

Malta Report

2025 Kudo Europe Junior Cup & Coach Exchange Program

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Introduction

Osu.

I would like to report on my expedition to Malta, conducted from November 17 to 24, 2025. This report consists of two main sections:

1. The Coach Exchange Program
2. The 2025 Kudo Europe Junior Cup

1. Coach Exchange Program

In Japan, efforts toward improving coaching standards have begun under the leadership of Vice-Director KAMIYAMA, centering around the newly established Instructor Development Committee of the Kudo All Japan Federation.

Based on a proposal by Branch Chief Vladimir Bredikhin (Malta), the Kudo Europe Junior Committee organized a multi-day Coach Exchange Program during the three days prior to the European KUDO Junior Cup.

Speakers:

Day 1: Ayumi KAMIYAMA (Japan)

Day 2: Dilyara Vakhitova (Malta), Anastasiia Kovalenko (Ukraine)

Day 3: Paolo Meal (Italy), Ilaria Agresta (Italy), Vilius Taresevičius (Lithuania)

Participants:

2 Coaches from Malta, Wales (the UK), Slovenia, and Hungary joined the program as audiences.

Pre-distributed Questions was follows

1. How many athletes do you typically coach in your group?
2. How are age divisions structured in your dojo or club?
3. What does your standard class structure look like?
 - Warm-up
 - Stretching
 - Main technical/tactical segment
 - Cool-down or recovery
 - Time allocation for each segment

4. What motivational or communication methods do you find most effective?
5. How do you maintain discipline and focus within the group?
6. Which part of coaching or which type of training session do you enjoy the most, and why?
7. How do you adapt your methods for athletes with different experience levels or personalities?
8. How do you evaluate student progress?
9. What advice would you give to a coach new to this age group?
10. Please elaborate on key points regarding your assigned theme:
 - Approaches for coaching juniors and teenagers
 - Fostering motivation, tactical understanding, and competitive mindset

I shared perspectives currently emphasized in Japan, including importance of KIHON (the basics), mindset and principles in youth development, and Budo-based values. Despite differences in nationality, all coaches shared similar training flows and strategies to contemporary issues.

One of notable points from Anastasiia (Ukraine) was the importance of long-term athlete development over short-term results.

Shared Understanding/All coaches emphasized

- Importance of KIHON (the base)
 - flexible coaching approaches to each individuals
 - Belief in Kudo's power to build strong character and resilience
- What Vilius shared during the training was also one of the notable points:
 "If you can train in Kudo, you can face any difficulty in life and overcome it."
- Commitment to Kudo as BUDO serving youth development

Discussions with Branch Chief Bredikhin affirmed that such exchanges are essential for the future of KUDO and ideally should be held annually. I also strongly felt that similar opportunities in Japan, regionally or nationally, would contribute greatly to future development. Such initiatives would significantly contribute to nurturing the next generation and developing young leaders who will guide the future of Kudo. It was also a good opportunity for young coaches to learn how to conduct such international events, and they did an amazing job. The young leaders are ready to lead the future of KUDO in Europe.

2. 2025 Kudo Europe Junior Cup

This year's Junior Cup featured the newly introduced U14 category. Although Armenia could not participate, athletes joined from Bulgaria, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, the UK (Wales), Ukraine, and Slovenia. A total of 87 athletes competed in 25 weight-based categories:

- U8, U10, U12 competed in the morning
- U14, U16 competed in the afternoon

With the introduction of weight divisions, safety increased, yet European athletes still demonstrated strong impact, making matches highly dynamic even in junior divisions.

Mr. Yamaguchi from the Embassy of Japan in Malta attended the event and delivered greetings during the opening ceremony.

This tournament was my third Europe Junior competition. By the third time, I was able to recognise many athletes by face and name, and witnessing their growth was deeply touching. Imagining these young athletes one day representing KUDO on the world stage filled me with pride and emotion.

Referee Development

The refereeing team showed great improvement. Some members had officiated at the recent World Cup in Bulgaria, demonstrating increasing rule comprehension and match awareness.

Kudo refereeing requires:

- Full understanding of the rules
- Quick and confident decision-making
- Accumulated experience

Every referee begins without full confidence; questioning one's decisions is part of the process. The goal should be to review one's performance after tournaments, correct errors, and build experience toward becoming a referee truly needed by athletes. Consistency among referees is essential. Post-match discussions, examining decisions and sharing perspectives, are crucial for aligning recognition. This tournament achieved such unification to a significant extent, and my own understanding deepened through post-event discussions.

3. Final Reflections

This opportunity was my first overseas assignment after becoming an officially recognized International Instructor of the KUDO International Federation.

Even as an instructor, my purpose is not to “teach” or impose Japan's methods, but to remain a learner myself. With differences in language and expression, I reflect on how to convey Japanese BUDO, how to jointly refine the art of KUDO created by Azuma-sensei, and what new aspects of myself I may discover through experiences in overseas.

Refereeing, too, is a continuous journey of learning and challenge. This journey is not traveled alone. It exists because we have training partners, athletes, fellow referees, coaches, and the organization of Kudo. It is a collective path walked together.

4. Acknowledgements

The journey was a solo journey. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Jukucho and the Chairman of KIF, who always place their trust in me and allow me to undertake such missions. I also extend my heartfelt appreciation to Branch Chief Bredikhin of Malta for providing me with this valuable opportunity. I feel deep appreciation for the hosts in Malta and for everyone who gathered from across Europe for this program and the KUDO European Jr. Cup.

Furthermore, as this trip followed the Asian Championships and the 30th Anniversary Celebration of the Nisshin–Nagakute Branch, my absence inevitably placed a significant burden on our members who continued the training in my place. I am deeply grateful for their understanding, especially the youth members and their families, during this busy period leading up to the regional competition. They embraced my wish to elevate KUDO beyond a small local DOJO and to shape it into a bridge that connects to the world.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to everyone who supported my absence. My heartfelt thanks go to our Branch Chief, who attended practice despite concerns about his health; to my mother, who supported him; and to my sister, who stepped in to teach the class with her infant in her arms when I was unable to return from Dubai in time and nearly caused a gap in training.

I am truly grateful to each and every one of them.

In gratitude and love