

## 名札掛け Nafuda Kake

The term 名札掛!Nafuda Kake is used to describe the name tag rack found in most traditional and classical schools of Japanese martial arts. A breakdown of the Kanji for the term reveals the following:

名 Na/Mei: name; fame  
札!Fuda/Satsu: tag; placard; name plate  
掛 Kake/Kakai: hang; suspend; install



The Nafuda Kake of the Seirin Dojo

The Nafuda Kake is a rack from which wooden name plates of all active members of a Dojo are hung, in order of their rank. The Nafuda represent the “connection” between the Dojo and the student, and symbolizes that the individual is not merely a student of the Dojo, but a valued member that is part of the organization. Members of the Dojo that are in good standing with the school will have their name plate proudly occupying a space on the rack. As long as there is a significant history of an individual training in the Dojo as a member in good standing and intimate connections have been formed from training together, the Nafuda stays on the rack. Even if a person moves away, their heart still occupies a place in the Dojo. One can “feel” that the person would like to still be there and will be there whenever possible. Years can pass and the Nafuda stays in the rack as long as that feeling of connection continues.

The Nafuda Kake is also used to indicate the rank and status of the students who train in the Dojo. The rack separates Kyu and Dan level students to denote those that have achieved higher grades through honest efforts. This method of member tracking serves as a source of motivation and creates a strong sense of bond among members.

Nafuda are usually constructed out of light wood such as fir or pine. They may remain natural without any form of stain or finish. A special brush is used to write names on the Nafuda, adding authenticity and beauty to them. In many cases on the back side of the Nafuda plates, information concerning training and promotion of the respective member are recorded. This allows for quick review of members training history. Nafuda plates can be re-used, when a student drops out, simply by sanding the wooden name plate, however Dan holders Nafuda should be generally kept since attainment of black belt is of permanent status.

In the Seirin Dojo, students are not provided with a Nafuda plate until they attain the rank of 9th Kyu (green belt). Until this rank is achieved, the individual is not considered a member of the Dojo. Students who leave the Dojo for a period of time beyond a month and do not communicate with the instructor have their Nafuda plate removed. Students who do not pay for their training fees on time may oftentimes have their Nafuda plate removed as a sign of embarrassment and discipline, with the plate being restored once the teacher is satisfied with the commitment of the student. When a student has advanced a rank, the student is

permitted to move their own Nafuda plate to the newer rank category. Also of note is that each Nafuda plate has the student's name written in Japanese, along with all of the ranks and categories also written in Japanese. At the very least, a student of the Seirin Dojo is expected to be able to read their own name in Japanese.



It takes time and attention to maintain the Nafuda display, and the entire rack was handmade and maintained by Sensei Takahashi. This effort is an investment in creating an air of traditional seriousness and purpose. A Dojo is nothing more but its members.

The order by which the ranks and member Nafuda are displayed is simple. Newer students are displayed on the bottom left, no matter how big the rack is. As they progress in rank, their Nafuda plate moves to the next rank category to the right. Once the plate cannot go any further right, it moves up to the next level, again starting from the left and moving towards the right. This represents the ascension in rank and skills that the student acquires through hard training.



