

Riders on the storm; Into this house we are born; Into this world we are thrown; Like a dog without a bone; An actor out alone; Riders on the storm.

Nikola Filipov, Tukkies's Olympic judo coach, will certainly be able to relate to these lyrics sung by 'The Doors' on a 1971 Album.

For the past 8 years he has been fighting a lone battle in his effort to obtain proper support for his players so that they will be truly competitive if they should, for example, participate in a World Championship or the Olympic Games.

"Being the national judo coach in South Africa, it feels as if I am battling against a strong head wind all the time. In judo nothing is ever a simple matter."

What Filipov is hinting at is that his players have remained: "like a dog without a bone; an actor out alone, riders on a storm."

The former Bulgarian Olympian admits that he has seriously contemplated to quit coaching in South Africa.

"I had offers to coach elsewhere. Bulgaria, my home country, approached me to coach the national team and I would have accepted if it had not been for Tuks Sport and the High Performance Centre (hpc)."

"Their support and vision are the only reasons why I am still involved with South African judo."

"I am certainly no longer interested in being involved with Judo South Africa's national teams. I will only be coaching at the TuksJudo Academy."

Filipov does not hesitate to say outright that the decision makers in SA Judo lack vision.

"South Africa has really good players, but they will never succeed because of the lack of international participation and competition."

"I have argued about this with

decision makers of Judo South Africa (JSA) on countless occasions, but nothing has changed."

"JSA need to go to SASCOC and explain exactly why certain players need financial support, but this is not happening."

"To be competitive in judo at an Olympic Games takes eight years of preparation."

"During the first four years you basically just work on the player's technique."

"During the second four years money is needed. Because judo is 80% a mind game, there comes a stage when a coach can really no longer do much to help a player."

"You can still help them to stay fit and hone their technical skills, but that is about it."

"The only way they can improve further is by competing internationally and also by training with better players."

"If I have to prepare a player properly during the four years leading up to the Games, I should like him or her to compete in at least three to four international tournaments during the first year and attend one training camp as well."

"During the second year they should compete in four or five tournaments and attend two training camps, followed by nine or ten tournaments and five training camps the next year. In the Olympics year they will need to compete in 12 tournaments."

"I did some research after the London Olympic Games and learned that the players who won medals had all competed in 12 to 17 tournaments."

"Taking this into account, Jacques van Zyl, who had only competed in three tournaments, never stood a chance in London."

"But he still impressed me. He was leading up to the last 26 seconds of

his fight. It can be compared with a soccer match in which a team leads 2-0 and is then beaten in the last minute by one goal."

The sad thing is that Van Zyl will probably never compete at a Games again because he cannot afford to sacrifice another four years of his life for nothing.

"I spoke to Jacques' dad and he told me that he had to use R280 000 of his own money to help his son to fulfil his Olympic dream."

"It is simply not fair, but it does not seem to bother JSA."

"If it had not been for the High Performance Centre's support, Jacques would not have had the opportunity to train and compete in Korea and Japan."

"I spoke to Russia's national coach and asked him what his budget for the Olympic Games was. He told me that it was limitless."

"Compare this to Jacques who basically received R300 000 over four years to prepare for the Games. He could not even use the total budget that was allocated to him this year. Because of the incompetence of the JSA administration, he was unable to compete and train in Spain."

Filipov is worried about the future of judo, not only in South Africa.

"More and more players quit the sport when they are in their early twenties to compete in cage fighting in which they can earn good money. This is beginning to happen in South Africa as well."

"Fighters with a judo or wrestling background are usually the most successful cage fighters."

"How does a coach keep players excited about, and motivated in, judo if they will never have a realistic chance of success?"

"JSA has to give serious consideration to this question."

As a player Filipov won countless medals in international competitions. The definite highlights of his career were winning two silver medals at World Championships (1992 and 1995).

He represented Bulgaria at the 1992 Games in Barcelona.

"After winning silver at the World Championship everybody expected me to win a medal at the Games."

"I was not at my best and could only finish 7th. When we got back to Bulgaria I was fired from the Army because of my bad result."

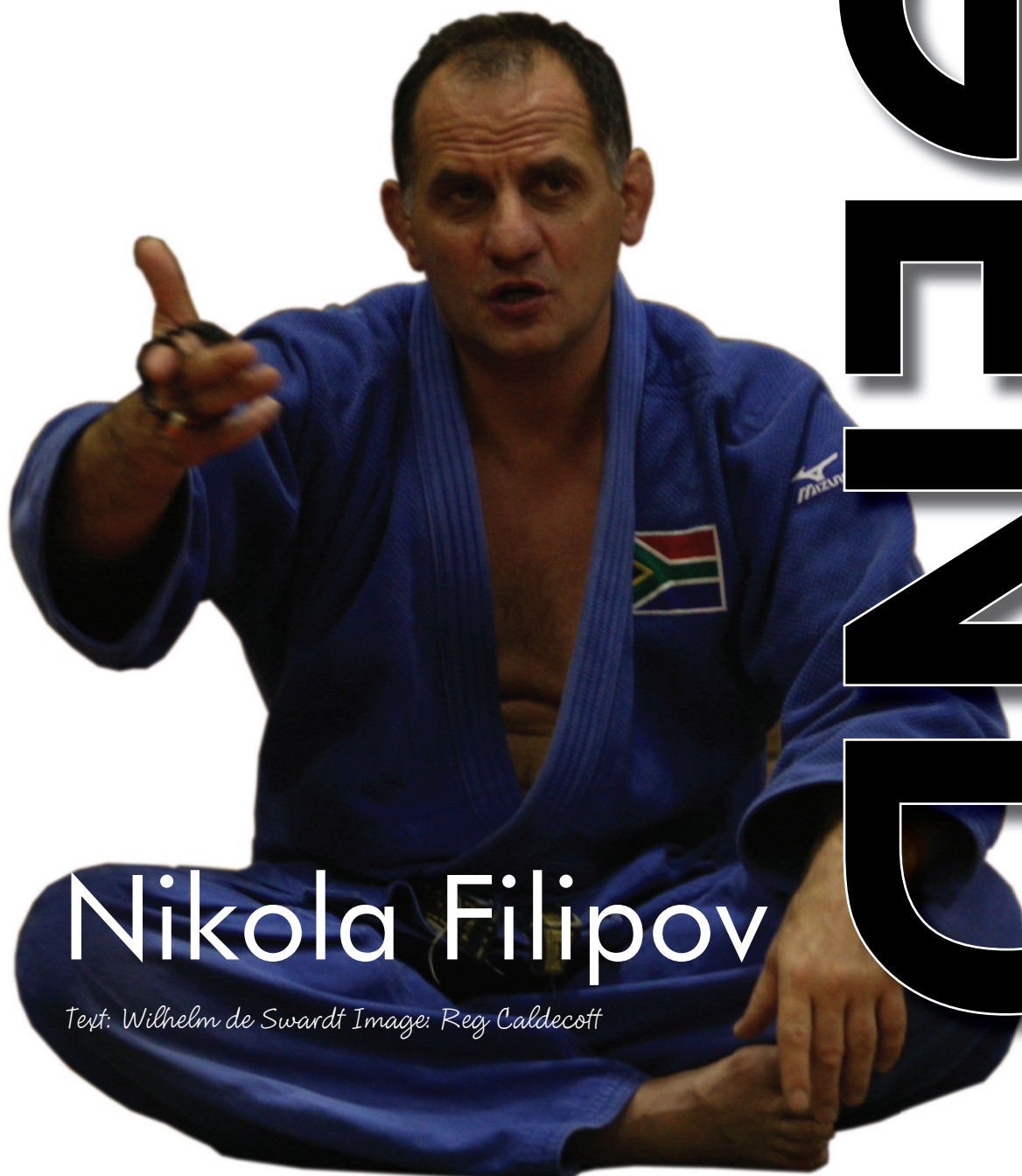
"In those days we were paid by the army or police just to train and

compete in judo."

According to Filipov, contact sports like judo are very popular in Eastern Europe.

"Judo is as popular in Bulgaria as rugby is in South Africa. In Russia alone there are more than 3 million registered judo players."

"Judo is also very popular in France. In France there are a million active players, compared to five million in Japan."



Nikola Filipov

Text: Wilhelm de Swardt Image: Reg Caldecott