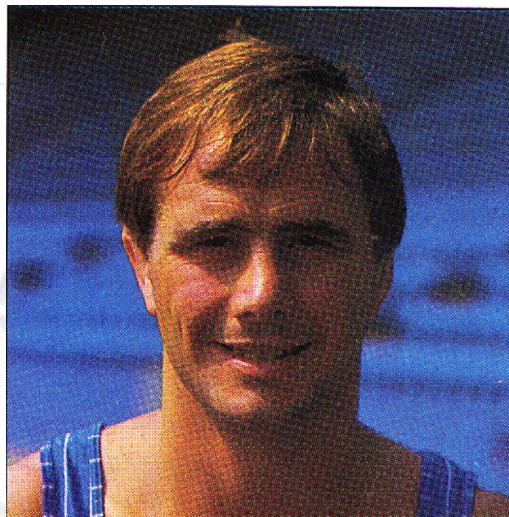


SPORTING LEGENDS: NEIL ADAMS

SPORT: JUDO

COMPETITIVE ERA: 1974 - 1988

Neil Adams' father was a carpenter who took up judo in his mid-twenties. Cyril Adams became so enthusiastic that he gave his son a judo suit for his seventh birthday and it wasn't long before young Neil was making a name for himself.



In 1967 he won his first medal in the Midland Area Tiny Tots Championship and the following year he entered the Junior National Championships. Nerves got the better of him in this, his first major competition, but in 1969, he returned to Crystal Palace to win the first of his five consecutive junior titles.

Always eager to succeed, Adams challenged for his black belt when he was only 15. Undaunted by the prospect of taking on four opponents who were larger and older, Adams duly won it but his victory left him surprisingly frustrated. "People didn't believe I was a black belt because I was only a boy," he says.

In 1974, Adams flew out to Tel Aviv in Israel to compete with the British team in the Espoir European Championships, for 16 to 18 year olds. He returned with a gold medal and not surprisingly, he decided to leave school so that he could devote all his spare time to judo.

On leaving school, Adams moved to London where there were better training facilities. He trained at The Society for Martial Ways where the British Champion Brian Jacks ran sessions.

SPORTING LEGENDS: NEIL ADAMS



Neil Adams' agility helped him reverse many of his opponents' moves.

In 1976 Adams lost to his friend Vass Morrison in the final of the British Open but at the end of the bout Morrison turned to Adams and said "Don't you dare be disappointed with that. You are going to be unbelievable". Adams missed out on going to the Montreal Olympics but under his new coach, Cyril Carter, he won the All-England Championship for the second year running in 1978.

When he was 20, Adams defeated his long-time Italian rival, Ezio Gamba, to win the European title. But a year later the tables were turned when he lost to Gamba in the Moscow Olympics. Missing out on the Olympic gold medal hurt Adams. "It was like a wounded animal", he recalls. But his insatiable appetite for competing and winning soon returned and in 1981 he beat the Japanese, Jiro Kase, to win the World Championship when he was still only 23.

It was undoubtedly the high spot of Adams' career. In 1986, he retired but the desire to win Olympic gold forced him to change his mind a year later. In 1988, he won the British National Trials and the British Open and was selected to head Britain's judo squad for Seoul. There was no fairytale ending as he lost early on, and he finally retired.

Adams' early successes were largely due to a shoulder throw, which he had mastered to perfection. It was his father, his first coach, who pointed out the weakness in just having one weapon in his armoury. Adams added a full range of throws and, after a humiliating defeat in 1977, he sought to strengthen his groundwork techniques as well.

Adams is known as a great stylist. To hone his techniques to perfection, he trained as a gymnast and a weight lifter as well as gaining stamina from early morning runs. To perfect his style, he studied video of his performances and he learned to be his own best critic. Adams acknowledged that much of his success had been due to his overwhelming urge to win.

SPORTING LEGENDS: NEIL ADAMS



Scott Burton's Final Thought

Neil Adams trained and competing via the code of the warrior; winning meant everything to him, and he would always give his all in a bid to achieve his goals.

His career is defined through his World Championship and Olympic medal successes, which helped to make him a household name in England.

This is a great achievement in itself, as Judo has never been considered as a mainstream sport in the UK.

Both Adams and Brian Jacks helped to bring the sport to a wider audience, both with their Judo achievements, along with their epic exploits on the primetime TV show, *Superstars*. For a generation of sports fans (of which I belonged), watching Neil Adams compete was a thrilling event to observe.



Neil Adams's vice-like grip served him well throughout his Judo career.