

SAFETY, ETIQUETTE AND BEHAVIOUR FOR KENDO TRAINING

'It is better to practice a little than talk a lot'
Musō Kokushi



Introduction

Safety is a collective responsibility. Acting safely must therefore be an essential requirement at all kendo training and events. To ensure and assure this, we must constantly evaluate the prevalent conditions both at the location where we are training and of our interactions with others. We should strike only when it is safe and appropriate to do so and always manage the circumstances of our actions.

It is the responsibility of everyone concerned with kendo training to know, understand, and implement the appropriate safety procedures to mitigate hazards and reduce risk.

By their nature, weapons hold an inherent potential for danger. It is only through diligent and correct maintenance, use and storage, that we are able to continue our activities in a safe manner.

One must treat an *laito* or a blunted *Katana* as one would a *Shinken* and give due respect when swinging and striking with a *shinai* or *bokuto*. By doing this consistently we can greatly reduce the possibility of an injury through a moment of forgetfulness.

The key areas related to safety when undertaking kendo training are:

1. Access to General Information:

It is important to keep up to date with all current BKA Health & Safety requirements.

To facilitate this the following information is available on the BKA website:

- a. BKA H&S Policy Statement
- b. Guidance on how to produce a H&S Risk Assessment.
- c. Generic Risk Assessment and blank risk assessment forms.

Before any practice, you must ensure you are aware of and fully understand the club's/dojo's safety procedures.

These should have been communicated to you by dojo leaders and/or coach/es.

During the practice it is your duty to implement the procedures outlined and highlight to the coach anything you experience or witness that you feel to be contrary to the guidelines or detrimental to the safety of those present including yourself.

2. Pre-Activity Briefing

All participants must be made aware of/ be aware of any key pieces of localised safety information or conditions. This is particularly important when visitors or new participants are in attendance, including:

- a. The sound of the fire alarm
- b. Fire exit and muster point locations
- c. Toilets, washing and eating locations
- d. First aid arrangements.



3. Pre-Training equipment checks:

- a. Whether your clothing fits correctly and offers appropriate protection
- b. Whether your Himo (cords) are correctly tied and tucked away and that there are no twists or lumps in the Men Himo
- c. Whether your Bokken and Shinai are in good condition. i.e., There is no splintering, chipping, cracking or excessive bending apparent.
- d. Whether your Iaito or Shinken is in good condition, mounted correctly in the hilt and the bindings are firm
- e. With regard to the shinai the leather parts must also be un-frayed and free from holes or tears
- f. The Tsuru must also be tied securely enough that it is not possible to pull the end off.

4. Pre-Training Personal Considerations:

- a. Does your hair obscure your vision?
- b. Are your finger and toenails adequately trimmed?
- c. Have you removed any jewellery? i.e., earrings, necklace, watch, rings etc
- d. Do you have any injuries or conditions requiring consideration? It is important to share these with the dojo leader or coach.
- e. Are any open wounds blisters etc. correctly dressed and covered?
- f. Do you have enough space to practice safely?
- g. Are your activities likely to interfere with those of anyone else? It is important to evaluate what forms the people around you are practising and manage your positioning to ensure you and they will remain safely distanced.

5. Safety of Premises

Although the dojo leader and coaches will generally manage the dojo, it will help if you are aware of what is necessary and assist where appropriate. You should help ensure the following:

- a. The floor area is of suitable manufacture and of a sufficient size to safely accommodate the intended training regime/s
- b. The ceiling is high enough to allow clearance for a shinai to be swung overhead
- c. There are no overhead, wall mounted or free standing obstructions, e.g. permanently fixed or stored gym or other equipment hanging down or protruding that could tend to cause injury.
- d. The lighting is adequate.
- e. First aid facilities and personnel are available and identified.
- f. There is a means of contacting Emergency Services should the need arise.

6. Duty of Care

It is not uncommon for injuries to occur to participants during sporting contests/activities and the risk of injury, particularly in contact sports is generally recognised as an implied hazard of the activity.

However, as sport becomes more commercialised, we are witnessing growth in litigation where claims for negligence are becoming more commonplace.

Numerous examples of former professional athletes now suffering life-limiting conditions following retirement from their sport are becoming commonplace e.g. High profile former Rugby and football players who have sustained serious cumulative brain injuries leading to cognitive impairment.

Volenti non fit injuria “to a willing person, no injury is done” is a defence often pleaded in sports negligence claims. The defendant (A coach, referee, official, practitioner etc.) might argue that the claimant was fully aware of the rules and the dangers associated with the activity and, as such, had given implied consent to the risk of injury caused by the non-application of the rules.

The counter argument is that the implied consent was only for exposure to ordinary incidents of the activity and not those that lie outside the defined limits.

The rules of sporting activities and particularly contact sports are framed for the protection of participants and competitors who therefore cannot possibly be said to have consented to a breach of the duty of care on the part of a coach, senior or experienced practitioner. The duty of such persons is to apply and or operate within the established safe parameters for the activity and ensure as far as possible that these are observed by others who engage in the activity with them.

To be clear; It is indefensible for anyone (particularly those in a leading role) to perpetrate or allow negligent or deliberate acts that cause injury to others.

Coaches, seniors and referees should identify what constitutes dangerous practice for participants and help mitigate against them during training and

competition. It is also their duty upon observing poor or dangerous practices to intervene to correct them.

Here is a non-exhaustive list for coaches and kendoka to consider:

Shouting loudly when closely engaged with an opponent (COVID 19 mitigations); uncontrolled or excessively heavy bodily collisions; contact to the head with stiff or raising arms that might tend to hyperextend the opponent's neck or back; deliberately pushing a person over/down; heavy blows to the top of the head particularly with the point of the shinai; blows delivered deliberately to unprotected and therefore invalid areas of the body such as the back of the head or neck.

Final comments

As responsible practitioners, our aim is to ensure that everyone who takes up kendo and its related arts can access the goal of **Issho (Kendo for life)**.

To this end we must be able to ensure that practitioners can return home after training in the same condition as when they left.

Constant vigilance of and personal adherence to prescribed safe practice procedures will assure that leaders, coaches and practitioners will remain aware of, address and control all and any potential hazards and by doing so – consistently enable access to safe kendo training for everyone.

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