

# Manabu 学

## Issue 3

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Welcome to your third edition of our newsletter!

We're back with more news, techniques, and event information to keep you connected.

Just like last time, we'll be diving into our three main sections:

**YouTube Channel News:** The latest videos, updates, and announcements directly from our new channel.

**Events & Seminars:** Information on upcoming opportunities to train and learn together.

**Insights & Techniques:** A deep dive into the principles and practices of nanbudo.

If you didn't subscribe last issue:

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## Heiwa YouTube channel updates!

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Thank you to everyone who has already subscribed to our new YouTube channel! If you haven't had a chance to visit yet, we have three short videos ready for you to watch. See what we've been up to at the dojo and subscribe to be the first to know when we post new content!

Advanced nanbudo: Kaeshi waza - nanbu sotai take kiri  
kaeshi/ude garami



Buki practice: Bo kaiten nage



Ippon shobu experiments



Don't forget to like, share, and subscribe to our channel for more valuable content!

## Upcoming nanbudo seminars led by Leo Rafolt:

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### International Nanbudo Summer Seminar in Zaton

**Date:** 20.6.2026-27.6.2026

**Instructor:** Leo Rafolt

**Description:** Detailed information available on event link.

**Register by:** February 1st at [mihaelzupancic@gmail.com](mailto:mihaelzupancic@gmail.com)

[Facebook event link](#)

**\*\*Advance payment to confirm reservation of 30% to be payed before February 1st 2026.\*\***

Spaces are limited, so secure your spot as soon as possible!





## LAST CALL: International Nanbudo Winter Seminar in Ravna Gora

**Date:** 9.1.2026-11.1.2026

**Instructor:** Leo Rafolt

**Description:** Held annually, nestled in the picturesque mountains of Croatia, the traditional Nanbudo winter seminar in Ravna Gora offers a unique opportunity for Nanbudoka to learn, and connect in a serene and focused environment.

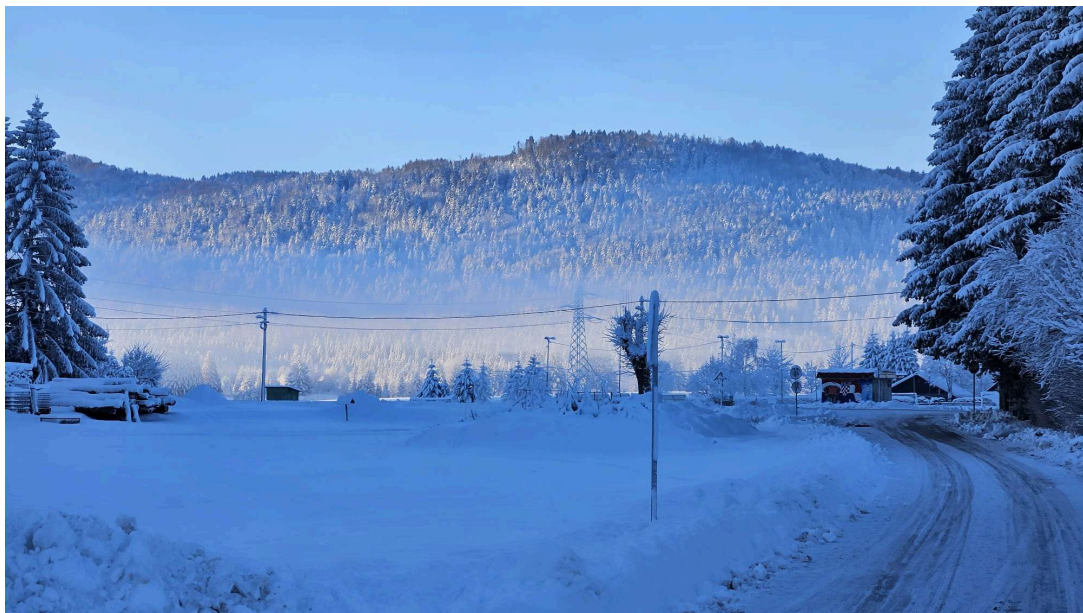
**Register by:** December 5th at [mihaelzupancic@gmail.com](mailto:mihaelzupancic@gmail.com)

Facebook event link

**\*\*This seminar now replaces annual Zagreb seminar in December\*\***

**\*\*Advance payment to confirm reservation of 30% to be paid before December 5th 2025.\*\***

Spaces are limited, so secure your spot as soon as possible!



Leo Rafolt

# Ippon-shōbu (一本勝負)

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## Ippon-shobu (一本勝負)

The expression 一本勝負 (いっぽんしょうぶ, **ippon shōbu**), literally "one-point strike", or "one point victory/loss", etc., is deeply rooted in the ethos of Japanese martial arts. While it denotes a contest decided by a single decisive technique or ippon its significance extends far beyond the framework of competition. It represents a metaphor of Japanese understanding of life and death (actual meaning of the two kanji in shōbu is 勝, shō, katsu, for victory, and 負, bu, makeru, for defeat), discipline, presence, and the moral cultivation, embedded in martial practice.

Or, in the words of one modern kendo master:

「一本は相手と共に生まれ、相手と共に消える。」

**"An ippon is born with the opponent and vanishes with the opponent"**

In early sword traditions ippon shōbu referred to a duel resolved by one conclusive cut, **ichigeki hissatsu (一撃必殺)**, "one strike, certain kill". Unlike the modern sporting rule that awards points, often named ippon, the historical idea stems from a life-or-death context where one decisive action determines opponents' fate. Thus, ippon shōbu, if translated to language of modern Japanese martial arts, ought to be defined as a belief that a true victory occurs only when body, weapon, and spirit are unified in a single, perfect act.

This understanding persisted everywhere in modern budō, e.g., in kendō textbooks (全日本剣道連盟, 剣道試合・審判規則, 2024), as: 「**充実した氣勢、適正な姿勢をもって、竹刀の打突部で打突部位を刃筋正しく打突し、残心あるものとする。**」

"A valid strike made with full spirit (kisei), correct posture, the proper part of the shinai striking the designated target with correct blade angle and accompanied by **zanshin** (lingering awareness)".

Japanese budō even inherited a metaphysical stance toward victory and defeat (**shōhai**, 勝敗). To "win (勝つ) in the ordinary sense is trivial; what

matters is to transcend the binary of victory and loss, or **shōhai wo chōetsu suru** (勝敗を超越する). True mastery lies in acting without attachment to outcome, embodying **mushin** (無心), or "no-mind". In ippon-shōbu, this transcendence is enacted physically. Since one technique decides the match, there is no room for hesitation, calculation, or pride. The practitioner must strike with full sincerity, **isshokenmei** (一所懸命), and simultaneously remain free from ego. The rule thus also serves as a disciplinary device to cultivate moral awareness through embodied practice.

Philosophically, the "one decisive moment" of ippon shōbu fuses three key concepts in budō: **気 (ki)**, **機 (ki)**, and **残心 (zanshin)**. In Japanese martial philosophy, this first ki denotes not only "energy" but one's state of mind and presence. The criterion **充実した氣勢 (jūjitsu shita kisei)**, or well-charged spirit, requires that practitioners' entire being breath, gaze, and posture be synchronized at the moment of attack. The Edo-period notion of **気剣体一致 (ki-ken-tai-itchi)** unity of spirit, sword, and body remains foundational in this sense. It embodies the insight that technique devoid of spirit is lifeless, while spirit without technical discipline is uncontrolled. In ippon shōbu, this unity must manifest instantaneously: the inner intent becomes form.

The second character, **機**, read here as ki or ma, refers to the critical moment or opening. The strike counts as ippon only when it captures the exact timing born of awareness and intuition. Yagyū Shinkage-ryū tradition, influential in early modern kenjutsu, described this as **ki wo miru kokoro** (機をみる心), or the "mind that sees the moment". This relational dimension is very important here: an effective strike is not independent of the opponent's movement, but arises from reading intention, rhythm, and emotional state. The practitioner must sense **maai** (間合い, **interval**), as well as **kikai** (機会, **opportunity**), through embodied perception.

In this sense, ippon shōbu crystallizes some kind of metaphysical view of time: it is not linear but chronotopic, like Kairos, i.e., the decisive instant in which intention, perception, and action merge.

After the strike, **zanshin** (残心) literally "lingering", or "remaining mind" expresses the continuation of awareness. It signifies, both, readiness and moral composure. The opponent is not to be despised but acknowledged. Zanshin transforms a violent act into an ethical gesture. The swordsman



who cuts with perfect awareness must immediately return to stillness a state likened to the calm after lightning. The body remains poised, gaze alert, ego subdued.

A phrase 一撃必殺 (*ichigeki hissatsu*, or **"one strike, certain kill"**) encapsulates the old samurai ideal. Yet, as budō evolved from killing art to moral discipline, its meaning shifted. The "certain kill" became a metaphor for clarity of intention a life condensed into a single, pure act. In a duel based on the principles of *ippon shōbu*, there is no second chance. This embodies a perception of impermanence (無常, *mujō*) in Zen, "dramatizing" fragility of life and the necessity of total presence.

In the words of Yagyū Munenori (柳生宗矩) in *Heihō Kadensho* (兵法家伝書, 1632): 「敵を斬るにあらず、己が心を斬るなり。」

**"It is not the enemy one cuts, but one's own mind".**

In the 20th century, as budō became integrated into schools and sports organizations, *ippon shōbu* was formalized into a rule for scoring. All Japanese martial arts, as well as *nanbudō*, all retained *ippon* as a marker of total victory, or as a full point. Yet, this modernization generated tension between 競技性 (*kyōgisei*, **competitiveness**) and 求道性 (*kyūdōsei*, **pursuit of the way**). Today, Japanese educational policy still regards budō as an important part of 人間形成 (*ningen keisei*, **human formation**). In schools, teachers emphasize how to "win correctly" (*tadashiku katsu*, 正しく勝つ), but also how to "lose beautifully" (*utsukushiku makeru*, 美しく負ける). The purpose of *ippon shōbu* is here not to create winners but to cultivate self-discipline, humility, and empathy, often phrased as:

“勝たせることなく、どう勝ち、どう負けるかを教えること。”

**"What must be taught is not merely how to win, but how to win and how to lose".**

The performative aesthetics of *ippon shōbu* echoes Japanese artistic values such as 一期一会 (*ichigo ichie*, **"one time, one meeting"**), e.g., in tea ceremony, where every encounter is unique and should therefore be cherished. A decisive strike is like the brushstroke in calligraphy spontaneous yet disciplined, expressing years of hidden practice in an



instant. This convergence of arts and combat reflects a distinctly Japanese synthesis of form and spirit. The ideal ippon often emerges from emptiness, i.e., not forced will, but "pure responsiveness".

As Zen master Takuan Sōhō wrote in *Fudōchi Shinmyōroku* (不動智神妙録, 1632): 「心を留めざる所に、真の働きあり。」

**"Only where the mind does not stop does true action arise".**

Yoshinao Nanbu Dōshu Sōke introduced the principle of ippon shōbu late in his methodology of teaching, and it somehow differs from its usage other Japanese martial arts. In kendo, the strike is not judged solely by contact but by the total integration of **気剣体一致 (ki-ken-tai-itchi)** spirit, sword, and body acting as one. The All Japan Kendo Federation defines a valid ippon as requiring “充実した氣勢 (kisei), 適正な姿勢 (correct posture), 刃筋正しい打突 (proper blade alignment), and 残心 (zanshin)” (全日本剣道連盟, 2024). This means that practitioner must approach the strike with full spiritual readiness, physical balance, and mental composure. When striking men, kote, or do, the swordsman must perceive the opponent's rhythm and inner intent, i.e., the moment of *kikai* (opportunity), the decisive cut, occurs in that single opening when all elements converge.

In practice, ippon shōbu is trained through exercises that cultivate timing, distance, and sincerity such as **uchikomi geiko (打ち込み稽古, repetitive striking practice)** and **kakari geiko (掛かり稽古, intensive attack drills)**. The practitioner must "strike through" rather than "strike at". In karate, the same ideal governs ippon kumite (一本組み手, one-step sparring) and ippon shōbu practice. There, a valid ippon is awarded for a technique that demonstrates **完璧な形 (kanpeki katachi, perfect form)**, **正しい間合い (tadashii maai, correct distance)**, and **制御された力 (seigyō sareta chikara, controlled power)**. So, the strike must have the potential to end the encounter while remaining restrained a balance between *ikken hissatsu* (one blow, certain kill) and **kime (決め, focused control)**.

In nanbudo, ideals of ippon shōbu are reinterpreted within a holistic philosophy of energy, movement, and personal harmony. Dōshu's writings emphasize that budo is not merely about defeating an opponent but about mastering flow and awareness. In this light, ippon shōbu is not only a rule of

combat but an inner intent. In traditional randori the ippon principle remains: every movement should contain completeness, as if it could end the conflict decisively if required. The principles of **tai sabaki** (体捌き, **body evasion**) and **ki no sen** (氣の先, **initiative through energy**) encompass this ideal. The practitioner must enter the opponent's rhythm and neutralize it through fluid redirection achieving ippon by dissolving, not striking.

Basic elements of ippon shōbu, as presented by Nanbu Dōshu, were the following. When examined through the relational dynamics of **tori** (being the one that performs the technique) and **uke** (the one who receives it), we see that wearing **bōgu** (防具), for do uchi (胴打ち), armoured practice, means reciprocal learning through controlled confrontation. It allows practitioners to work on their "tori-role" which was neglected by many practitioners because of uke-oriented structure of nanbudo i.e., experience the reality of impact without fear of injury. In pure sword arts, men, kote, dō, and tare form a sacred boundary they protect the body yet demand control.

The psychological shift that occurs when armour is put is also profound. For tori, armour enables full commitment to the strike (**uchikomi**, 打ち込み), projecting ki and power without hesitation. In unarmoured training, practitioners often pull back or restrain themselves, which can lead to shallow technique. For uke, the armour provides an opportunity to receive the energy of the strike fully to study its rhythm, direction, and intention. Being struck while in armour is not a passive act but an act of learning: uke observes maai (distance), hyōshi (rhythm), and kime (focus) of the attacker, and this develops a deep sensitivity to the flow of technique, and the ability to absorb or neutralize force without losing composure. The armour thus enables uke to face "attacks" with calmness, which is the core of **ukemi** (the art of receiving).

The act of striking is both muscular and meditative: it demands relaxation before the explosion of energy, followed by instant recovery. Repeated strikes in armour, e.g., before throwing, during randori, during free forms, develop **hara** (centered power), grounding the practitioner. For uke, receiving the strike as in do uchi even through armour trains body conditioning, i.e., one learns to absorb impact safely and calmly, or to redirect impact-energy, and to maintain posture and breathing under

pressure. In budo pedagogy, the receiver is not an inferior role but a co-creator of learning. The uke allows tori to perfect technique while simultaneously developing **ki no nagare** (気の流れ, **energy flow**). Through repeated encounters, both roles learn the principle of **aite o ikasu** (相手の生かす), "to let the opponent live", i.e., to enhance each other's growth through mutual trust.

In Japanese martial arts, wearing armour and exchanging strikes symbolize controlled confrontation with death. Bōgu metaphorizes samurai's yoroi in classical times. Ippon shōbu ideal is realized: every strike should be treated as decisive. In armoured training, this clarity becomes tangible through sounds of hitting the centre of do uchi, or the pressure of a controlled tsuki, revealing presence or absence of spirit, the paradox of protection and exposure, of attack and defence.

The armour used in our school is rather traditional, similar to yoroi, but also very flexible, and comfortable, because it needs to tolerate throwing techniques, especially **ukemi** (受け身) and **sutemi waza** (捨て身技).

To summarize, it allows some of the following waza to be executed with more comfort and precision:

1. kicking on the armour sides, e.g., in mawashi geri chudan, yoko geri chudan), direct strike to the chest, e.g., in chudan zuki;
2. defensive techniques and leg-grips, before executing throws, or sweeping techniques, i.e., in sukui uke, mochi uke, etc.;
3. finishing techniques in all armour regions;
4. transformation of "non-armour" randori no kata to armoured ones;
5. complex kata, especially those derived from traditional usage of the armour, e.g., umanori randori no kata, sukui no kata, etc.



We look forward to seeing you on the tatami!

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