

The concept of Motodachi by Paul Budden 7th Dan Renshi

Often the concept of being a Motodachi can seem quite daunting and usually stems from a basic lack of knowledge and understanding.

If we look at the aspects of Kendo practice – Keiko ...it is obviously apparent that we need a minimum of two people to effectively complete the various exercises that are needed in order for us to make a progression. It is this interactive relationship and the collective needs that have to be understood & cultivated from an early stage in our Kendo careers.

The role of Motodachi has obvious comparisons and similarities with Uchidachi – ‘the one who leads’ in Kata geiko – Kata practice and can often be misconstrued as being only the senior person, this is coming from the concept of seniors having more knowledge through their experience which unfortunately is not always the case. Shidachi and Kakarite then being the opposite side – ‘the one who responds’ or who takes the initiative. During the relative practice sessions where a Motodachi is required the position can be assumed by both senior and junior practitioners as it only requires plain and simple understanding through good direction in order to become a good Motodachi.

The responsibility and tasks of Motodachi in Kihon practice: Motodachi has the responsibility to be the one who helps (leads) by correct distance and with a clear indication of what is required from Kakarite i.e. Men, Kote, Do, Tsuki, opportunities offered should be both inviting and encouraging and should avoid breaking Kakarite’s rhythm through hesitant or bad timing and unclear or late indications.

The use of a formal approach by stepping into Issoku itto no mai (initially for Men) from the Shokujin distance encourages and develops ‘Seme’ – step in or ‘approach’ and if the opportunity is indicated by a clear invitation, then move on to the strike, if the centre is held then Kakarite should move back and approach again.

There is ideal opportunity for the development of Zanshin during the exercises for both sides which should be maintained at an equal level – 100% by both parties.

The use of Suri ashi rather than Fumikomi in the first instance, teaches both control of the body movement through Ki ken tai ichi with an ease of movement. – Fumikomi movements can then be undertaken later once the patterns have been established

Correct breathing and Kiai are paramount – Kakarite should offer an initial Kiai prior to their approach, Motodachi needs to offer a reciprocal Kiai at this initial distance of Shokujin no mai, this can then be the ‘trigger’ for Kakarite to begin. On striking Kakarite’s secondary Kiai should be extended until returning to the start position. Sets of 3 strikes can be undertaken in one breath and then extended to further striking combinations.

Patterns – set exercises should be introduced with as much variation as possible through varied cutting actions and combinations with both large and small strikes.

Counter striking by Motodachi is both educational for Kakarite as it removes the elements of shock and surprise that can be encountered in the first instance as a ‘beginner’ in Kendo and instills confidence with striking without ‘flinching’ or protective covering actions, it also improves the skills of Motodachi. This can be seen as a development from the giving of a clear

indication – i.e. opening for Men & Kote to the application of Oji techniques such as Suriage waza.

Motodachi should endeavour to apply the same 'logical' applications in both Uchi komi & Kiri kaeshi practices, however the cutting actions coming from Kakarite should be encouraged to be large in each case when undertaking 'Basic exercises' with emphasis for Motodachi' in Uchi komi geiko to encourage good distance, breathing and timing. Ozawa sensei points out that Motodachi should always 'consider the best way to improve Kakarite'.

Motodachi in Kakari geiko (Advanced exercises): In Kakari geiko it is the requirement of Kakarite to instigate the attack without receiving indications i.e. 'given areas of attack' and with an emphasis on Kakarite to build the attacking spirit through Kiai and Ashi-sabaki (this build up according to Tashiro sensei should be an 'animalistic' feeling like a cat & dog or Dog v Dog or cat v cat fights as types of examples squaring up). This should be done whilst maintaining the far to Shokujin distance before launching into an all out attack lasting around 10 seconds. Motodachi should not offer the indications seen in Kihon practices, but should maintain a strong 'central' looking Chudan kamae, but without being over forceful. Kakarite should after the 'Kiai build up' attack by breaking Motodachi's Kamae using techniques such as: Osaе, Harai, Uchi otoshi and 'the approach' – Seme. Motodachi should not offer resistance to these attacks (keeping a 'loose' Kamae), but should look to deflect inappropriate strikes, attempt counters like Nuki-do and Suriage etc whilst continuing to encourage Kakarite to attack. Kakarite should attack with small but full sharp cutting actions as many times as they can within one breath and use 'approach' movements when applicable and as required throughout the sequence.

During the practice of Kihon, Kiri kaeshi, Kakari geiko and Uchi komi, Motodachi should not allow the Maai – distance between them to open up, but should close in each time and adjust as required, Kakarite can then move feely from the correct distance of Issoku itto no ma-ai without breaking the rhythm of their movement.

Here some notes taken from Sumi sensei's book translation courtesy of Matsuda sensei.

There are three things that always need to be considered after being a Motodachi in keiko and Shido-geiko:

- 1) At any time was I in 'a resting' mode, so did I spend any time without concentration?
- 2) Did I make the appropriate distance (Maai)?
- 3) Did I encourage and make Kakarite execute their skills fully? And did I also encourage them to do a little more than their usual ability?

Motodachi should hold appropriate 'Ki-atari' (communicative spirit) with a strong 'Kensen' whilst maintaining good but subtle distance with Kakarite. This will teach Kakarite how to perform Shikake' waza (attacking techniques) with appropriate opportunities. Motodachi should teach the Kakarite good opportunities, appropriate distance and 'Ai-ki' – a harmonised spirit.

Note from translator:

Motodachi needs to 'encourage' there is often a word used in Japanese – 'Hikidasu' which means 'to pull out' and in this case, Kakarite's best ability. This means that Motodachi needs to know Kakarite's limit and encourage 'a little more' than their normal performance level.

The following citations from Matsuda sensei on the teachings of Uegaki sensei, Fujita sensei also from Yoshimura sensei in his books

“Uchidachi is I believe coming from the Koryu idea of being a teacher 'Utsu' means to strike and 'Tachi' means sword, this means 'striking sword' and with the student side being 'Shidachi' – 'Shi' means to serve. So there are striking and serving swords in Koryu, this is the way of learning Kumi-tachi or Kata forms.

Whereas 'Motodachi' and 'Kakarite' are in my view, coming from Shinai kendo. 'Moto' means the root or platform or in 'building' (Construction) terminology –'foundations' (to receive a building on top) 'Tachi' in this context is 'standing' or 'position'. This also means 'the base position', whereas 'Kakari' means to approach or attack and often implies 'to initiate'. Here then we can put into context the Motodachi and Kakarite relationship, with Motodachi in a 'static position ready to receive' Kakarite who takes the 'initiative and executes attacks'. In other words there is Motodachi who receives and holds Kakarite's techniques on top of the platform (foundations) this together then creates and completes a 'strong building' one that can be then added to 'floor by floor'. This is the concept of 'Shitei-Doko' which means that the teacher and the student walk together side by side, thus establishing their 'human' relationship. Students in order to improve their ability learn proactively from the Teacher whereas the teacher although also learning from this process, has to continue to learn externally in order to improve. Kendo appears then to have a much larger picture in this context not only for one to improve but also for the entire group to improve together”.