

# Shinai Express

Issue 5 – February 2025

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## Editorial

*By Sensei Graham Sayer*

Hello NZ Kenshi, it was a pleasant surprise to be asked by Sue to contribute something to *Shinai Express*, particularly in this 50th anniversary year of the NZKF.

It hardly feels like long ago that a mate of mine (read: Ken Wells) and I started to change the NZKF direction by convincing the original small group to hand over the keys. A small group of pioneers within New Zealand Kendo began encouraging a shift toward closer alignment with the International Kendo Federation and greater engagement on the international stage. What followed, as many of you will read about throughout this anniversary year, was the collective effort of many long-standing and dedicated NZKF members. Much like the development of strong growing dojo, progress at a federation level has always depended on people being willing to put in the work when it was needed.

Those who take on these responsibilities often do so quietly and without expectation. Over time, that commitment tends to be reflected not only in experience, grade and understanding, but also in the satisfaction that comes from contributing to something larger than oneself.

The article below was written in that spirit and translated with/by a lifetime Kendo widow I know well. It was published in *BUDO*, a monthly Budokan magazine in Japan, which is printed and distributed to over 7,000 budo-related subscribers nationwide, with an online version also available. The publication regularly features a wide range of articles across all budo disciplines, including contributions from fellow Kiwi kenshi Alex Bennett.

Finally, a small reminder: running a dojo and sustaining the growth of kendo takes considerable time and effort. Likewise, the NZKF is entirely volunteer run, with many board members also leading and operating dojo themselves. It is not easy work, but it remains essential to the health and future of kendo.

Original English text of ...

## Reflections on a Lifelong Kendo Journey

By Graham Sayer -Life time Kiwi Kenshi



As I approach my 68th year and reflect on over 45 years of uninterrupted Kendo practice, I often wonder how different my journey might have been had I started as a child. Yet despite starting later, I've been fortunate, my early years in Kyoto, where I progressed from shodan to yondan, gave me a strong foundation under excellent guidance.

Living in back in New Zealand from my early-30s, helping to build the NZ Kendo community and returning to Japan to pursue godan, I began to understand how much I had missed in terms of philosophy and depth due to my limited Japanese at the time. For adult beginners, a meaningful Kendo path is best supported by balanced exposure to training, philosophy, and history, or by starting young in a system with caring sensei and purposeful challenges.

Today, I travel between New Zealand, Japan, and other parts of the world, crossing swords with Kenshi of all levels. Some are national team athletes, others are late starters seeking physical and mental challenge. What unites them all is Kendo as a means of personal growth regardless of age, gender, or nationality, Kenshi around the world seem to use Kendo as a way to deepen their lives. Inoue Yoshihiko Hanshi once said, "The purpose of Kendo is to forge the mind and cultivate the self through keiko." This ideal, more than medals, gives Kendo its enduring global appeal. It is not a path with a fixed endpoint, but a lifelong journey. I've come to



believe that learning in Kendo flows both top-down and bottom-up. The highest-level Kenshi from Japan are now challenged at the World Kendo Championships not only by teammates or rivals from Korea, but also by dedicated practitioners from France, the U.S., Australia, and beyond. To support this spirit, I helped found the International Kendo Unity Program (TIKUP) based at Chionkenschukan, my home dojo in Yaizu, Shizuoka—a dojo established by the late Inoue Hanshi. Visiting Kenshi who train with us and demonstrate strong spirit are invited to join this growing community. In turn, our local dojo members benefit from this global exchange. Older Japanese practitioners meet foreign peers with the same passion. Young children see that Kendo transcends language—that one day, they too may form global friendships through their practice. The future of Kendo is bright. With growing



accessibility, translations of foundational texts like Go Rin No Sho, and an emerging class of teachers focused on lifelong Kendo, we are witnessing a global maturation of the art. It is no longer just about shiai or promotion—it is about the journey.



*The original article in Japanese can be found at the end of this issue*

### Little updates

- **Please complete your Club Histories**, 1500–2000 word to NZKF secretary by 20th February please. Provide at least 5 photos in 300dpi jpeg format.
- **16th NZKF National Kendo Championships** is hosted by Yōshinkan Wellington. This is a quick heads up that full information will come out soon but you need to know a) the venue for all activities is St Patricks College, 581 Evans Bay Parade, Kilbirnie – lots of buses from town go here b) there will be a Shimpan Seminar Thursday July 9, from 5.30-9.30 for yondan and above as Shimpan, and we welcome players to be shiaisha c) Friday and Saturday are the days for Nationals Competition d) on Friday 10 July, the 50<sup>th</sup> Commemorative Dinner will be held at the James Cook Hotel Grand Chancellor, 147 The Terrace, which is also offering discounts for accommodation to NZKF (more details following shortly) and e) a Squad training for the Wolf Pack will be held from 9am-noon on Sunday morning. All at St Patricks College
- **Auckland 2026 International Summer Kendo Seminar:** 27 Feb – 1 March. There are still vacancies for this highly sought after event. Please hurry and register and pay for your place. [Information Pack](#)
- **22<sup>nd</sup> Hong Kong Asian Opens:** These are coming up March 27- 29 and NZ is sending official representatives. Some clubs may also be competing. We wish you all the best.

### The Wolf Pack is Taking Shape

*By Blake Bennett*

Over the past 12 months, the NZ Kendo Federation’s high-performance programme has been building real momentum, with a shared goal becoming clearer across the community: to *disrupt the status quo in international kendo*, and continue lifting what New Zealand is capable of on the world stage.

At the heart of this direction is the idea of the Wolf Pack. At first glance, a wolf might seem an odd symbol for kendo, especially in New Zealand. But the meaning runs far deeper than a logo. Wolves succeed not because of one standout animal, but because of how the pack works together. They train together, adapt together, support each other, and move with purpose. Every member has a role, and it is the strength of the group that allows them to take on much bigger challenges.

That is exactly the kind of high-performance environment we are building in New Zealand kendo.

The concept of the Wolf Pack reflects what already happens across our community: kendo-ka, coaches, clubs, and supporters all contributing to the collective progress of kendo in NZ. Likewise, at the international level, success is never the result of one person's effort. It comes from shared standards, consistent and quality preparation, and many people pulling in the same direction over time. Importantly, this direction builds on the strong foundations laid by those who have shaped New Zealand kendo over many years. This is not about replacing the past, but about growing what already exists into an even more connected, resilient, and effective high-performance pathway.

In 2026, the Wolf Pack will take important steps forward at two major international events: the 22nd Hong Kong Asian Open Kendo Championships in March, and the 1st Asia-Oceania Kendo Championships (1AOKC) in May. A huge congratulations to those selected to represent New Zealand (see the NZKF Facebook post for athlete names). These competitions are key moments in our longer journey of disruption, giving athletes the chance to test themselves, gain experience, and measure our progress.

What makes this journey especially exciting is that it is being guided by research evidence. Pathway to Podium (P2P) training camps and development work are now being shaped by athlete self-assessment survey data, alongside insights and resources from our collaboration with the University of Auckland – specifically focused on the mental side of performance. This ensures our preparation is targeted and realistic, producing athletes who are thoroughly prepared, confident, and equipped to *disrupt* at international level.

The collective effort of the Wolf Pack also extends to how we financially support participation, too. The NZKF Board and Coaching Team are working together to assist athletes where possible; and with limited central funding available, local fundraising efforts will remain important, particularly for items related to team uniforms. Guidance around external funding opportunities will be shared with CTD representatives/club leaders and supporters in due course, courtesy of the NZKF Board.

*Next steps:*

The recent P2P camp over Waitangi Weekend in Nelson was where our data-informed approach was put into action with excellent results. (A big thanks to the Nelson Club for hosting the event, and to those who travelled from around the country to take part.). As the campaign continues this year, P2P opportunities will become increasingly targeted toward athletes preparing for major international events. We are also looking ahead to the NZKF National Championships in July (Wellington), which will serve as the final selection event for the ‘Lead Wolves’ who will represent New Zealand at the 20th World Kendo Championships in Tokyo in 2027.

Further opportunities are also emerging for athletes in the lead-up to the 1AOKC this year, with more details to come.

The Wolf Pack is not just a team name, but a shared way of working, preparing, and striving together to *disrupt* expectations in international kendo. We are encouraged by the momentum growing across the NZKF community and grateful for the collective support that continues to drive us forward.

We can’t do it without the collective effort of the NZKF membership, so thank you for your support so far, and please keep it coming as 2026 heats up.

### **Wellington Iaido Club - Sharing Samurai Spirit in the Capital**

For over fifteen years, the Wellington Iaido Club has been quietly introducing the art of iaido to the capital – not only through regular dojo training, but by taking the Japanese sword out into the community and sharing it with the public. Recently, this probationary club was accepted as a full member to the NZKF with voting rights, acknowledging the growth of this dojo and its impact in Wellington.

Founded in 2010, the club has become a familiar presence at Japan Festival events across Wellington and the Hutt Valley, where members regularly perform iaido demonstrations for large and diverse audiences. These demonstrations aim to show iaido not as a theatrical display, but as a living martial art grounded in focus, precision, and mindfulness. Many spectators encounter iaido for the first time through these events, often surprised by the calm intensity and inward focus of the practice.





Festival performances typically include structured kata demonstrations, explanations of etiquette and sword handling, and opportunities for the public to ask questions about training, history, and Japanese martial culture. Over the years, these appearances have played a significant role in raising awareness of iaido in the region and have directly contributed to new students finding their way into the dojo.

The club is led by Cam Findlay (4th Dan Iaido), who has been training since 2008 and regularly attends national NZKF iaido seminars in Auckland. This connection to the wider iaido community ensures that public demonstrations and local training are firmly aligned with national standards and current practice.

Alongside festival activity, Wellington Iaido Club has worked to strengthen iaido in the lower North Island by hosting seminars and workshops in Wellington, helping make high-quality instruction more accessible outside Auckland. A major milestone was reached in 2025, when the club hosted its first NZKF-sanctioned iaido grading in Wellington, held during a mid-year Winter Seminar. This event marked an important step in supporting local practitioners and recognising Wellington as an active centre for iaido training.



At its core, the club sees public engagement as an extension of keiko. Whether performing at a festival, hosting a seminar, or training in the dojo, the goal remains the same: to represent iaido with respect, clarity, and technical integrity. Through consistent participation in Japan Festivals and national events, the Wellington Iaido Club continues to play a meaningful role in sharing the spirit and discipline of iaido with both the martial arts community and the wider public.



## **Kitamoto Club: A Week in Katsuura**

*By Jae Tsai*

I attended the 50th International Kendo Leaders Seminar, formerly known as the Kitamoto Seminar, held in Katsuura from the 17th to the 25th of October 2025.

Organised by the All Japan Kendo Federation, the seminar marked a significant milestone and brought together kendo practitioners and instructors from across the world. As a Yondan with approximately eighteen years of practice, and an instructor at Waikato Kendo Club in Hamilton, New Zealand, I attended as a participant with the aim of gaining deeper teaching insight and guidance as I prepare for my upcoming Godan grading in 2026. The week provided both, and more than I had anticipated.

A strong emphasis throughout the seminar was placed on fundamentals, particularly men strikes. Tomohiro sensei's instruction stood out to me, as the repeated focus on correct timing, sae, and zanshin significantly contributed to the improvement of my debana men over the course of the week, as acknowledged by the sensei during keiko. The simplicity of the drills, combined with the intensity and precision expected, reinforced the idea that advancement at higher levels is rooted in constant refinement rather than complexity. This lesson was especially valuable to me as someone with increasing teaching responsibilities.

The kata sessions were another highlight. Practising with kendoka around my own level allowed for meaningful exchange, but the opportunity to practise with Oda sensei, a female Nanadan, during the final session was particularly impactful. The experience gave me a clear physical and mental understanding of how kata should feel when performed correctly; something that is difficult to grasp through explanation alone. It was a moment that will continue to inform both my own kata practice and how I teach it to others.

The seminar also offered extensive shimpan practice, including sessions among us and students from the International Budo University. This was especially enjoyable, as they were closer to my age and brought a different energy to keiko and matches. One moment stood out during our inter-room shiai where I believed I had landed a valid kote on my classmate that was not seen by the shimpan. Feedback from another classmate afterwards highlighted that while the strike was present, my seme needed to be more clearly expressed, it doesn't matter how fast the strike was. This was a valuable lesson in making intent unmistakable, and one I am still actively working on.

As a Type 1 diabetic, Miyasaka sensei's lecture on anti-doping resonated strongly with me. His discussion highlighted the importance of being organised with Therapeutic Use Exemptions and athlete responsibilities. His ability to deliver the lecture seamlessly in both Japanese and English was impressive and well received by all participants.

Beyond the technical aspects, the seminar strengthened my sense of the global kendo community. Being the youngest participant in my cohort, I appreciated the support and camaraderie that developed over the long but well-structured days. I formed friendships with kendoka from around the world, many of whom I expect to meet again at events such as AOKC 2026 and WKC 2027. Visiting the home dojo of a US

classmate after the seminar further reinforced how shared kendo values transcend borders. In conclusion, the seminar encouraged me to reflect deeply on my role as both practitioner and instructor. Returning home, I aim to bring these lessons into my dojo, particularly in working with senior members, maintaining strong fundamentals, and avoiding complacency. Hosting a dojo shiai on my birthday weekend using prizes from the local Chiba Budogu Shop felt like a fitting way to carry that momentum forward. I remain committed to doing my best kendo at every training, not only during special opportunities, but as part of everyday practice. I am also deeply grateful to the Executive Committee, for the opportunity to attend this seminar and represent my dojo and country.

## Kendo as a Digital Nomad

By Ren Sayer

For most NZ-based kenshi, a typical Kendo "calendar" usually consists of no more than 3 domestic events per year and perhaps the odd Japan or WKC trip - if you're lucky. But after hearing so many inspiring stories about Kendo experiences abroad, this wasn't a reality I wanted to accept. I've always been frustrated at how geographically isolated NZ is as a country, and Kendo is no different.

When I left NZ for Japan in March 2022 and fulfilled my dream of becoming a 100% remote worker (digital nomad), I saw the perfect opportunity to expand my Kendo horizons beyond NZ and Japan (I have solid Kendo roots in Japan, thanks to my background). I then booked a one-way ticket to Europe and headed off in December that year with no end in sight. Armed with my bogu and the ability to earn income anywhere, I moved spontaneously from destination to destination.



*With a few prominent NZ kenshi at the Iadera gashuku in Zadar, Croatia*

Two and a half years have passed, and this journey continues today. Since then, I've practiced Kendo in 19 countries, 50+ dojos, and attended various seminars, shiais, and gashukus, with occasional breaks along the way. As I write this from São Paulo, Brazil,

I'm surrounded by a city with a deep Kendo heritage that's home to many dojos and 7th dans.



*With Walt Kim (NSK) in Seoul, South Korea. With Eric Viola (NSK) in Buenos Aires, Argentina*

I have no idea when, or if, this adventure will end. But it continues teaching me valuable lessons about both myself and Kendo. While I may chronicle the complete story another time, here are the key insights and lessons I've gained from practicing Kendo on the road:

- **The main thing I've learned is to be open-minded.** While we're all united by the concept of Kendo, the way it's taught can vary considerably across dojos. Some dojos keep things simple, while others can get too carried away and make things more complicated than necessary. I've had several "WTF" moments where training has made no sense to me, such as sonkyo kirikaeshi (not suburi!), "blocking" practice that's based on football penalty shootouts, and placing your shinai to your right in seiza for the sake of "being different". You need to be tolerant of this stuff since you're the guest, and luckily I haven't been to a dojo yet that's totally off the planet!
- **Travelling with your bogu doesn't have to be a pain.** People are always surprised when I say I travel with all my bogu (including shinai), along with the rest of my life. I don't deny it's a lot, but it can be manageable with the right approach and mindset. I always fit all of my Kendo gear, excluding shinai, into half a suitcase which also includes my bogu bag. Then, I put my shinai bag inside a camping pole bag and add more stuff to it, so it essentially becomes a second suitcase. I just accept that I'll carry 2 suitcases rather than trying to fit everything into one, which gives me peace of mind. Seeing one of those "all-in-one" Kendo bags that looks like a cello makes me feel stressed!

- **Travelling with my bogu has taught me to be a better minimalist.** You might think that travelling with your bogu is at complete odds with being a minimalist. But I disagree. In my view, minimalist travel means to *only* travel with things that give you value or meaning and get rid of things that don't, instead of travelling with less for the sake of it. My bogu provides a lot of value and meaning to me on the road, so it's not like travelling with heaps of clothes you never wear. Having all my Kendo gear to begin with makes me much more mindful of this approach, and thanks to that I've been travelling with less and less as I go on. Always frame a challenge into an opportunity!
- **Your Kendo can still improve, regardless of where you are.** I've managed to hit 2 Kendo milestones while being on the road: passing my godan and taking part in the WKC. There have been dojos where I was fortunate enough to practice with high grades, and others where I've suddenly become the "sensei" by being the highest grade there. All dojo roles can teach you something to improve your Kendo, so don't let your environment or circumstances become an excuse!
- **The Kendo network is truly magical.** Every dojo I've been to has been super welcoming and Kendo is always my go-to for meeting new people on the road. I particularly like how it's a fantastic way to meet locals whom you otherwise wouldn't meet, so you don't get trapped into expat bubbles and generic meetups that many people like myself get caught up in. I'm not saying they're bad, but there's just something really special about Kendo as a community as a whole.
- **The same types of people and groups appear in every dojo.** I'm not sure what it is, but I've noticed that certain individuals and groups tend to appear in almost every dojo worldwide, forming distinct archetypes of different Kenshi. I may write about this in a future edition of shinai express, so keep an eye out ;)
- **Dojo names fall into 1 of 2 categories in all countries.** They are Japanese names like Yōshinkan or Shinbukan, or location names like Auckland Kendo Club or Waikato. It's *very* rare to encounter a dojo that doesn't fall into one of these 2 name categories, unless it's a Korean dojo or a University club.
- **The level of "Japaneseness" in each dojo and country varies.** Some take it too far where it becomes cringeworthy, while others greatly add elements of their own culture during practice. One country I went to tends to get very philosophical about their Kendo and gets stuck in its own ways. Meanwhile, another one is so relaxed that people are often late to training and chat during taiso, yet they do the hard yards and do very well in international shiai. Having a beer during a seminar lunch break can be a thing in some places too! While the Japanese aspect will always be a part of Kendo, it's very refreshing and interesting to see other countries and cultures put their own spin to it.
- **Every dojo outside Japan follows the same training pattern.** That is: taiso, suburi, kihon & waza practice, and jigeiko - in that order. If it breaks away from this pattern, it's usually because there's a shiai or grading coming up, meaning shiai geiko, kata, or jitsugi. Whenever I've mentioned a jigeiko only practice like

Saturday asa geiko at AKC to people, their mouths tend to drop. Some said they'd do it but couldn't follow through.

- **Some dojos focus on a niche.** All the dojos I've been to have been accepting of all Kenshi, but it's clear that some cater to a certain niche or group. I've encountered shiai-orientated dojos, "traditional" dojos (whatever that means), and even dojos that favor young liberals with lots of tattoos and piercings. With a large Kendo population, these types of dojos become a real possibility.

If you ever get the chance to expand your Kendo journey beyond the NZ Japan Kendo bubble most of us are accustomed to, then I couldn't recommend it enough. Yes, Japan might be the "best" place in the world for Kendo, but there's a lot you can learn and experience in other countries, and that will only continue to grow as Kendo develops around the world.

**The full list of countries I've practiced Kendo in since 2022 and the number of dojos in that country in brackets, with stays ranging from a few days to six months:**

Japan (10), Belgium (2), Croatia (1), Slovenia (1), Hungary (2), Romania (2), Serbia (5), North Macedonia (1), Germany (5), Denmark (1), Poland (4), South Korea (2), South Africa (3), Italy (1), Turkey (1), UK (3), Spain (3), Argentina (5), Brazil (6), Thailand (5), Vietnam (3)

*\*\* If you are interested about Kendo in any of these countries and would like more information, then please feel free to email me at any time - [ren.sayer@gmail.com](mailto:ren.sayer@gmail.com)*

*Keep reading!*



## 生涯を通じた剣道修行 の省察

国際剣道連盟監査役  
前ニュージーランド剣道連盟会長

グレアム セイヤ



全日本剣道演武大会で演武に臨む筆者（教士七段）

68歳を目前に控え、45年以上にわたる途切れのない剣道の歩みを振り返ると、「もし子ども頃に剣道を始めていたら、自分の道はどう変わったのだろうか」と思うことがあります。とはいえ、遅れて始めたにもかかわらず、私は幸運でした。京都での修行時代に初段から四段

まで進むことができ、素晴らしい指導者のもとで確かな基礎を築くことができました。30代半ばからニュージーランドに移り、現地の剣道コミュニティの発展に尽力しつつ、五段取得のために再び日本へ戻った頃、私はある重要なことに気づきました。それは、日本語力の不足によって、剣道に内在する哲学や深みを十分に理解できていなかった、ということでした。

大人になってから剣道を始める人にとって、意味ある剣道修行を支えるものは、稽古だけでなく、哲学・歴史等を含む心身のバランスであり、また少年期からスタートする場合は、思慮深く思いやりのある指導者と子どもたちへの意義あるチャレンジが備わった教育体系だと思えます。

現在、私はニュージーランド、日本、そして世界各地を行き来

し、あらゆるレベルの剣士と交剣知愛を重ねています。中にはナショナルチームの選手もいれば、人生の後半で身体的・精神的な挑戦を求めて始めた人もいます。彼らをつなぐ共通点は、剣道を「自己成長の手段」として捉えていることです。年齢、性別、国籍を問わず、世界中の剣士たちは剣道を通じて人生を深めようとしているように見えます。

故・井上義彦範士（1928〜2015）はこう述べています。「誤った剣道はない。あるのは誤った修行者だけである。それは太古の昔から変わらぬことだ。人種、年齢、階級の問題ではない。ただ、志の問題なのだ」。この理念こそが、メダル以上に剣道の国際的な魅力を支えているのだと思えます。剣道は、決して到達点のある道ではなく、一生をかけた旅路なのです。



故・井上義彦範士（右）と筆者



国際剣道交流プログラム（TIKUP）で講話を行う筆者（中央奥）



道場に掲げられた看板

同プログラムの国際メンバーとして招かれています。国際メンバーは毎年増え続けており、地元の道場生たちもこの交流から大きな恩恵を受けています。年配の日本人剣士は、同じ情熱を持つ海外の仲間との出会いに刺激を受け、道場の子どもたちは「剣道は言語を超えるものであ

私は、剣道の学びには「上から下へ」だけでなく、「下から上へ」と流れる双方向の力があると信じています。現在では、日本の最高レベルの剣士たちが、世界剣道選手権大会で、韓国だけでなく、フランス、アメリカ、オーストラリアなどから来た熱心な修行者によって真剣に挑まれる時代になっています。

この精神を支えるために、私は故・井上範士が設立した静岡県焼津市の道場「知恩剣修館」を拠点に、国際剣道交流プログラム（The International Kendo Unity Program〈略称：TIKUP〉）を立ち上げました。この道場を訪れた海外の剣士たちが強い志を持ち道場の精神



令和3年秋の叙勲で旭日双光章を受章した筆者（中央）に対してニュージーランド総領事公邸で行われた伝達式の一部

り、自分たちもいつか世界とつながることができる」と実感しています。

剣道の未来は明るいものです。「五輪書」（宮本武蔵著）のような基礎文献の翻訳が進み、生涯剣道を志す新しいタイプの指導者たちが登場するなかで、剣道は世界的にも急速に成熟の段階に入っていくように感じられます。それはもはや、試合や昇段のためだけでなく、「旅路そのもの」の価値が見直されている証でもあるのです。

