

Stiff Arming – The Most Used Defense in Judo!!

Let's take a look at one of the most used defensive tactics in Judo competition. Obviously, it is the best defensive tactic in Judo considering how widely used it is. Let's take a look at how this defensive technique works. Upon gripping your opponent, tighten your hold making a fist with the clenched hand. Press the hand strongly away from you and if you happen to have a hold of the lapel, press firmly against the chest or shoulder of your opponent. Now just move around and keep your hand press strongly against your opponent not allowing any attacking throw to be attempted.

From this defensive posture, you will greatly minimize the number of attacks that are even remotely successful. Throws are not the only groups of techniques that stiff-arming protects you from. By forcing the distance to remain between you and your opponent, you can prevent most armbars, virtually all chokes and nearly all techniques for entering into matwork; unless you bend too far forward.

As you rise in rank and eventually open your own school for teaching Judo, make sure that this is one of the first techniques you teach your white belts so that by black belt, they will be exceedingly proficient.

If you are laughing by now, good! Scoffing and wondering why you are reading anything that this crack-pot has written, even better!! Hopefully you got a good chuckle out of this or were quite disappointed by this article at this point. Let's begin a more serious discussion of the pros and cons of this technique in the table below.

Pros:	Cons:
Keeps your opponent at a 'safe' distance.	The hands can be dislodged.
You tire your opponent out while they try to fight based on your defense.	You tire yourself out needlessly and create tired feelings in not only the hands but forearms and shoulders.
Feel 'safe' from any of your opponent's attacks.	Not only does it minimize the number of your opponent's attacks, it also minimizes your attacks and allows your opponent to know when you are attacking as you have to lower your defense in order to attack.
	Stiff-arms offer plenty of opportunities for arm-bars.
	A stiff-arm defense allows for your opponent to use makikomi-style techniques as the spinning motion dislodges the defense and breaks balance at the same time.
	Utilizing this defense will cause more 'stalling' or 'overly defensive posture' penalty calls for the person applying the defense.
(Myth) I feel my balance is stronger as I am tied to my opponent by stiff arming.	Balance is actually more likely to be broken to the front when stiff-arming an opponent.
	You cannot counter any techniques as there are so few techniques that you allow your opponent to initiate.

OK, so maybe after looking at a short list of pros and cons, there are not many good reasons to use the stiff-arm defensive tactic in Judo, practice, or tournament. So why then do we see this used so often in tournaments?

One thing to consider when teaching students; work to teach your students how to counter throws. It is virtually impossible to counter a Judo throw when you are stiff arming your opponent and preventing any attack from being launched.

Another potential cause that I have seen when discussing stiff-arming with many students is that there is a fear of being thrown and falling to the mat. If there is a fear of hitting the mat as the result of a throw, then there is a higher chance that stiff arming will be used as a defense. The problem is that with any reasonable length of training, most judoka will quickly be able to work around this defense and the feared contact with the mat will be the result.

To prevent players in your club from developing a bad habit of stiff arming in randori or shiai, work on various drills of grip breaking and makikomi drills. As practice develops better grip breaking skills, stiff arming during judo play will appear fewer times with senior students. At that same time, newer students will learn by practical experience that stiff arming doesn't work and they will not develop this bad behavior.

Developing makikomi style techniques allows the hands to be dislodged and the balance to be broken quite readily and allows for an attack to circumvent the defense. The shoulder shimmy or wiggle used to begin the makikomi group of techniques can be used simply to dislodge the hands. This breaks down the defense to other techniques as well.

In overly exaggerated applications of this defense, you will notice that the shoulders are in front of the toes and the hips are behind the heels. This "butt to the wind" posture creates bad balance to the front and most other directions. Skilled players will love this posture as it opens up favorites like Tomoe Nage, Sumi Gaeshi, and other sacrifice techniques.

Ultimately there are so many reasons not to use this posture as a defense in Judo. Make sure that when you see this used as a defensive posture; take the time to reiterate to the class how readily this posture can be used against the person using it as a defense. Referees certainly will see its flaws and will penalize its excessive use, so do your best to make sure that anytime you see it in your club, you point it out and discourage its use.

So back to the original title and opening paragraphs, maybe we should consider a title more along the lines of "Stiff Arming – The Worst Defense In Judo!"

Play Hard! Have Fun! Strive to Improve!!

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