a Japanese mother and an American father finds himself living with his father who has no appreciation for the Martial arts and only understands the language of money. Without giving away the story the father in the end comes full circle and his son becomes a hero to the father as he teaches his father the true meaning of life thru his martial arts.



## **The following is announcement on George Harris from the IJF January 8, 2011**

It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of American judo legend George Harris 9th Dan. The genial and gentle giant Harris had fought a long battle with cancer and died peacefully in the arms of his wife. George Lee Harris was born in the tiny village of Kittrell, North Carolina on 15 January 1933. By 1952 Harris had moved north to Philadelphia and the Korean War was at its height. Harris showed an early taste for combat activities and was an amateur boxer from the age of 12, continuing through high school. Yet, despite the knowledge that many of his high school friends had been killed or were missing in action he joined the US Air Force. Harris was sent to Travis Air Force Base in California for medical combat training.

It was here that he was offered an introduction to judo by Lt. Philip S. Porter Jr., USAF who brought George to a judo class taught by Walter Todd, Chief Civilian Combatives Instructor, Physical Conditioning Unit, Strategic Air Command. In 1954 a 10-man AAU-Air Force team visited six Japanese cities to compete in 16 contests. Harris was a successful member of this team and reportedly won all of his 16 contests. In 1956 Harris, by then a 2nd Dan, took third place in the heavyweight division at the national AAU Judo Tournament at Seattle. After winning the US National Championships in 1957 and '58 Harris was transferred from his original Air Force responsibilities to the Physical Conditioning Unit (PCU) where he was able to concentrate on learning judo, karate, aikido, and jiu jitsu. His new role was to maintain the fitness levels of Air Force flying personnel and, in the Strategic Air Command, teach hand-to-hand combat to bomb crews.

Over a period of ten years Harris would spend many months in Japan training at the Kodokan and, when not training in Japan, the Air Force sent Harris to compete throughout Europe and South America. In 1958 Harris won the 3rd Dan category at the Pan-American Judo Championships held in Rio de Janeiro. Later that year, Harris represented the U.S. at the 2nd World Championships in Tokyo where he placed 5th losing to eventual gold medalist Sone of Japan. After his efforts in Tokyo Harris was promoted to 4th Dan. He competed at the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo when judo made its Olympic debut. Harris, an African-American, competed alongside teammates Jim Bregman, who was Jewish, Ben Nighthorse Campbell, a Native American, and Paul Maruyama, a Japanese American.

In 1968 Harris, along with fellow Armed Forces Judo Association (AFJA) leaders George Bass, Robey Reed, Jim Bregman, Phil Porter, Rick Mertins, and Karl Geis, attended a meeting in Chicago that saw the founding of the United States Judo Association (USJA). Widely regarded as an honest and upright figure in US judo, Harris came from a family where his father and all uncles had all died before the age of 50. Harris was only a few days short of his 78th birthday. He was the father of three daughters, all college graduates, of whom he was immensely and understandably proud. In 2000 Rebecca Barnett interviewed him for an article later published in *The Masters, Judo for Adults*. "Everything that happens in life shapes your values and whether you'll be an honorable person. I've tried to be a good person, to touch other people's lives, to impact them to live honorably" said Harris.

*Sheldon Franco-Rooks, IJF Media Team*

## George Harris, 77, judo great

Posted on Wed, Jan. 12, 2011

By Elliott Denman  
For The Inquirer

BRICK TOWNSHIP, N.J. - "America is not like a blanket: one piece of unbroken cloth, the same color, the same texture, the same size. America is more like a quilt: many patches, many pieces, many colors, many sizes, all woven and held together by a common thread."

Jesse Jackson declared that in 1984 as he formulated his Rainbow Coalition. However, for four United States Olympic athletes - George Harris, Jim Bregman, Ben Nighthorse Campbell, and Paul Maruyama – that concept was decades old.

On Friday, Mr. Harris, a resident of Brick Township, N.J., died of leukemia, eight days before his 78th birthday.

Mr. Harris was an African American who grew up in Philadelphia. Bregman is a Jewish American from Virginia. Campbell is a Native American of the Cheyenne tribe from Colorado, and Maruyama was a Japanese American from California.

They were America's "Rainbow Team" in the sport of judo at the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo.

Long a Japanese specialty, judo went global by the mid-1960s and was added to the '64 Games at the urging of the Japanese hosts, who went on to win three gold medals and one silver in the four weight classes.

The "Rainbow Team" was like a brotherhood. They shared the camaraderie of their pioneering Olympic mission, and they remained a tight fraternity in the 46 ensuing years.

To International Judo Federation spokesman Sheldon Franco-Rooks, Mr. Harris was "an American judo legend, a genial and gentle giant."

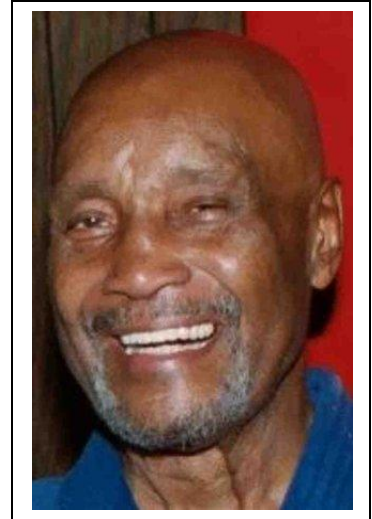
Just a handful of men have ever reached international 10th-degree black-belt status in judo. As a ninth-degree black belt, Mr. Harris was the highest-ranking American in judo history.

Mr. Harris already was a young veteran of the judo wars when he got to the Tokyo Olympics. Born in North Carolina, he moved to Philadelphia at an early age. An amateur boxer as a teenager, he enlisted in the Air Force after high school.

Judo was a skill required of all Strategic Air Command personnel. At Travis Air Force Base in California, Mr. Harris learned judo and taught it to other airmen.

"Every year for 10 years, I spent four to six months training in Japan at the Kodokan," Mr. Harris said in an interview last year. Kodokan is Japan's leading judo institute. "The Air Force would send over 26 men at a time."

Mr. Harris went on to win six Air Force judo championships, four U.S. national titles, and two Pan American Games gold medals.



George Harris was on the first U.S. Olympic judo team.

Competing in the heavyweight division at the Tokyo Olympic Games, Mr. Harris won his first-round bout over a British rival but bowed out in a second-round loss to a Russian who went on to win the bronze medal.

It was one of the few major disappointments in Mr. Harris' long competitive career.

"I was totally inspired by watching George Harris at the top of his game. He was the best there was at what he did," said Bregman, the only American judoka to medal in Tokyo, taking a historic bronze in the middleweight class. "I learned so much of the technical aspect of the sport from George. I owed so much to him. And in his later years, he became a renowned teacher of judo and an international spokesman for the sport. George was respected everywhere."

"George Harris was like a superman," said Campbell, who competed in the open division at Tokyo and went on to a career in politics as a three-term U.S. representative and two-term U.S. senator from Colorado. "We traveled the world together," Campbell said. "We had so many wonderful experiences. And the biggest thing he taught me was never to give up, something I took with me in everything I ever did."

Mr. Harris starred in the late-1970s martial-arts film, *The Year of the Gentle Tiger*, a forerunner to *The Karate Kid*.

"In Japanese, judo is 'the gentle way,' " said Jesse Goldstein of Toms River, N.J., a former U.S. heavyweight champion. He and Mr. Harris taught judo at Ocean County YMCA and at many schools and academies.

"George Harris was truly a gentleman," Goldstein said. "No one I ever met spoke badly of George. Everybody looked up to George, the Japanese, the Brazilians, the British, the Dutch, everybody."

"I loved the man. That's why I named my fourth son after him. Jacob Harrison Goldstein."

Mr. Harris is survived by his wife, Janice Conner Harris, and three daughters. Funeral arrangements were pending.

