

The Shinai Express

Issue 3 – June 2025

Editorial

By Clem Guo, NZ Kendo Team Men's Coach

16th WKC in Japan 2015

My first WKC was in Japan 2015, and I joined some great (and super strong) seniors in Blake, Walter, Ramon, and David, as well as the younger cohort, in Walt, Jordon, Nick, and Masa as our apprentice.



Left to right standing: Sue Lytollis, Naoko Stephenson, Bruce Middleton, David Wong, Ramon Plamer, Clem Guo, Walt Kim, Alex Bennett, Nick Robertson, Blake Bennett, Jordan TeWharau, Alan Stephenson, Walter McCahon

Left to right kneeling: Masa Matsunami, Akiyo Yamaguchi Ellin, Irvina Fernandes (Team Physio)

We lived near and trained daily at Kansai University and even trained with Panasonic in our build-up thanks to Alex Bennett's connections. The WKC was held at the famous Nippon Budokan, and one of the key highlights I remembered was watching the intensity of the NZ and Great Britain in the team pool matches. We fought to a draw, but advanced because of our wins /points against the Czech Republic. *It taught me the value of an ippon and fighting for something greater than your own match.*

17th WKC in Korea (2018)

Fast-forward three years and I was now training for the 17th WKC in Korea. My time in Japan had no doubt helped me improve my preparation and focus this time round. We also had a great men's team, led by Blake as our men's coach and Walter as our captain, alongside Thomas, Walt, Jiwon, Nick, Jordan, Masa, and Kai as our

apprentice. We trained in Japan in preparation as well and managed to safely travel to Korea after a typhoon scare (thank you to Bruce for saving us!).

In our team match, we faced Japan, Latvia, and Romania. We bested Latvia and Romania but came up short with Japan. It was a surreal moment to be fighting Japan's best. Although we did not progress, I learned that *every 'big moment' – whether it is a local competition or the WKC – builds character and helps you become stronger for the next challenge.*

19th WKC in Italy (2024)

The last WKC in Italy was held 6 years after Korea due to COVID. I found myself (suddenly) the oldest, the captain and I felt the responsibility to lead the best I could, in the same way those before me had done so in 2015 and 2018. Thankfully, I had some remarkable teammates to count on in Masa, Kai, Max, Zac, Pavel, Zach, and Ren, who each brought new energy and determination. Surely, this had to be one of the youngest NZ teams on record?

We faced a lot of disruption to our preparation due to COVID. In fact, our arrival into Milan was the first time the whole NZ team were together. But we made the best of every chance we got to train, whether this was battling giant mozzies in the carpark doing suburi, doing shiai simulations, or even meditating in Alex's room (silent and in the dark) to strengthen our mental fortitude.



Left to right back: Oscar Xing, Alex Bennett, Alan Stephenson, Zach Pen, Rina Kobayashi, Yoko Maruyama

Left to right front: Kai Edwards, Masa, Clem Guo, Zac Chai, Max Lee, Pawel Szymonczyk, Ren Sayer

We fought hard in our matches against tough opponents. Our team pool had Bulgaria, Austria, and Australia. Despite our best efforts, we did not get the result we wanted to progress. But I saw that day the potential for our team to rise stronger for the next occasion and I hope we carry that sense of desire to the next and future campaigns.

Lastly, it was not all kubun-geiko, we also got to sightsee and bond as a team! So great to share those memories with you!

Upcoming News and Events

- a) **Australian Iaido Seminar** – Several Iaidosha are planning on attending and grading at the Australian National Champs in coming months, we wish them well
- b) **Waikato Seminar Eiga and Morioka 15th-17th August** – If you have not seen the advertising for this you are clearly in a big deep hole with no wifi. If you have not registered, you may need to find out if they still have spaces, this is a premier event in the second half of 2025.
- c) **Rembuden Taikai** – a premier shiai event is happening on 13th-14th September – moved from the usual October dates so as not to clash with the World of Wearable Arts. This makes it cheaper for Kenshi to attend, so please get your club teams, travel and accommodation sorted and register when the forms are sent out.
- d) **2026 NZ Nationals and Hero Event for 50th Anniversary** – some of you were clearly not born 50 years ago but in 1976, when flares and flower power were at their height, the New Zealand Kendo Federation was born. To celebrate this austere event, there will be a special dinner celebration held at the NZ National Kendo Championships in 2026. Yoshinkan Dojo in Wellington will host this event over the Kings Birthday weekend (30th June-2nd July 2026).
- e) **The 50th 2025 International Kendo Leader's Seminar** – unusually, the AJKF has announced a second leadership seminar for 2025 (read Rina's April experience in this edition). The 50th event will be held from 17th-24th October in Chiba, Japan. Open to 3rd -6th dan Kenshi who play an important role in their dojo. Please consider applying as there will be another in 2026 as well. Please write something about yourself, what you do for your club/NZ Kendo etc and please get this to secretary@kendo.org.nz by the end of June.

Kyū Grade Guidelines

The NZKF Technical Advisory Committee has responded to requests from clubs for Kyū grading guidelines. These guidelines have been drawn up and will be held on Hello Club, a new score sheet has been made to accompany this update. This syllabus has been tested by two dojo in April and May and found to be very useful in assisting in decision making. While this is a guideline, when clubs join to offer a combined grading, it is recommended that these guidelines are adhered to. If there are NZKF sanctioned gradings from 3rd – 1st Kyū, these will be the guidelines used. So please upskill on Bokuto Keiko and if your club would like any assistance in learning more about it, please approach secretary@kendo.org.nz and we will see which Sensei might be able to travel to your region to hold a short seminar for your instructors/members. See Alex's article below regarding the details.

Why the NZKF Needs a Standardised Kyū Examination Format

By Alex Bennett, Technical Committee

As someone deeply involved in New Zealand Kendo, I firmly believe it's time for our federation to adopt a standardised format for Kyū grade examinations. Currently,

grading methods vary greatly between regions and individual dojo, leading to confusion and inconsistency. A standard system would significantly improve fairness and clarity in how students are assessed, ensuring everyone meets the same technical expectations.

When Kyū rankings are consistent and comparable nationwide, practitioners can have greater confidence in their achievements. Instructors would also benefit from clear, structured guidelines for teaching and evaluating their students. Additionally, examiners would benefit greatly, as we currently often find ourselves improvising without a clear, formal structure to guide our assessments. This approach would undoubtedly enhance the overall quality of Kendo training throughout New Zealand.

In my view, the *Bokutō ni yoru Kendō Kihon-waza Keiko-hō* (let's just call it BKH!) provides the ideal foundation for creating a unified examination system. In fact, I strongly believe BKH should already be a regular part of any dojo's training regime, regardless of grading considerations. These structured drills clearly outline essential techniques, proper posture, and principles of attack and defence. Implementing this method would ensure students nationwide develop a consistent understanding of fundamental techniques, resulting in clearer, more objective evaluations.

Additionally, this system is officially recognized by various prefectural organisations in the AJKF, meaning adopting it would align New Zealand's grading standards with international norms. In my opinion, embracing this approach would significantly improve the technical proficiency and credibility of Kendo across the country, ultimately fostering stronger growth and development of the art. The proposed content for a Kyū examination, as outlined below, has already been successfully trialled at various events in the South Island. Although it can certainly be adjusted and refined further depending on dojo circumstances, the general framework appears to be working effectively. What do you think?

Kyū Grade	Requirements	Notes
10 th -7 th Kyū	BKH 1 & 2	Both sides. <i>Tsuki</i> is also included in Kihon 1, but children under the age of 12 do not need to learn it.
6	BKH 1, 2, 3	Both sides.
5	BKH 1, 2, 3, 4	Both sides.
4	BKH 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Both sides.
3	BKH 1-9	Both sides.
2	BKH 1-9 Bōgu (<i>uchikaeshi</i> , <i>men</i> x 3, <i>kote</i> x 3, <i>dō</i> x 3, <i>jigeiko</i>)	Both sides.
1	BKH 1-9 Bōgu (<i>uchikaeshi</i> , <i>men</i> x 3, <i>kote</i> x 3, <i>dō</i> x 3, <i>jigeiko</i>) Kata 1-3	Both sides. Both sides.

The 1st Asia Oceania Kendo Championships

By Blake Bennett, NZ National Kendo Coach

As National Coach, I would like to update you on a significant proposal from the All Japan Kendo Federation (AJKF) that could reshape the competitive landscape for our region in coming years. The AJKF is preparing to host the inaugural Asia Oceania Kendo Championships (1AOKC) in Tokyo, tentatively scheduled for late May or early June 2026.

We are hearing that this event is part of a broader move to establish an Asia Oceania Kendo Federation. The goal is to fulfil international sport governance criteria, and it offers our kendo athletes an exciting new international opportunity in addition to the World Championships.

So what's on the table?

A draft program includes team and individual divisions (including an under-3-dan category), kata and Iaido demonstrations, and high-level 8-dan shiai. This is a well-rounded format aimed at showcasing the depth and diversity of kendo in our region. It is also subject to some change! A meeting of delegates from invited countries (including NZKF) will take place in July to discuss further, and updates will be provided as information comes to hand.

That said, participation comes with costs — both financial and strategic. At this stage, the baseline international plan for the NZ Kendo Wolves is to attend the 2026 Trans-Tasman Taikai (Sydney, TBC) and the 2027 World Kendo Championships. If funding permits, the 2027 Hong Kong Asia Open is also a strong contender. At this stage, events like the 1AOKC are being considered as 'expression of interest (EOI)' invitations. EOIs will be open to individuals willing and able to self-fund travel (in the case of Wolf Pack members, this self-funded attendance would be in addition to the other international events mentioned above as well as domestic kendo travel).

We've already submitted a formal response to the AJKF's questionnaire (the deadline was tight!), and reported on this event to the Coach and Talent Development (CTD) Group in early May. We would still like to hear from people, though: Does this type of event represent a meaningful opportunity for growth, or should our energy stay focused elsewhere? Your insight will help shape how we approach emerging events like this in the future.

If you have thoughts to share — especially around athlete interest, financial viability, or long-term strategy — please get in touch.

Jodo in Whangaparoa

By Lionel and Mayumi Hutton

Jodo is the art of the short staff, or Jo. The history of Jodo is well documented. Briefly, the system was founded approximately 400 years ago by Muso Gonnosuke, who was famous for his duels with Miyamoto Musashi. History also relates that Gonnosuke went to meditate at Mt Homanzan, in modern day Dazaifu. To this day Jodoka meet for a monthly practice at the temple at the base of Mt Homanzan, Kamado Jinja.

Today, under the umbrella of ZNKR, Seitei Jodo is practiced around the world, as is also the lesser known Koryu system, Shinto Muso Ryu. In the early 2000's Mayumi and I, and our two young daughters were living in Fukuoka, Japan. I had practiced Karate in my 20's and thought I would like to try a traditional Budo art. After much searching and infinite patience and help from Mayumi, I found a Jodo Dojo in central Fukuoka city.

We both joined in 2008 and have continued our practice when we returned to New Zealand in 2013. We have a Dojo on the Hibiscus Coast, just north of Auckland, and we have recently been accepted into the NZKF as a provisional dojo.

Jodo practice consists of:

- Tandoku Dosa, individual practice of basic techniques
- Sotai Dosa, paired practice of the same basic techniques and
- Kata. There are 12 Seitei Jo Kata.

You are all very welcome to visit and try out.

Largest Iaido Event in NZ ever, hosted by Kaneda Sensei

By Brent Hansen

Twenty-seven Iaido members from Wellington, New Plymouth, Whangarei and Auckland, met for a challenging but very enjoyable two days in April for the National Iaido Seminar. This was the largest Iaido event to be held so far within NZ for Iaido and a real credit to all who attended.

On the first day everyone was guided through the changes in the standard Iaido Kata under the AJKF (Seitei). Seitei is mainly used for gradings and shiai so it's important everyone was updated on the new key points. Sensei explained why the changes had been made and gave a very clear reasoning for it.

Sunday was all about 'Muso Shinden Ryu' traditional Kata that was formed from 3 sets of Kata into one, and Sensei is a direct link to Nakayama Hakudo Sensei the man who created them. Muso Shinden Ryu second set was covered by Sensei to the 4th Dans and above, again a real challenge that had us all struggling. But to learn the Kata and understand why they were formulated was fantastic for participants.

Looking at the passion within the Dojo over the weekend it's clear to see that Iaido is not only growing within the NZKF but also heading soundly in the right direction.

49th International Kendo Leaders Seminar

By Rina Kobayashi, NZ Kendo Team Women's Coach

In March 2025, I had the honour of attending the International Kendo Leadership Seminar in Katsura, Japan, as a representative of the New Zealand Kendo Federation. The seminar brought together 47 participants—14 women and 33 men—from 47 countries. As one of only four female Kendoka among the 17 participants in the 5th dan group, the experience felt especially meaningful to me, both personally and in terms of representation and leadership.

Through continued study, both theoretical and physical, my understanding of Kendo deepened significantly. This allowed me to anticipate and understand the intent behind the teachings of higher-ranked sensei, and break down and explain those concepts to others. This reflected not only my growth, but also the depth of my knowledge and commitment to Kendo. These moments helped me strengthen my mentoring abilities and reinforced my commitment to fostering the next generation of Kenshi in New Zealand.

We participated in a shinpan seminar each day. On the final day, I was honoured to receive the best referee award among all 47 participants - one of the proudest moments in my Kendo journey (I was relieved to see that Alex Sensei seemed proud of me too!). This recognition not only validated my shinpan skills but also reinforced the importance of fairness, precision, spirit in Kendo, and the importance of believing in myself!

Lastly, I am sincerely grateful to the New Zealand Kendo Federation for giving me this incredible opportunity. Without their support, I would not have been able to learn and grow as much as I did. This seminar has profoundly enriched my Kendo journey, and I'm committed to applying these lessons to support and uplift our community.



My Journey to Godan

Rayon McKenzie, Instructor, Shoshin Kendo Club

I had been eligible for Godan for a while, waiting in Nelson for the right time. Constantly considering external factors was burdensome. I always had my eye on it. I just wasn't sure when the planets would align for me. The only thing I could do was to do my best with the Shoshin Kendo Club.

In November 2024, my journey to Godan unexpectedly ramped up. I was in Dunedin attending trainings with Alan Stephenson Sensei and the Otago Kendo Club. Coming from a small city with limited opportunities to train with high calibre sensei, it was a blessing to get valuable and dedicated time with one. This is when he decided that I would attempt Godan. I didn't need the planets to align; I just needed Alan Sensei!

I plotted a course from my first training back home to grading day. December and January were difficult months. Most of our members were occupied with school events, holidays, and golden beaches, and our Dojo would be unavailable for an extended period. Before the Christmas break, what I think I might have concentrated on was to stick to what Alan sensei had taught. When I erred, I heard his voice etched in my head, “What are you doing, mate?” If I went John Rambo (Google the name kids), I would imagine a confused look on his face as he would say, “Calm down, be tidy, stick to what you know.” Once the break hit, I had no Dojo. The substitute was an abundance of suburi, kata, fantasy jitsugi and plenty of fitness training. Once back into the Dojo, I was physically ready and mentally semi-stable. Most of the time I only had one or two people to do Keiko with, Azusa and Junko. I thought, maybe I needed to train with other men, but as they beat me from pillar to post, I realised I was wrong. These ladies were exactly what was required.

The weekend of the grading finally arrived. The seminar went well. I received mixed feedback after jigeiko and mawari-geiko with the sensei. I had to make everything make sense in a short space. I had to improve. Maybe I did, probably not to gold medal standard, but I was extremely conscious of the effort I had to put in. It felt like there must have been a million people at the grading. I got anxious and excited at the same time while watching everyone going before me. It was difficult to stay grounded. My first jitsugi started with an ai-men, not too rushed, natural, like it happened by itself. My partner and I were compatible, we made a connection and I felt we both created some nice moments without disrupting each other's Kendo.

The second jitsugi also felt positive. My most vivid recollection is of my last strike. Alan Sensei talked about creating opportunities. If your partner is stationary, this is your time, make him move. I offered opportunities, where's his mind, some into the danger zone, I moved my shinai, he reacted to that, there it was, KOTE, MEN, full noise, zanshin into chudan no kamae. That felt nice and smooth, going with the flow of what was created.

Kata came and went like a thunderstorm. I made a mistake, disappointing. I had to suck it up and keep on trucking. What's done is done. Finally, the results of the grading were announced. It took an eternity to get to the Godan group. When they called out my number I looked down to confirm what was on my tare. “Yep, that's me? What a great feeling! The ‘hills really were alive with the sound of music’, peace finally reigned in Lego Land, and now I could eat. I was very close to starvation! Happy and hungry, what a confusing state for the mind and body to be in.

Thank you to everybody for helping me get to this stage. I'm grateful beyond words. I can only bow my head and say, “arigatou gozaimashita.”

The ‘Not the Summer Kendo Camp’ – A Yoshinkan Beginner's Experience *by Rain (Yuxiao Ming)*

It is only when some days become the past that we come to comprehend their meaning to us. As I now look back on the “not-the-summer-camp” from three months ago, its beauty and meaning begin to unfold.

Two weeks before the camp started, I had just gotten my first *nafuda* - a small front line with *Yōshinkan*, followed by larger characters: my name, Rain - which at the time simply meant no longer being anonymous. Two weeks later, with lingering excitement from this name recognition, we were on our journey to Paekākāriki Holiday Park, where the camp would take place over two days and two nights. That night, as I arrived at the dinner table surrounded by everyone in their casual forms, I stepped into a conversation where one senpai was commenting on the stunning sunset along a stretch of beach, a scene that happened to be captured not only in mine but also in several others' phones. I soon realized it was a moment when individual paths began to overlap. The camp, therefore, had already begun long before the formal first day. It had begun at the dinner table, the night we stepped back from our own lives, ready to begin writing a story we would share.

At 6:45 am the next morning, ambitious *kenshi* were already heading to the beach in the chill darkness. As sunlight blossomed from thin fog, we had completed hundreds of voluntary *suburi*, accompanied by gentle morning waves. When the park had filled with the stirrings of others waking from their drowsiness, we were having our first family breakfast, sunny eggs sizzling expertly from one senpai, an urgent request from another senpai for a bread knife that surely well-deserved by their fancy bread, and most importantly, solving the puzzles of who was the loudest snorer last night. When the sun was fully risen and the park buzzing, we were in our camp dojo, wearing gear, putting on our kendo faces, and welcoming Alan Sensei, whose unfamiliar presence brought a tinge of freshness and unnamed excitement.

The two-day training sessions were well-organized and truly insightful. Alongside all the other useful exercise (e.g. staying for 15 seconds in *chūdan* for honing patience and observance, practicing *ōji-waza* to appreciate proper timing, etc.), two tips especially stood out to me. First was the emphasis on elongated *kiai*. We all know *kiai* plays an important role in kendo as a way to intimidate opponents or to unleash instinctive aggression repressed by civilization, yet I only came to feel its personal meaning when Alan Sensei demonstrated both a "good example" and a "bad example." When his elongated *kiai*, alongside all the other details involved in the good example - clear step, upright posture, decisive cut, etc. - became the very element that expressed one's *attitude*, I suddenly had a clear reason to explain those unexplainable feelings; why I couldn't help but feel a lump in my throat, applaud, and respect when the seriousness and intention exuded from other senpai: because their *kiai* spoke of their clean and enthusiastic attitude.

The second piece of advice by Alan Sensei is outside dojo, how to watch kendo videos, particularly relevant to people like me who love watching "*ippon* clips." Alan Sensei suggested, "Don't just pay attention to the *ippon*, but to what happens before it." I found this helpful for understanding all strikes, whether they validly land or not: "Why do they make this strike?" "Is it whimsical or well-planned?" "Oh, was it a trap to lure the opponent in?". With this mindset, I came to realize every strike is more than just a sudden lucky hit but rather a full mind game.

This camp was wrapped up with a group *shiai*. Although *shiai* means competition - with "win" and "lose" as its built-in components - it was never stressful but rather a

precious experience to watch and take part in. Fighters never lost their best-can-do focus, and the audience was never stingy with a single clap. Each *shiai* touched my heart. It revealed a simple truth, an eager heart can always shine, regardless of outer factors. During *shiai*, we were treating and treated equally with the utmost seriousness, whether it was a common occurrence for Dan grades, a new experience for someone who had only worn *bogu* for two days, or the very first time some even understood what *shiai* really is. Enjoying the process means looking beyond the result, and our *shiai* was one hundred percent enjoyable. I had never imagined I could be standing in *chūdan* with a senpai in a *shiai*, and that alone was already so much fun. In the end, earning a “Fighting Spirit” was never my expectation, but now it whets my appetite to explore the unknown within myself.

Two nights and two days, the length feels longer than it sounded. As I write these words, looking at the photos as if I am travelling back to those days; as if I am hearing again the shinai clashing, the shouting, the foot stomps, the clinking beer cups, the big laughter, and also the distant sea waves by the dojo, the wind rustling through trees; as if I am seeing again the determined eyes behind *men-gane*, the sweaty gear hung on the rooftop, the fumes from the barbecue, the shared jellies and crisps, the greedy digging into Kiwi trifles, Sensei joking that sobriety should be added to one pleat’s representation. The days intertwined with two sides of us, within and beyond Kendo. It became a turning point for me to reflect on what this dojo means to me, and what these people mean to me.

Now, as I glance at my *nafuda*, I remember its first significance: no longer being called “that beginner.” And indeed, people started calling me by name:

“Rain, you wanna half my long black?”

“Hey Rain, can you pass me your shinai?”

“Your distance, Rainnnnn!”

“Oh Rain, you got a Men!”

“Rain, you took us all by surprise!”

Pictures flash by. People calling out my name. Yet the significance of being recognised has faded and quietly outshone by the smaller characters above my name: “*Yōshinkan*.” The title I once felt indifferent toward, but now the one that sits above all our names. The place we all belong to. The place that offers security, belonging, happiness - for the first time, for me, on this land.

“*Yōshinkan* is a family.” And now, it is my family.

*If you have anything for the next edition of the Shinai Express,
please email Tasha Derrett secretary@kendo.org.nz.*

