



# United States Judo Newsletter

## News from the United States Judo Association

**A taste of USJA and Judo history honoring the passing of Allan Coage in 2007  
by James S. Bregman, Olympic and World Medalist, Dancer.**

Winter 2022

Allen Coage, My Hero, Our Hero

It was an odd set of circumstances that day so long ago in Philadelphia. The venue was alive with the excitement of the Judo Trials for the 1976 Olympic Games to be held later in the year in Montreal. The event was about 90% completed when the "tournament officials" made an announcement about a late breaking decision they had just made concerning the selection process and the tournament. The exact details, blurred now by time matter very little, but to these athletes who had spent their entire lives trying to make an Olympic team it was devastation, a crushing tsunami which meant that some deserving winners might indeed not be selected!



After the 'official announcement', there was a long moment of stunned disbelief and silence. The ABC camera crews were baffled as were the directors and producers. This was to be the first time the Olympic Judo Trials were to be covered live by the media. Then the noise level rose steadily to a vibrating din and the athletes were milling around agitated, angry, hurt, confused, and astonished at this "stupid" last minute "switch" which would completely determine their future Olympic hope and dreams. An athlete's revolution was brewing and they were "mad as hell". They were not "going to take this crap" any more. But what on earth to do to rectify this "official blundering fiasco"? How do powerless athletes reason with "unreasonable officials" who are "dictatorial in their edits" and domineering.

Allen Coage and Jimmy Wooley were to fight next and, although, the confusion, milling around and the athlete's disgust and disappointment were being voiced now by shouting and jeering, yelling and screaming at the "tournament officials". Ben Campbell, George Harris, Paul Maruyama and I were dumbfounded, standing on the floor by the mats completely taken aback by the announcement and the loud "revolution" which was gaining momentum. We were approached by Allen and Jimmy for advice and guidance and, as we were talking, the athletes gathered around and the boiling noise level began to simmer. Then it turned into dead silence. You could have heard a pin drop. Allen and Jimmy asked us simply, "What would you guys do in a situation like this?" It wasn't Ben's, George's, Paul's or my Olympic berth that was on the line. It was Allen's and Jimmy's and all the other Olympic Dreamers who came to fight that day. The four of us were awe struck at the question, at the dilemma and speechless. The five of us talked quietly and logically and explored options. All of which were, to say the least, not good. Finally, the call came from the announcer commanding Jimmy and Coage out to the mat for the final match.

Allen and Jimmy respectfully asked one more time, "What would you guys do?" A second call to the mat came with a threat of disqualification. Time had run out. We four told them "we" would not compete in this situation and we would demand other trials with consistent and fair selection criteria published at the start and immutable throughout the tournament. I said that the USOC/AAU will be sued by the USJA and that the four of us would work with the USJA Board to correct this mess and get a retrial under a court order if necessary! We also told Allen and Jimmy that it must be their decision and their decision alone as to what course to follow because the personal stakes are too high for us to "tell them what to do", not that we ever really would have tried to do that. Allen and Jimmy, two of the greatest American Judoka of all time had great senses of humor at this moment of "truth" and with rye, impish smiles on their faces they said "Just watch this!"

The ABC cameras were rolling, the very nervous officials were all in their chairs and places of honor and the venue was hushed.

As they walked to the mat together, friends and competitor at the same time, they whispered quietly to each other and then took their respective places to compete opposite one another on the mat. They stepped onto the mat and bowed to the officials. Stepped up to the "line" to wait for the hajime. And then, it came, loud and clear from the referee, "hajime!". With dignified grace these two men of the mat, bowed and walked slowly to the center of the mat. They shook hands, walked back to the "line", bowed humbly and walked off of the mat. What followed can only be described as total chaos, a loud cheer went up from the athletes and the audience, flags were waved and cheering and yelling continued for a long time. Allen and Jimmy made their way over to the four of us and we all hugged and jumped joyously.



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The “athlete’s revolt” which had been brewing for a long time erupted like a volcano. I quietly and slowly made my way through the crowded floor to an exit. I was cornered by four officials who said in essence, I was to blame for this and that I would pay for this “disrespectful behavior”. smiled and excused myself. I needed to find a pay phone. Cell phones had not yet been invented!

I called Michael Rosenberg, the USJA attorney in Washington, D. C., and related all the shocking events in detail. Michael said his firm would do everything possible to see that there was a retrial. A case was filed in the Federal District Court of the District of Columbia.

Long story short, they settled, agreed to a retrial under consistent rules and procedures. Allen and Jimmy at the retrial entered separate categories and made the 1976 Olympic Team. I was in Montreal that day and watched Allen fight and win a Bronze Medal. After the medal ceremony, I called Michael at the law firm from a pay phone outside the arena in the hall. I told him Allen had won and let him listen to the applause. WE, American Judo Athletes, had won and Allen and Jimmy showed the way with dignity and courage at a time of high crisis.

I can hear my youngest son, Matthew, calling me, as he often did as a child, “Hey, Dad, come on down and watch wrestling with me! Bad News Brown, aka, Allen Coage, is wrestling tonight. Hurry, you don’t want to miss it.” This was a ritual on wrestling night and I would sit with Matthew and we’d watch the latest saga of Bad News Brown unfold week after week. After the wrestling was over, I would tell Matthew many stories about the Olympic Trials events, the Montreal Olympics, the Camp Olympus stories, training trips to Europe with Allen and the trips to South Africa to have team judo matches with the South Africans during apartheid. Allen was the Captain of all of those teams. The South Africans loved him. WE all loved him. WE will all miss him. He was a courageous and honorable man, dignified, steady and had a great sense of humor. He was a tremendous DANCER. Matthew and I, like many millions of children and parents around the world, mourn the passing of the one and only Allen Coage, Olympian, and OUR hero. Our regrets and sympathy are with his loved ones.

Allen Coage started his judo career very late – when he was 22. But only two years later he won the AAU heavyweight championship. He repeated as AAU heavyweight champion in 1968, 1969, 1970 and 1975; and in 1970 he won the open division at that tournament. In addition to national titles, Coage won gold medals at both the 1967 and 1975 Pan American Games. With his bronze medal at Montreal, Coage, a 5<sup>th</sup> Dan,, became the first American black to win an individual medal in a sport other than track & field or boxing. Coage spent some time as a professional bodyguard for singer Aretha Franklin, and later wrestled professionally as “Bad News Brown”.



Jimmy Wooley attended the University of Houston, graduating in 1974, between his two Olympic appearances. He also competed at the 1975 Pan American Games, winning a bronze medal in the open class. Wooley was a 4<sup>th</sup> Dan. He was US Champion in the open class in 1974 and 1976, and was second as a heavyweight in 1972 and third as a heavyweight in 1973. Wooley also competed at the 1973 and 1975 World Championships. He served as team manager for the US judo team at the 1983 Pan American Games and the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. Wooley later returned to school and earned a degree in chiropractic in 1979 from the Palmer College of Chiropractic in Iowa, and then became a practicing chiropractor in Irvine, California.

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