

## Meeting the Masters: Charlie Chaves & Jim Bregman

Over 50 years of training in budo, I have been lucky enough to meet or train under many notable martial artists. This year, I want to share my impressions, some deep set, some fleeting, about the men and women I met on the way.

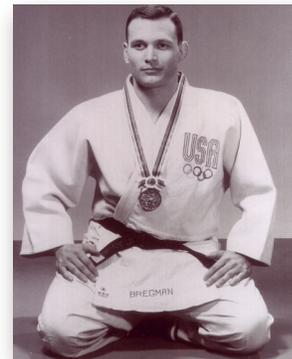
Of all the names I have mentioned in my articles and all the masters I have studied with, the least known is a former 1980 Black Belt Magazine Instructor of the Year, Charlie Chaves. Sensei Harry Yanagi was the head instructor of Northeast Judo Club (a.k.a. Tohoku) in Somerville, MA, but I seldom saw Yanagi Sensei teach any classes (except for one of my early classes at Brandeis and a *joshi* 女子, i.e women's class at Tohoku, back when they actually separated the genders). For the most part, Charles Chaves served as *de facto* chief instructor.

It always seemed that Charlie, who never wanted to be called anything else, could always perform the technique better than any of us even though he was not as athletic as some of us and older than all of us. Part of this ability was probably due to Charlie's early training under Yanagi Sensei, but also due to his using partners such as Benny Babineau and Ray Dionne, two of the best lightweight uke in the dojo.

Charlie managed to be both a hard taskmaster and a supportive teacher. I can recall being unable to finish at least two judo workouts when I had always been able to survive high school football, gymnastics, and any other sport I undertook. We started with a minimum of 30 minutes calisthenics and stretching, and at least as long with simple *uchikomi* (fit-ins) before we got to a short period of technical instruction and then 30-45 minutes of *randori* (free "sparring"). This was the taskmaster side.

I saw the supportive teacher side when both my parents and my aunt came to watch my first official judo *shiai* (tournament) at Tohoku where I won my first match in a few seconds, but lost my next two in double overtime. After the *shiai*, Charlie was kind enough to tell me, with my parents present, that in his opinion, I had won all three of my matches. It was a gesture that was unnecessary on his part, but very much appreciated on mine.

It was Charlie who seemed to be the host at Sensei Ron Berube's dojo when Pan-Am Games medalist Jimmy Bregman came to teach. Jim was famous for his very fast, very deep *uchimata* (inner thigh throw) and although he taught it at the seminar, the most impressive memory was his insistence on throwing DOWN. We had always been taught to off-balance upward at an angle so that we could more easily get our hips under the opponent's waist in major lifting throws, but the instruction ended there. Bregman wanted to make sure than we did not simply release our partners into the air, but aimed them toward the mat. At first, I thought this emphasis unnecessary since it was nonsensical to aim a partner anywhere else, then later, I thought it an emphasis on power and speed so that *uke* could not escape the technique once applied. Now, I think that he was teaching what Soke Don Angier called "the triangulation point"—to throw to a point approximately a shin's distance from uke's base.



It took me decades to appreciate the depth of that little tip. It was probably the source of Charlie's insistence, once Judo was slated to become an Olympic sport, to not only throw downward, but also to *kiai* on impact. I think that Charlie understood the competitive advantage of Bregman's instruction, but not necessarily its technical depth. But then, none of us, perhaps not even Bregman himself, fully understood the implications of that throwing nicety. That was probably because both Charlie Chaves and Jimmy Bregman would do it automatically, Charlie against his lighter dojo uke, Jim against competitors in his own weight-class from other countries. Good enough, at least, to win a bronze medal, and successful enough to share the knowledge with us meager but eager students.