CONTENTS

Cover Story

**GAKUJI TOZAKI**
Without Frontiers
By Jose M. Fraguas

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20 John Limcaco
A Learning Journey
By Jose M. Fraguas

26 Jose M. Maañon
PKF President
By Jose M. Fraguas

34 PREMIER LEAGUE/SERIES
A REPORTS
Dubai 2020
Salzburg 2020
Photos Courtesy
Kphotos.net

46 JOELLE INCIONG
Junior Athlete Profile
By Jose M. Fraguas

52 Para-Karate
By Sasha Gerritson
USA KARATE ATHLETES
FACING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Tom Scott  Cirrus Lingl  Sakura Kokumai  Brian Irr

About the Cover

COLUMNS BY
- Phil Hampel ............. 5
- Kamran Madani .......... 6
- Akira Fukuda ............. 7
- Fariba Madani ........... 8
- Jeff Khon ................ 9
- Teruyuki Okazaki ...... 10
EDITORIAL

The Karate calendar of the year 2020 was packed with decisive Premier League and Series A events, Pan American Championships – Senior and Junior, the World Championships in Dubai and of course, the long-awaited Tokyo Olympics, where the sport of karate was going to debut in the Olympic arena. Unfortunately, somebody had other plans, not only for the sport of karate but for the whole world in general. The pandemic of Covid-19 literally stopped, not only all the sportive events around the world but the daily lives of all us. No dojos open, no gyms available, no restaurants where to have a meal, not even going out to the streets to walk in many US cities. The “stay-at-home” order “sent” all of us to “our rooms”; pretty much like if we did something wrong and our parents send us to our rooms grounded. We had [and still have] many casualties – lives lost - and a terrible effect on business across the world. But, what about ‘us’, the ones whom were sent to our rooms? Obviously we have been having extra time, time to think…to reflect…to back off from everything we used to do in our daily lives and, hopefully, to reset our priorities. In life, when we can’t do what we do, we should do what we can. And these “stay-at-home” months, hopefully, have been a time for re-organize our priorities, not only in our social circles but in our lives in general. Maybe for some, the future is going to be different after this cathartic experience with a new way of relate to others…shutting and slowing down the “automatic pilot”. That ‘automatic pilot’ that we all have, run our lives; plans for today, for tomorrow, for the next week and for the next year. But this crisis stopped us all on our tracks. In 24 hours, we went from 60 to zero and gave us the opportunity to ask ourselves if this is the kind of life we really want to live or if we should make adjustments to better enjoy our existence. Adjustments in things like paying more attention to our family members, to our elders, to create a “pause” in our days or weeks to “breathe” a little. The most of our daily behavior is based on habits, habits that we have built unconsciously – just because “we do it all the time”…it is something automatic. Many people that we all know, do things for social pressure as well, for the perception that others will have of them. These times have been an excellent opportunity to re-evaluate those things within each one of us. For others, nothing is going to change when we go back to “normal”. At the end of the day, it all depends on the individual. Like karate training at the dojo; no matter how much the teacher wants to teach, if the students don’t involve themselves in the learning, nothing will be absorbed.

But it is important to go back to our lives in a progressive manner, go back to your dojo training under the supervision of your sensei or coach. Re-evaluate your goals in karate and focus on them, don’t let other things get you off track. “Trust the process” as I like to call it. You had time to reset your life and hopefully that will affect your karate training as well.

What if 2020 is not a year to “erase” from the books? What if 2020 is the year that we “needed”? A year so uncomfortable, so painful, so scary, so raw that it finally FORCES us to grow. A year that screams so loud, finally awakening us from our ignorant slumber. A year that we finally accept the need for change. A year we finally band together, instead of pushing each other further apart.

Like Dave Pelzer said: “Something good comes out of every crisis”. Walk on! USANKF.

Jose M. Fraguas
Editor-in-Chief
As we continue through the pandemic there are so many things on everyone’s mind. We are just starting to get back to training and hopefully we will be able to start competitions soon. Through all of this we have to keep athlete safety in mind. I wanted to take this time to remind everyone of the efforts that are already in place and those we have recently implemented.

Our SafeSport policies can be found on our website at safesport.usankf.org. The Athlete Safety Handbook, the Minor Athlete and Officials Abuse Prevention Policies and the SafeSport Code define the guidelines we use to help keep our athletes safe. Currently we require background checks and SafeSport training for all Official and Coach Members. All adult members are required to complete SafeSport Training. This year the member clubs are required to comply with the Minor Athlete and Official Abuse Prevention Policies and have all individuals in the dojo who have authority over minor athletes complete background checks and SafeSport Training. While this is a big change for member clubs it also separates our clubs from their competitors and shows the commitment to athlete safety.

Training programs are available for minor athletes which are age appropriate as well as training for parents available through the U.S. Center for SafeSport. These programs can be found at athletesafety.org.

While the education, policies and procedures are important to protecting athletes, we know that the real protection comes when violations are reported. There are several ways to report a concern. USA Karate has an independent hotline 844-598-1865 and website usakarateethics.com powered by NavEx Global. If you are not comfortable reporting to USA Karate or the report is for sexual misconduct, you can report direct to the U.S. Center for SafeSport via their hotline 720-531-0340 or website uscenterforsafesport.org/report-a-concern. Reports can be anonymous. For the reporter’s safety we have policies in place to protect against any retaliation for reporting violations.

Athlete Safety is everyone’s responsibility. If you see something say something.

Looking forward to a return to our events. Please wear your mask, wash your hands and social distance.

Phil Hampel
Chief Executive Officer
USA National Karate-do Federation
Being an athlete and going through coronavirus is tough. Whether bored, confused, lazy or just going crazy, quarantine has affected each one of us in a different way. For me though, it was a breath of fresh air. After many months of back to back competitions, physical and emotional burnout were evident. Taking a moment to slow down and let my body recover was something I desperately needed. The separate challenge came in the form of the question, “what do I do now?” The first week of being stuck at home I came out guns blazing. Two workouts each day, teaching zoom classes in between, even sleeping at the dojo some nights. I quickly found that this schedule was not what I needed, but instead what I was forcing on myself. I was not being smart about my training and didn’t listen to what I needed. Truly defining my own individual balance is what I found throughout the viral quarantine.

Taking an athlete out of their average “routine” can be detrimental to their own development within sport. Having something that you continuously work towards abruptly taken away is a shock to the system. As many athletes struggle to find out how to maintain any source of training, others become discouraged and upset through lack of the consistent stimulation and challenges that would be there from sport. I felt and saw these feelings in myself and in students that I was working with. My solution became using the same work ethic towards other aspects of life that I could control.

There is no doubt I am a “homebody.” My favorite pastime is being home just “chilling” and not doing much. Although with training being limited during the peak of the virus, I found myself constantly wanting to get up and move. I felt a bit helpless without the constant training and discipline on the tatami. It then occurred to me that I need to maintain this same mindset off the mat. As we see many times on social media, the mantra “more than an athlete” came to mind. While used in many different contexts, being stuck at home forced me to look at who I am as an individual- not just as a karateka. What else do I have to offer? I took these thoughts and began investigating what my other passions were off the mat. I found that something as simple as reading could create a balance enough to help motivate me to train even better. I took this energy even further and started educating myself in topics such as nutrition, strength and conditioning to better understand what fits my own training needs and how I can maximize my abilities with my current surroundings. I eventually noticed that the more balance I found within myself, the happier and more motivated I was to train and get back into the dojo. It is common for coaches, parents and teachers to tell us (athletes) that doing too much of something is not beneficial. I was able to live this lesson and develop and learn more about who I am as an individual off the mat. Moving forwards I now know that having balance within all of my life will help me benefit even more on the tatami.
Although, crisis or disasters are never foreseen. The steps taken to cope with difficult times can help or hinder us. Coaches and athletes can relate to resilience and perseverance. Often the competition rituals/routines can be applied to everyday lives. The ability to reflect and create a smooth transition share strong correlations that can be easily implemented to our current situation. Many practices such as consistent training, positive thinking, communication, proper recovery, and nutrition can be applied. Below are strategies to help through these tough times.

Routines: Having routines maintains a level of normality will keep stress levels down.
- Do not let a crisis throw you off track. Maintain a daily schedule.
- Wake up at a reasonable time, schedule meals, plan sleep times.
- Increase productivity. “Idle time” topped off with anxiety, thinking of worst case scenarios produces a catastrophic mindset leading to decreased productivity.

Control your own environment: Create a distraction free work environment whether at work or working from home.
- Do not turn on devices and social media with non-work related activities. Remember, working from home is still work.
- Create goals that are attainable. Smaller goals are easier to achieve and lead to the big picture.
- Make a daily checklist, track your progress. Goal setting strategies often get neglected in the midst of stress and anxiety.

Stay connected: Depression and anxiety thrive in isolation.
- Maintain normal social connections.
- Use social media platforms to check in with colleagues, friends and family.
- Create a virtual meeting time with colleagues, friends, and family. Maintaining a healthy relationship is often appreciated.

Self-care: If you do not care for yourself, you can not take care of those who depend upon you. Taking care of yourself is an unselfish act.
- Take time to recharge. Daily breathing exercises, 10-15 minutes, helps center the mind and body.
- Adequate sleep of 6-8 hours is essential to health. An inadequate amount of sleep, increases risk for poor focus, accidents, and higher levels of stress and anxiety.
- Quality sleep increases levels of energy, better concentration, decreases risk of cardiac disease, and promotes a healthier immune system.

Nutrition: Prioritize what you eat. When our bodies are stressed, it craves comfort food packed with high sugars and fats. Initially, comfort foods feel satisfying because of the dopamine effects. But comfort foods lead to an energy crash and feelings of irritability and grumpiness due to the release of stress hormones.
- Better fueling of your body boosts your mood, provides better concentration, and increases memory.
- Studies have found that snacks with higher proteins produce a calming effect. Fruits and vegetables promote a mind body connection.
- Stay hydrated to maintain concentration, performance, and prevent excessive elevations in heart rate.

Stay active:
- Exercise can reduce stress and tension by releasing naturally occurring endorphins.
- As little as 10-15 minutes of exercise can lead to happiness, relaxation, lower heart rate, blood pressure, and stress hormones that have been linked to various stress hormones.
- Take time to relax...

Developing a growth mindset can often transform a crisis into a learning opportunity. Mental skill practices are useful with everyday performance routines. Keeping productive, increases action in daily activity, leading to a positive outlook, and higher efficacy. Invest in yourself, self-care, and take time to reflect. It will make all the difference.
Coronavirus E-Competition

This time last year, the name “Corona” would make us think of parties, beaches, Mexico, relaxing, and all sorts of good stuff. This year, the name brings us a whole new meaning. We have constantly heard “Corona” and “COVID” over the past few months which has brought a newfound anxiety to many people around the world.

This unwanted virus changed and even paralyzed the world the way no one could imagine. It has also changed the way nearly everything will function in the future. Many areas of our lives will be modified to be virtual and online.

The world has been mostly shut down these past few months. There was no school or university to go to. There was no park or swimming pool to enjoy. We had no gatherings of any kind and no way of going out without face coverings. The karate world was no exception. Like many other sports, no competitions or seminars could take place.

In early March, like all others, we were forced to close our physical dojo and move to an online teaching and training system. Most of us were struggling to begin with and we had to adjust our teaching strategies to give students online quality training time. It was no easy task for students either. But we persisted and prevailed. Our students and instructors stepped up, were patient, were creative, and our dojo has survived what we hope is the worst of physical distancing. We did our best to keep our students, their families, and our community safe.

Just when we thought things might be moving closer to normal again, with distancing and face coverings of course, we heard about kata e-tournaments. From one perspective, it made sense. Logically, if we can train online, we should be able to compete online too, right?

But then many questions arose. How will we judge kata? Will we need also train our judges how to judge online, too? How can we teach judges to feel power and Hara over the internet or while watching a video online? Do we have same ability to judge if we are watching a videotaped kata compared to if we are watching a kata live?

I do understand that it is a very difficult time for many dojo owners. We have a commitment to the sport, to our communities, to our students, and we want to run a viable business. We need motivation for our students to keep training. Many students who competed in the past used competition as a goal to work towards. With a modified tournament schedule and a slim number of options, online tournaments are becoming an attraction for competitors of all ages. But is e-competition really for maintaining our athlete motivation or is it just a business experiment?

Digital training, though we have managed, probably will always be lacking things that face-to-face training gives us. For instance it is slightly more difficult to teach intensity and kime via video. Perhaps we should also strive for more than just having our students do exercises and progress through their belts.

Over the last few months of the pandemic, I have been invited to be a judge for several international kata e-competitions. When I asked for details of how I would be judging, I was told that the competitor will send a video of their kata. Then, the judges will watch the video and based on what they see, they will score each individual and then the top scorers will be advanced to the next round. The athlete then has to submit another video and so on.

Therefore, basically each competitor could take their own time and video multiple different katas and pick the best one and then submit it for competition! Will that be considered as a real competition without all the risks of live action? Will the competitor feel the same pressure they feel in the Tatami? Will us as officials feel the same enthusiasm watching pre-recorded videos than watching katas right in front of our eyes? Will we be swayed by better produced videos, privileging athletes with better cameras, and those with potential better access to the means for video production services?

The answers to these questions are a firm NO! However, would this be a good reason to motivate our athletes and students to train harder and be more prepared when the normal competition season resumes? The answer then is yes. These types of competitions could be a good tool to motivate our students until we can fully return to regular life and training schedules.

Coronavirus is drastically changing our lives like nothing before. People might not need to travel like before to hold a meeting, class, or anything of that nature. When it comes to karate, we all hope that we get back to real competitions soon. In the meantime, let’s use technology for the sake of motivating our athletes and keeping our sport alive. Let’s shy away from only focusing of financial benefit! Human feeling matters greatly in our sport. It’s like hugging your loved one instead of showing love to them over a video call. It’s certainly not the same. But until we can safely high-five, handshake, and hug each other again, let’s motivate our athletes!

USANKF
I've been in karate since the 1970's. I've had a dojo that whole time, and things have definitely gone in cycles over the years. Sometimes karate was more popular, sometimes less, but always had a steady stream of people in the room. When I made the switch to working largely with athletes with disabilities, it was organic and natural. More and more people came to me by word of mouth. I imagine I am not alone in the karate world when I admit that I'm not as tech savvy as most. Needless to say, nothing prepared me for the last two and a half months of quarantine. Absolutely nothing.

The first two weeks we were closed. I didn't want to believe this was happening and didn't really want to make the switch to online classes. I had no firm grasp on what that even looked like or was. My business partner suggested we put our classes on Zoom. So, starting April 1, we did. We put up 4 classes a day, 6 days a week.

After being closed for two weeks entirely, I was certainly ready to get back to work. I thought it would be easier, only 4 hours a day, since I typically teach 8 hours a day. But it wasn't! The challenges with the computer and the audio (and remembering to “start video”) continue to be a challenge every day. Some kids had great wi-fi and some kids didn’t. I wasn’t always sure how to mute everyone and didn’t know if they could hear me. It was a struggle. But we are fighters, after all, and giving up is not in our nature, right? So, I pressed on. I knew in my heart that my kids with disabilities, more than ever, needed structure and routine. I put their classes at the same time as they always were. I went through the same set of warm ups and used all the same language. I had to adapt my process, in some ways, to accommodate the individual space limitations of each students’ home and make sure I was speaking slowly and clearly for the audio delay.

I realized a lot about myself during this time. As a teacher of students with disabilities, I am accustomed to making adaptations for exercises and methods, but I have always been able to physically demonstrate certain movements. As I always say “Karate is a contact sport” and showing someone a move is a lot easier in person, as opposed to over Zoom.

But, we are surviving. Some are even thriving. We made flat monthly fee for unlimited classes and some kids actually showed up to the zoom classes more than they ever came to the dojo. I never would’ve imagined. And just this last weekend we held our first ever belt test via Zoom. Not my favorite method, but it worked.

I have been holding practices for the USA Para-Karate team every two weeks. They are doing an AMAZING job. And it occurred to me, that this method makes it possible for us to practice together, across time zones and state borders, more than we ever have in the past.

Overall, in this difficult time, I have seen strength, dedication, adaptation and a true love and desire to continue their journeys in karate. It has been a pleasure.
People often misunderstand this translation, in that they think Master Funakoshi is saying that kata and kumite are two different things. In one sense, they are—and with this principle we are talking about how they are. But as I always remind my students: Basics, kata and kumite are all the same—they are connected.

However this principle, again, is about the difference between kata and a real fight. And it is important for karate students to understand what is meant by “difference,” because self-defense should always incorporate kata, even if it cannot be identical to it. This is where we have misunderstanding. What Master Funakoshi is saying is that the two cannot be identical. But I want to emphasize that kata movements should always be incorporated—flowing from you naturally—whenever you are required to defend yourself.

Kata is the essence of karate’s techniques. Masters created the kata, condensing all of the body’s movements and karate’s techniques to a definite form. If you follow these forms you will develop your movement, timing and rhythm. You will develop your ability to execute the individual techniques, and you will develop an ability to move naturally from one technique to the other. When doing kata, don’t introduce your own ideas. Just do the kata. Actual combat is different, and we will get to that in a moment. But when you practice kata you must follow the prescribed way.

There is a step-by-step study of karate. We have talked about this somewhat already, but it begins with developing good fundamentals. This is the case with learning a kata. First, you have to understand the principle of the kata; then, you need to learn the techniques and movement; and finally, you must come to understand the meaning of the kata applications. In this final step you need to practice with an imaginary opponent, to help you prepare, mentally, to respond immediately to any attack. This is essential so that when you do have to defend yourself, your kata technique will come naturally. I always tell students, “When you practice kata, create an imaginary opponent.” You should do this right from the beginning. Before starting a kata, spend a few seconds to calm your mind. “Find” your imaginary opponent. Then begin the kata, to defend yourself.

In a real situation you will never have time to think of which techniques to use. But if you continuously practice kata, your technique will come naturally. It will be strong, rhythmic, connected, flowing. Ideally, in a combat situation, you will use kata techniques unconsciously. It may be slightly different than the exact kata technique, but essentially you will be doing the same thing. Let me give a simple example. In heian shodan every punch is chudan level, to the solar plexus. The target is a set one, and a punch to any other target while performing the kata is a mistake. In application, things may be different. In a real fight, your open target may be jodan, to the head. In that instance, you ought to punch jodan. The technique will not resemble a technique from heian shodan exactly, but it will naturally incorporate all you have learned about stepping punch from doing heian shodan over and over again. If you practice kata correctly, you can find different applications for each movement, and this will automatically come out when necessary.

In a real fight you will know what to do based on your study. Pieces of the kata will flow out of you, because they are part of you, they are part of your mind. If you study the kata you will find the way. If you study a little you will move like a machine. If you study a lot you will move like yourself. If you do not study at all, you have no way to defend yourself.

We call kata application bunkai. Once you understand the principles of kata movements, you have a foundation for natural reactions. But when you practice kata you must follow exactly the correct path of body movements. Strict adherence to proper technique when doing kata will lead to natural and effective body movement in combat.
Respect: Where Sportsmanship Begins

Athletes, coaches, and parents agree: good sportsmanship begins with respect. And maybe you’ve heard the old saying that respect is a two-way street. That sounds pretty good at first; but if you stop to think about it, that metaphor doesn’t begin to capture the reality. If you want to be a good sport, then respect has to move in a lot more than two directions.

For one, respect has to include your opponent. It can express itself in obvious ways, like complimenting an opponent for their efforts during a match. That’s a positive thing to do; but the things you don’t do might be every bit as meaningful. For example: competition can get intense, and sometimes there are official calls you might disagree with. If you respond to those calls in ways that might invite penalties, you’re showing disrespect for your opponent and the match itself.

Of course, it’s also important to respect your parents and coaches. That’s easy when you agree with their decisions. It’s less easy when the coach decides to take you out of a competition. If you react negatively, you’re not only showing disrespect to your coach – you’re helping to create a negative atmosphere that can erode morale.

Think of respect as an intersection – an ongoing exchange of respect given and respect earned. Respect for teammates, opponents, parents and coaches, ...and yourself.

It can be challenging to teach young athletes how to practice good sportsmanship at times, but TrueSport is built around hands-on activities and other innovative learning techniques. For example, we know that big concepts like ‘respect’ can be hard to wrap your head around. But if you bring it down to the level of everyday personal relationships, it’s easier to understand and to put into action. Use the word TOPS – Teammates, Opponents, Parents/Coaches, and Self to help your athletes remember that Respect has to include all of them!

This series of TrueTalk features is inspired by the values and principles of TrueSport – an initiative powered by USADA, the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency.

We Value Champions.
We Champion Values.
Want to learn more? Visit TrueSport.org
Gakuji Tozaki is one of the top kata competitors in the US. In this up-close interview, he shares insights on his training and experience as a competitor and 2019 USA KARATE National Champion. He has been spending time in the Japan training and taking classes pursuing his education and training under well-known instructors.

We did catch him on before one of his trips to Japan for training under Sakamoto Sensei and interviewed him for USA KARATE magazine.
How long have you been practicing Karate and who is your teacher/coach?

I've been training karate for about 19 years now. My dojo is Okinawa Ryuei Ryu taught by Sensei Tomohiro Arashiro. I also have other sensei in Japan that I seek guidance from to help me with my competitions.

How were your beginnings in the sport?

I was always a great fan of kick-boxing and K-1. My dad and I watched different fights almost every week, and even traveled to Las Vegas to watch the US Gran Prix hosted at the MGM grand. My all time favorite fighter Andy Hug, who practiced Kyokushinkai karate, inspired me to start practicing.

However, as a shy kid, I was little hesitant to immediately dive into the world of karate. But I had friends in elementary school who practiced karate as well, and they pushed me to start.

Why did you choose karate over other sports?

I was always an active kid growing up, always running outside, and breaking things in the house, so my parents made me participate in any sport you can imagine. Soccer, basketball, baseball, I tried it all! However, I chose karate because I thought it will make me stronger, and a fighter. I also felt a great connection with the martial art because we both have Japanese roots. I immediately fell in love with all the Japanese culture and tradition I felt from every training.

How important do you think is for you – at this point of your career - the supplementary training like running, weight lifting, etc?

It’s great to have supplementary training to not just make one stronger physically, but mentally as well. I personally like to run, not only to condition myself, but to also give myself time to reflect on things I have improved on, and to think of new techniques I want to work on. I believe weight training is also a great resource to make you stronger, but I utilize weight training as a way for me to set a goal numerically. In karate, feeling improvement and progression may be difficult unless there is concrete feedback from your sensei or senpai. In the other hand, in weight training, I can set goals creatively by choosing the weight and number of sets. I believe as an athlete, creating and beating a goal set by oneself is an important aspect for self improvement.

What do you see as the most important attributes of a good Kata competitor?

As a karate practitioner, I believe we all share a common goal, and that is to seek and perfect oneself through training. Therefore in karate, I think it is important to have a unique personality. Nowadays, with social media and the internet, we can easily connect ourselves to the outside world. Which I think is great, but also gives chance for people to be stereotypical. It’s okay to be unique and different from others as long as you are confident with it! Once an kata athlete reaches the elite level, I think what separates the champion from others is their personality and uniqueness in their techniques. I think this is the same for all aspects of karate whether that is kata, kumite, or kobudo. I wish every practitioner to cherish their self-beliefs and find their own way of karate-do.

Self-defense, sport or tradition: what is karate for you?

Karate is an identity, and a reflection of their character. I think all three aspects are very important, and I think each of its value is different for everyone. As of now, I love the competition aspect of karate, which teaches me self-defense and traditional Japanese culture.
How do you structure your personal training for an important competition?

Some phases of my physical preparation include strengthening / conditioning, improving, and fine-tuning. That is all planned out by me before important tournaments. I make sure that my body is at the best condition. If there is any fatigue left, I try to recover as much as possible so I can move at the best of my ability the next day. As for mental aspect, I make sure to prepare as much as I can during training to boost my confidence. I constantly think about the sport and try to be as creative as possible. This helps me fix and improve from the mistakes I made in the past and compete with a proper mindset. As the tournament gets closer, mental preparation becomes the majority of my practice since all the hard work is done. I believe the ultimate balance of calmness and sharpness brings out my best performance.

Being a young athlete, how’s your experience traveling with the National team and competing internationally?

I joined the senior national team when I was 17 years old, so over the years I made a lot of friends who were on the team with me. It’s great to see them all shine on the mat, and I feel honored to have shared the same experience with all of them on the Team USA.

Do you think it is positive for Karate to be in the Olympic Games?

I think it’s great that the karate is getting recognized by the Olympic committee and finally making its debut at the summer games in Tokyo. By becoming an Olympic sport, karate will be recognized more by others, which will lead to its improvement and development.

Karate will not be in the Olympic Games of Paris 2024. How this IOC decision affected your future plans?

Again, it’ll be great for karate to have the recognition it deserves from the IOC. But nothing will affect my future goals to be the best karateka I can be. Inclusion or not, I will always practice to perfect my karate. I’ll be prepared for anything that comes my way.

What does it mean for you to be the Number One USA Karate kata athlete for the WKF World Championships in November in Dubai?

I’ve had the best support I can wish for to get to this point. Mostly from my family. My family has faced a lot of hardships to help me travel and gain experiences from international tournaments.

My father moved to Japan by himself to financially support the whole family, my mother started a difficult teaching job at a Japanese school, and my brother took time off school to be my training partner.

I’ve made sacrifices myself. I sold my first car, and valuables to travel to tournaments and trainings in Japan. I spent majority of my time last year in Japan to get extra training. Thankfully, I have guidance from different sensei in Japan whom are kind enough to share their knowledge and lend their dojo to me.

My family still face shortage of money, and other challenges that may let us down, but those obstacles has molded me into a stronger athlete. I push myself to my utmost limit everyday, to strengthen my techniques and spirit. My kata is a representation and a result of everyone’s kindness and endeavors.
“By becoming an Olympic sport, karate will be recognized more by others, which will lead to its improvement and development.”
My success at recent tournaments, and winning the USA team trials has proven that hard work always pays off. This makes me a unique athlete, and the best representation of USA Men's kata at the World Championships.

The pandemic of Corona Virus greatly affected the final phase toward Tokyo 2020 (2021). How did you approach and adapt your training to the circumstances?

I am currently in Japan now training at a great, safe environment, with the best coaching from the sensei I trust. I would not have been able to train and practice without their help. As the condition worsened, I started to spend more time indoors, isolating myself, to work on some techniques. I've always practiced in small areas at the dojo, simulating the small warm up areas at international tournaments. I would have never imagined that training will help during a pandemic outbreak of a virus.

What advice would you give to those who wish to start training?

1. To have a great work ethic. Be the hardest worker in the room!
2. Practice your basics! The basics are the foundation to everything!
3. Do not become close-minded. It's very easy to become one when perusing a sport for a long time. This is the same for karate. Be smart and think outside the box.

Finally, what are your plans for the future?

My goal is to simply become a better version of myself. There may be ups and downs, but I know they all happen for a reason. From all the hard work I want to inspire future generation of karatekas and help them become successful.
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• STUDIED UNDER SENSEI CHUZO KOTAKA, FORMER ALL-JAPAN CHAMPION
• BEGAN TRAINING AT AGE 7
• OVER 50 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE
• FROM 1982 - 1991 RANKED #1 BLACK BELT FOR THE STATE OF HAWAII
• 9 - TIME ALL-HAWAII KATA CHAMPION
• 8 - TIME ALL-HAWAII KUMITE CHAMPION
• 1986 -1995 AAU-USA NATIONAL KUMITE CHAMPION
• FORMER USA & AAU TEAM MEMBER
• 1991 & 1993 WINNER OF THE “CENTURION AWARD.”
• 2005 NOMINATED “COACH OF THE YEAR”.
• 1996 TO PRESENT AAU/USA NATIONAL COACH
• 2000 TO 2018 USANKF NATIONAL COACH - USANKF IS THE NATIONAL GOVERNING BODY FOR THE SPORT OF KARATE SANCTION BY THE US OLYMPIC COMMITTEE
• HE HAS DEVELOPED AND PRODUCED MORE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CHAMPIONS THAN ANY OTHER KARATE SCHOOL IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA.
How long have you been practicing Karate and who was/is your teacher?
I started karate training at age 7 and have been practicing karate over 50 years. I studied and trained under Chuzo Kotaka. Sensei Kotaka is a former 1962 All-Japan Champion which is still considered the most prestigious tournament in Japan.

Have you trained in other Martial Arts besides Karate?
I have learned and participated in other martial arts such as Judo, Kung Fu and boxing when I was younger, but I really fell in love with Karate. I was fortunate that Sensei Kotaka is also a black belt in Judo, Aikido and has knowledge of traditional Japanese weapons. When I was younger, it was part of our curriculum that we learned and trained at the dojo.

Would you tell us some interesting stories of your early days in training?
I think everyone who has trained for as long as I have, probably have similar types of stories. Our training 40+ years ago was a different culture and experience compared to today. Sensei Kotaka barely spoke English. He taught strictly by example, demonstrated each movement and carried his bamboo stick “Shinai”. Let’s just say, you knew when you were doing something wrong. There are many stories to tell, some good and some bad but, this story made me look at things differently and gave me a better perspective of karate. One day after the All-Hawaii tournament, Thomas Asing (my dojo teammate and close friend) won the adult kumite championship. He came to class and was talking about his fights that he had with everyone. I guess Sensei Kotaka overheard him talking and once class started, he told everyone get ready for kumite (sparring) and he put on his hand pads. Sensei was in his 40’s at the time and Thomas was 19 or 20. Thomas Asing was fast, strong and became a great champion. Sensei instructed everyone to make a circle and once the circle was formed, he called Thomas to do a kumite match against him. Within seconds he got his wind knocked out of him and was on the floor because he got thrown. This went on for 3 - 5 minutes, but it seemed like forever. It was crazy and intense and

“Karate has evolved so much over the years. Over the years, we as athletes and even instructors must change to keep up with the new trends of training philosophy, ideas, techniques and even the way we teach the younger students.”
after it was over Sensei said, “You are not as good as you think, Be Humble!” Finally, he said “There is always someone better than you are. You need more practice.” Humility and Never Settle and more importantly Be better than you were yesterday are the lessons that I learned that day. I truly believe in this and I try to instill it in all my students.

**When you started your training, were you ‘natural’ at karate – did the movements come easily to you?**

I would have to say “No.” I think if you ask Sensei Kotaka he would say that I just worked harder and never gave up. He never once said “John, you are talented or good.” He would say “You need more practice.”

**What advice would you give to students on the question of supplementary training (running, weights, et cetera)?**

A word that would describe supplementary training would be Crucial. Today any athlete who wants to reach or achieve their dreams of becoming a World Champion or even an Olympic Champion needs to educate themselves and seek help from professionals who are experts in various areas. The scientific knowledge and technology that are available today were never heard of thirty, forty or even fifty years ago. I am not only referring to the physical aspect but the mental and the psychological development are extremely essential for an athlete to reach his or her highest potential. I started incorporating supplementary training with my students as early as 5 years old. For example: George Kotaka who probably won every major event that he has entered besides being a 2x WKF World Champion. George was only 5 years old and I exposed him to cross fit training. I made him run in the sand on the beach, in the water knee deep, sprint hills, sit-ups, push-ups, squats and everything else I could think of. Not only George but all the other students who were under my supervision and had a successful karate career such as Barbara Chinen, Elisa Au, Shannon Nishi and Gino Bough just to name a few.

**Have there been times when you had doubts about your karate training?**

I can honestly say I have never had any doubts when I participated at any competition when I trained properly and correctly. That’s not to say I trained correctly all the time for every event because who can say they did? But when I did focus and concentrate, I always had good results.

**How has your understanding and perception of karate developed over the years?**

Karate has evolved so much over the years. Over the years, we as athletes and even instructors must change to keep up with the new trends of training philosophy, ideas, techniques and even the way we teach the younger students. Without change how can we as instructors or even human beings become better? Change forces us to improve or we become obsolete. With that being said, I believe even with change, we can never forget where we come from. The values, traditions and the old ways of Budo must always be part of our journey.

**What do you think are the most important attributes of a karate student?**

Karate can teach so many different things but the one thing that you can’t teach is Heart and Perseverance. If I had a choice on what type of quality is important for a karate student, I would have to say, “a student who is eager and willing to learn”.

**What do you feel was your biggest loss, and what did you learn from it?**

I honestly can’t say what is my biggest loss as far as a competitor. Win or lose, I’ve always learned something from it. Understanding why you won is just as important
as understanding why you lost. The answer can’t be because I, he or she was faster, stronger, older the answer must be what did I do or didn’t do that caused the outcome of that match. After each tournament I ask all my students why did you win or lose? It makes them think and self-reflect and more importantly makes them want to learn from it. Although, I think my biggest regret or loss would be pushing many students away from karate because I pushed and demanded a lot from them too fast. Over the years when I got older, maybe slightly wiser and consistent reminding from my wife that “you can’t want it more than they do”. Sometimes it is very hard for me to resist from pushing and trying to make them see the potential that I see in them.

**Are there any mental exercises you would recommend to strengthen the mind for strategy and creativity in elite competition?**

Mental exercises are tricky. I believe each athlete must be treated as individuals. Meaning everyone is different. Not all exercises can work on everyone. It really depends on their upbringing and their personality. Since I am not an expert in this area, I really can’t say too much on this topic. I can say I have witnessed many athletes who have the talent and potential to become great but lack the mental toughness because they are not willing to absorb or take advice from those who are willing to help. I feel many athletes can’t take constructive criticism without being offended. Again, this is just my opinion.

**Karate is nowadays often defined as sport…would you agree with this definition or you think it is more than that?**

I would have to agree that Karate is defined more as a sport today because of the array of competitions that are offered around the world. I think sport Karate is more appealing to the younger generation than Martial Arts. Don’t get me wrong Karate is an Art like other martial arts or styles, but I feel especially for the younger generation their attention is drawn to the sport aspect of training.

**Do you feel that you still have further to go in your studies of the karate?**

Karate is a never-ending learning process. I feel once you stop learning how can you grow as a person or become better than you were yesterday.

**When training karate – what do you think it is the most important element; self defense, sport, health or tradition?**

Personally, I think training and learning all the elements that karate has to offer makes you a well-rounded Karate-Ka. I believe everything goes hand in hand. One element helps you become better in the next element and without perfecting one how can you possibly perfect the other? A saying that I always use that I learned from Sensei Kotaka “If you have 5 mistakes in your kata how can you fix them if you can’t fix the first mistake?” This saying does not only apply to Karate but in life as well. But today students/athletes are given the choice of what they want to focus on whether it be just kata, kumite, weapons, self-defense or just health benefits that karate can offer. Again, everyone is different some are more passive, so they concentrate on kata and others are aggressive by nature and they focus on the physical part which is kumite. And there are those who prefer to learn the traditions and culture of the art. Karate has evolved so much over the years.

**Do you have any general advice you would care to pass onto young athletes?**

Just enjoy and have fun in what you are doing. Be honest and true to yourself. Lastly, be accountable for your actions and always be humble.
What do you consider to be the most important qualities of a successful karate competitor?

There are so many factors to be a successful karate competitor. What is a successful competitor? At what level of competition can we say we are successful? Athletes who decide to compete at local tournaments only and win are they not as successful to those who compete at an international event? Everyone has their own personal goals on what they want to achieve. Who are we to say which is more important or more successful? For the sake of argument let’s talk about at a world-class level. I think the qualities that are needed to become a world champion is the understanding of what makes you special. Once you understand your gifts create a strategy that will benefit you when you are competing. Be true to yourself meaning have your own identity. Be willing to learn from your mistakes and to adapt. Most importantly have the correct and positive people who believe in you win or lose.

Who would you like to have trained with that you have not (dead or alive)?

I have been so blessed and had the privilege to have trained under so many great teachers and masters who were considered the pioneers of the karate world over the years. Many have passed away and I am very honored and fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn and meet them. It would have been awesome to meet Bruce Lee.

What would you say to someone who is interested in starting to learn karate?

I think I would say that Karate has so much more to offer than any other sport, but it takes a lifetime to learn the true art of Karate. Besides learning self-defense, gaining confidence, obtaining physical as well as mental benefits; the life learning lessons that come with karate is “Priceless”.

Karate is finally part of the Olympic Games, what is your opinion about it and the fact that we won’t be in Paris 2024?

Like myself, and the millions of karate practitioners around the world, we felt joy and excitement when it was announced that Karate had finally made the Olympics. The dreams we once hoped for was now a reality. Finally, the next generation of students had the opportunity to dream of becoming an Olympian someday. The many years that took the Olympic committee to vote Karate into the Olympics took only seconds to vote against it in 2024. I personally have my opinion on this issue, but it would be best to keep them to myself, but I would love to sit down and discuss it with you or anyone over a soft drink or tea. I just have to say it is heart breaking and sad for everyone, especially the little kids, to take away their hopes and dreams of one day representing their country in the Olympics because of the many indifferences people may have.

Finally, what are your plans for the future?

My plan for the future to continue, if needed, to help make a difference in the development of our USA athletes. On a personal note, I strive to continue to make a positive impact and influence on the lives of all my students and to be a better person than I was yesterday.

“Be willing to learn from your mistakes and to adapt. Most importantly have the correct and positive people who believe in you win or lose.”
When the world is still in “shock” due to the pandemic of COVID-19, we wanted to approach Mr. Jose Maria Garcia Maañon, President of the Pan American Karate Federation to ask him about how this situation may affect the PKF events in 2020 and even the Championships to be held in the next year, 2021. It is the time to find “new answers” to the questions that destiny put in front of us all.

“When we thought we had all the answers, suddenly, all the questions changed.”

Mario Benedetti
The Coronavirus (COVID-19) has altered the calendar of sports around the world, even forced the Olympic Games of Tokyo 2020 to be postponed until the next year. Let’s focus on how this directly affects to the world of karate. The first event within the PKF is the Senior Championships scheduled for the end of May in Costa Rica. What can you tell us about it?

The situation is extremely delicate and difficult. The COVID-19 not only affected all the sports but every single human being around the world. Many of the WKF events were suspended and/or postponed like PL Rabat, PL Madrid, Tokyo 2020 Paris Qualifier and finally the Olympic Games. These decisions were made based on the safety for all the athletes and the people working in the events including also the spectators themselves. Obviously, in the PKF we had to take similar decisions and cancel the Senior PKF event that was going to be held in Costa Rica. This is very unfortunate because Costa Rica had already everything in place and having to cancel the event one month before…it was hard. But this situation surpasses every single one of us. It’s all about safety.

What are the plans for the Junior PKF at the end of August in Monterrey, Mexico?

The Junior PKF is scheduled for the end of August and we hope the situation will be better by then.

The final decision is not in our [PKF] hands. Everything depends on how the control of the COVID-19 evolves around the world. At this moment I can’t give you an answer and it would be speculating at this point. For the celebration of a Pan American Championship, there are many things to take into consideration and many people involved; athletes, coaches, referees, assistants, volunteers, etc. We should also think of the situation in the hotels, airlines, transportation, etc. In short, at this moment I can’t give a definitive answer. We all have to wait and see how the situation develops.

The same applies to all WKF events for 2020.

I’d like to mention that during the last months we have been working very hard with Pan Am Sports and the good news is that Karate has become included in the official program for the “Pan American Games 2023” in Santiago de Chile.

Another good news is Karate is amongst the 30 sports that have been approved to participate in the 1st Junior Pan American Games in Cali, 2021. The event will be organized by Pan Am Sports and for the sport of Karate we’ll have a division of Kumite Under 21.

The PKF Executive Committee has study and approved the final Qualification System: every country will have two possibilities to qualify although at this moment – because of the circumstances - we can’t assure when and where these events will take place, and also because it will be affected by the Pan Am Sports decision of the date (month in 2021) of the Junior Pan American Games in Cali.

Tokyo 2020 will be now “Tokyo 2021”. What is your opinion about this?

I know this decision was a hard one to take by the IOC and the Japanese Organization Committee, but there was no other solution. I think this is the first time in history that the Olympic Games have been postponed and moved to another date. I truly believe it is the right decision. Once again, the safety of athletes, coaches, managers, workers and spectators must be the priority for all of us.
How do you think this decision may affect to the athletes that are already qualified for Tokyo 2020?

I believe that this decision affects to all the athletes the same, either they are qualified or still trying to qualify. It is obviously a bump on the road and they all will have to adapt and adjust their training.

Many sports and National Federations already had in mind not to participate in Tokyo 2020. This fact could have affected the level of the competition since most likely the best athletes were not going to travel to Japan under the COVID-19 circumstances. For Japan, the Olympic Games under this situation were not the Games that Japan always wanted.

The Paris Qualifier that is scheduled for June 2020 is going to be the final chance for many. Do you think it will be held in June of this year or can be pushed forward to be held closer to the celebration of Tokyo 2021?

I will reply to you with the message sent by the President of the WKF Mr. Antonio Espinos recently to all the WKF National Federations:

“We are now in close connection with the WKF Olympic Planning Commision and are regularly meeting by video conference in order to proceed, in agreement with the IOC, with the adjustment necessary as regards to the qualification System for the Olympics Games and the 2021 WKF activities Calendar …”

Finally, although we all are in a “state of shock”, is there anything positive we can all get from this situation that we are in?

I really think so. Even if we are in a very sad moment when human lives are being lost every single day, the world will be defined “before” and “after” COVID-19. I believe that the human beings will learn how to be more sensitive one to each other, more aware of the individual next to us – in a good way. I am sure we’ll come up with new strategies to recover and overcome similar problems and for us, the Karate world, to develop our sport in a better and bigger way.

Remember…”what doesn’t kill us…makes us stronger!” (F.N.) USANKF
Sakura, what does it mean for you to be the first USA Karate athlete to ever qualify for an Olympic Games?

SK: It is an honor and it is also exciting to be one of the first to qualify for the Olympic games. “being first to qualify” was never on my mind when I was going through the qualification process so it feels weird to be labeled that way. But I am honored to be the first, and I hope to represent our country and also our sport well at the Olympics.

Looking back more than two years ago...how do you see your personal evolution through the whole qualification process until now?

BI: I have definitely learned a lot about myself as an athlete as well as my opponents as competitors. My application of strategies and techniques during competition has significantly improved over these last two years and I owe that to my coaches and training partners for helping me by challenging me along the way.

CL: The person that I have grown into because of the Olympic qualification process until now has truly blown my mind. Two years ago, I was just entering the adult division, so the task of qualifying for the Olympics seemed very daunting especially to tackle it with going to college and still teaching karate all the time. I had my family, friends and my coach on my side that all believed in me and my abilities. They helped to teach me that I am a much stronger and better person, as well as competitor, because of the process. It has given me confidence and strength I didn’t know I had because it pushed my limits both on and off of the mats. That is something I would not trade for the world because that is who I am, and I am very proud of that.
**TS:** Participating in the Olympic Games will be easier than this qualification process. This has been a grind. I can say that the heavy travel paired with the ups and downs of victories and defeats is the hardest challenge I have ever faced in my life. I am happy to say that because of the good guidance that surrounds me and with my support team that holds me to my principles, this process will no doubt make me a stronger man, athlete, teacher, husband, student, sensei, friend and hopefully one day a better father too. I have learned a lot about myself dealing with adversity and disappointment, but at the same time, I am always relearning to enjoy my sport for the thrill of competing and not to focus on winning. Whenever I get that right, I am unstoppable.

**The pandemic of Corona Virus greatly affected the final qualification phase toward Tokyo 2020. Although you are already qualified, what is your opinion of how it should be handle the last qualification phase?**

**SK:** All of us athletes have sacrificed a lot of time to prepare for the Olympics. The circumstances we are in are very unique and it is challenging for all of us to adapt. I hope they make a decision that is fair for all athletes. We have trained so hard for this moment, we all deserve a chance to try.

**BI:** So far, I am pleased with how things have been managed. Although I am disappointed that the process has been disrupted, I completely understand the reason behind the changes. Priority is being placed on the health and well being of everyone involved. I'm looking forward to the rescheduled qualifying event to be held next year.

**CL:** I think the way that the qualification process has been affected is fair considering how the virus is affecting the world as we know it. Cancelling the final Karate One tournaments, postponing and then cancelling the last chance qualifier in Paris and the ultimate postponement of the Olympic Games to 2021 is all in the best interest of the universal health of our society. It would not be fair to hold the games or these tournaments with many people's trainings put on pause. Now is a good time to rejuvenate, keep training, be ready and be better than we are now for when our chance to compete again presents itself.

**TS:** What a wild last few weeks it has been. I think everyone has mixed feelings about it all. Every athlete was certainly relieved to get some rest, however many, including myself, missed out on opportunities to grab points that were left on the table. I trust the WKF and IOC to come to an appropriate solution that can make up for the missed events.

**How did you adapt your training to the current circumstances in order to be at your very best?**

**SK:** My training hasn’t changed much. Of course, many events have been cancelled due to the situation, but I know the “how” and I am very good at adapting to any given situation. Karate has always been a martial art where people practice at home, you can practice karate anywhere, so I try to see the positive side of the situation and adapt, so I can be ready for the next competition.

**BI:** The same way I have been all along. Following the plan laid out by my coaches and giving my best effort during each and every workout.

**CL:** I am currently doing all of my training at my house. I am lucky to have my sister and my dad to train with while at my house, even though the space is limited and Chicago weather doesn’t always cooperate for outdoor trainings. We are doing the most we can with mixing a little bit of weight training with the few weights (or backpacks) that we have with kumite trainings to keep in shape and moving forward. I keep in touch with my coach, Sensei Mertel, who helps a lot to send us trainings and workouts to be able to continue to progress in the way we would if we were still in the dojo every day.

**TS:** Most importantly, just like I teach my kids in online classes, I have tried to maintain my daily and weekly schedule as best as I can. It is very important that we humans stay
on schedules and I am the first person that can attest to that. Having kept to my classes and my workouts (whether in the gym or at home) first and foremost we have to be doing something. Our team has moved our strength training to the living room, but we have kept a lot of our conditioning work outside where we were. At the track we are able to bust out hard workouts and keep a good social distance too.

What advice would you give to those who have restrictions at home because of the Corona Virus quarantine but they still want to train?

SK: Be creative. Karate is a sport that can be done anywhere. Stick with the basics, set yourself a goal, and work every day to reach those goals. Once all of this is done, you would want to feel ready and prepared for the next competition.

BI: Keep training. Be proactive. Be creative. Encourage your coach to hold practices via video conference if they aren’t already. Reach out to other sources you might have in other parts of the country or world. These past few weeks I have been noticing more and more respected members of the karate world posting workouts and ideas on social media. The more creative you are, the more enjoyable your training can be during this period of time.

CL: I would advise people to just continue to do the best that they can to stay in shape. Whether you have a full dojo at your home or just a little bit of space in your living room, you can definitely do things that will benefit your karate. Practice your basics, work on strength or flexibility or countless other ideas can make your karate better even if you aren’t training with your Sensei’s and teammates like normal.

TS: SHOWER PUSHUP CHALLENGE. I encourage everyone wanting to get better to join me in the shower pushup challenge. Before you take any shower (don’t worry if you sweat) do as many pushups as you can before stepping in and clean up. It doesn’t matter how many you do. It might not even be the time to keep count. If you go until failure every time you take a shower you will see and feel improvements right away.

Unfortunately Karate will not be in the Olympic Games of Paris 2024. How does the IOC decision affected your future plans?

SK: It hasn’t changed much because the goal I had was Tokyo 2020. Karate will always be a part of my life, with or without the Olympics. I am sure karate will be represented well in Tokyo and I hope everybody will see what we do as martial artists.

BI: For now I am focused on the Olympic goal. After that, I don’t expect my future competition plans to change in light of 2024. So long as I am still enjoying the process, I will continue to compete for as long as I am physically and financially able to.
CL: The IOC decision to not include Karate in the Olympics in 2024 has not affected my future plans for karate. It will be different for me because I will be experiencing the adult, international Karate world for the first time without the thought of the Olympics. Since I entered the adult division, everything has been with the focus of the Olympics, therefore, once the Olympics pass, it will be a whole new set of experiences for me. I still want to become the best version of myself that I can be and I cannot wait to see what that looks like, regardless of the Olympics or not.

TS: I loved my sport before it was included in Tokyo. Although this news would be unfortunate, it would not change my plans at all. I plan to do my sport for a long time.

Now that the Olympic Games have been moved into 2021, how do you think this will affect the overall preparation for all athletes - extending a year?

SK: I will reply to you with the message sent by the President of the WKF Mr. Antonio Espinos recently to all the WKF National Federations:

“We are now in close connection with the WKF Olympic Planning Commision and are regularly meeting by video conference in order to proceed, in agreement with the IOC, with the adjustment necessary as regards to the qualification System for the Olympics Games and the 2021 WKF activities Calendar .”

BI: We are all in this together, facing similar restrictions. Elite athletes will always find a way to do whatever they can to prepare themselves both mentally and physically. I think when this is all done and over with, we will see many of these athletes emerging with a new-found level of passion for their sport.

CL: I think that overall the preparation for many athletes will be greater than ever before. Many athletes from all sports will have more motivation to show the world that the extra year of preparation because of the scenario in the world is for the good. Sports will be better than before, attitudes will be more positive and everyone will enjoy normal training and regular life activities more than ever.

TS: I think WKF athletes are very used to a continued year round competition/training schedule. There hasn’t been an “off-season” in 10 years. I guess I mean to say that I have no doubt everyone will continue to work for the next year. While this could end up the longest stretch without competitions that I have ever experienced on the USA Karate team, we currently have Pan American Championships in May, and I look forward to the build up.
FULL COVERAGE

ROAD TO
TOKYO
2020!

DUBAI PREMIERE LEAGUE
SALZBURG PREMIER LEAGUE
1. Brian Hilliard avoiding his opponent attack. 2 & 4. Tom Scott during his first match. 3. Mason Stowell performing “Anan”.

Photos Courtesy Kphotos.net
1. Tom Scott receiving last moment instructions from Coach Brody Burns. 2. Brian Irr scoring with a Mawashigeri Chudan. 3. Mason Stowell performing during his first kata round. 4 & 5. Kamran Madani taking the offense in his first match.
1, 3 & 5. Gakuji Tozaku performing Ryuei Ryu kata in the first round. 2 & 4. Pan American Champion Ariel Torres in action.
1. US National Champion Gakuji Totsuku in kata “Suparimpei”. 2, 3 & 4. Tom Scott attacking his opponent during his first match.
1, 3, 4, & 5. Brian Irr during his first match. 2. Irr waiting for his match next to Coach Brody Burns.
How long have you been practicing Karate and who is your teacher/coach?

I've been practicing karate since I was five years old, and I'm sixteen now. My senseis are Sensei Barbara Maile Chinen, Sensei Robert Koncal, Sensei Shannon Nishi-Patton, and Sensei Eimi Kurita from “Kachi Karate Hawaii”. I love my senseis so much. They create an amazing environment in the dojo that feels like family. We spend time together outside the dojo too, going to the beach, hiking, and eating (Sensei Maile makes a delicious Dalgona whipped coffee!). They emphasize that although training hard in karate is important, we should also be genuinely good people and work hard in school.

How were your beginnings in the sport?

When I was five years old, my Uncle Marc gave me the “Kung Fu Panda” movie for Christmas. Po the panda inspired me to try martial arts, so my mom signed me up for karate classes at a local dojo. I began to fall in love with karate, and when I was six years old, I started competing. At my first tournament, the only event I competed in was weapons. I walked onto the mat with my “bo” in the wrong hand. I may have gotten second, but from the experience, I got much more than a medal. The little girl who won first, Krislyn Dote, became one of my best friends, and we grew up in the dojo together. My family also started karate with me. My mom, dad, and little sister, Jorryn Inciong, all did karate with me. Karate was a way for my family to stay active and bond with each other. Although today I’m the only one in my family still doing karate, (Jorryn became a star golfer, cheerleading captain, and our family’s gourmet chef) my family still cheers me on in karate.
Why did you choose karate over other sports?

I chose karate simply because I love it. I participated in soccer and track up until I turned twelve. I decided to give those sports up because I wanted to make the Junior US National Team, and I knew in order to reach that goal, I would need to focus on karate. Even though I enjoyed soccer and track, karate is what makes me feel most alive.

How important do you think is for you the supplementary training like running, weight lifting, etc.?

I do cross training and dance to help me improve in karate. Cross training with Coach Kenny Patton and in the dojo helps me improve in strength, speed, agility, and overall athleticism. I also do dance class at school under Ms. Cyrenne Okimura. Ballet, contemporary, jazz, and hip-hop help me with strength, flexibility, mobility, and balance. In kata, the athlete has to be able to do both hard and soft movements, and dance helps me particularly with the soft movements and relaxing my muscles. The constant stretching also helps me with stances and kicks.

What do you see as the most important attributes of a good Karate competitor?

I think being respectful and hardworking are the most important attributes of a good karate competitor. Respect is an important part of being a good person, and hard work is what is required to improve.

Self-defense, sport or tradition: what is karate for you?

I believe karate is all three. First and foremost it is a beautiful tradition, reflective of my Japanese roots. It is also a sport requiring immense skill, focus, and dedication.
However, it also is applicable to real life, making it a form of self-defense.

**How do you structure your personal training for an important competition?**

In order to prepare for an important competition, I practice kata on Monday, Tuesday, and Saturday, kumite on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday, and conditioning on the weekends. Although kata and kumite are separate events, I believe they are connected and that by training in one, I'm also improving in the other. I love both equally. In between training, school, and work, I also make sure to sleep and spend time with my loved ones, this helps me recharge for more practice.

**Being a Junior athlete, how’s your experience traveling with the National team and competing in international events?**

I love every single moment of traveling with the National Team and competing in international events. I feel so honored to be apart of the National Team. When I compete for the US, I feel very proud to be wearing the US flag by my heart. I feel like I’m not only competing for myself but also for the team as a whole. I want to contribute to the overall success of the team. Furthermore, because I'm from Hawaii, I rarely am able to see my out-of-state friends. This makes seeing everyone at the competitions even more special. Besides competing, my favorite part of competition is cheering on my teammates. I feel joy when I see my teammates and the team succeed.

**How do you prepare psychologically for an important competition, and how does your mindset change when you are getting close to the competition day?**

To prepare psychologically for an important competition, I have a routine. Before I fly out to the competition location, my mom paints a small pink heart on my left pinky finger, pink because that’s my favorite color and on my left pinky because I’m right handed, so the heart lasts longer on the hand I use less for everyday activities. This may seem very specific and odd, but this tradition helps me perform well at tournaments. When I’m at the competition, I can peek at the heart in staging or between rounds, and it calms my nerves by reminding me that my mom loves me and is with me. Next, my mom and I fly out. When I arrive at the competition location, I train in the morning to get my muscles firing after the long flight, then I relax and de-stress for the rest of day because I know the training and hard work have already been done. I sleep for eight to nine hours, then the morning of the day I compete, I start to intensify my thoughts by visualizing myself performing well at the tournament as I get ready in the bathroom. I eat yogurt and a protein bar for breakfast. My mom also helps me do my hair, a small French braid across the top of my head into a bun for kata and a small French braid across the top of my head into a ponytail for kumite. I’m then ready to compete!
Do you think it is positive or negative for Karate to be in the Olympic Games?
Positive, of course! Karate is an amazing sport requiring technique, speed, strength, intelligence, and more. Karate deserves to be in the Olympics! Seeing the incredible athletes on the Senior US National Team compete in the Olympics, inspires young athletes like me.

How is your personal training these days?
Now days, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I train via Zoom at home. My amazing senseis and teammates train together virtually, even though we are physically apart. Our training consists of basics, kata, kumite, and strength training. The physical distance and space limitations have pushed us to be more creative with training. For example, rather than using the weight vests, like we usually do at the dojo, we made our own by stuffing backpacks with canned goods, water bottles, rice bags, and any other heavy materials we could find at home. We wear these homemade weight bags to amp up the difficulty during drills. Although the Zoom training is great, I still miss seeing my team in person and can’t wait to return to the dojo!
What advice would you give to those who wish to start training and are getting ready to enter into national and international competitions?

My advice would be to train, compete, reflect, and have fun! Along side training extremely hard, in order to be successful, you must gain experience from competing and reflect on what you learn in the dojo and at the competitions. Fun is also important because I believe when you’re enjoying what you’re doing, you perform better.

What keeps you motivated to keep training?

My family and team are what motivates me to keep training. My family loves me unconditionally, and I always try to make them proud. My team also motivates me by pushing me during training, giving me words of advice, and being my second family. One of my teammates in particular, Mikela Ancheta, is like my sister, we had the matching kiddy half-heart bracelets to prove it. We’ve been training together since we were in first grade. Everyday, we build each other up and make each other better. She’s the best training partner and sister ever.

Finally, what are your plans for the future?

In the future, I plan to go to college to major in Biology and minor in Public Health. I hope to one day have a career in the medical field. For karate, I hope to continue training and volunteer at the dojo, so I can give back to the place that I grew up in and turned me into who I am today. Seeing the little ones in the dojo makes me happy, and I hope to be a good role model for them like how my sempais were for me. USANKF
My oh my, what a journey the last two months have been! With the emotional ups and downs of the pandemic, the roller coaster of rules stating what we can do and what we can’t, closing the dojos, loss of income and meaningful work, trips being cancelled… it’s been a tough few months for sure.

As I write this, I realized we would’ve been in Costa Rica today, at the PKF. Normally one of the busiest weeks of my year, I find myself at home, in between zoom meetings, in rainy Chicago, wishing I was there with my karate friends and family. The disappointment that I have felt and have witnessed from others is real. Cancelled tournaments, the Olympics postponed, hopes and dreams shattered…the list goes on and on. But through it all, we must remain hopeful.
So in an effort to focus on the positive, I decided to make a list of good things that I’ve seen or learned about para-karate, about teaching karate, about running the dojo, and about our athlete and parent relationships.

I asked some of the parents of the para-karate athletes we serve to write up their experiences. Here is one from Dr. Matthew Pietrafetta, parent of Zach, a para-karate athlete, age 15.

“I take away from the past 2 months 2 key lessons.”

“First, I am amazed that Zach could be taught with only auditory prompts. Frustrating for both at times, but Sensei Kohn masterfully adapted. East became where the “baby’s slide” is; west, the “door” to the other part of the basement; north, the “cubbies” where the toys are kept; south, the “camera” for the Zoom session. “Hand out, hand on the Obi, back leg, front leg, Gedan Barai, Soto Uke, Uchi Uke, etc.” – all verbal prompts, many in Japanese, no ability to physically adjust Zach’s form. During a couple of sessions, as the Master learned new tech skills himself, Sensei was in dark mode for the whole session. He was only a voice, yet they still progressed in each session, demonstrating the trust they’ve built, the resilience and commitment they share, and one profound fact: Zach’s brain has rewired, developing significant auditory processing learning skills over almost 9 years now of consistent training with Sensei.”

“Second, Sensei’s teaching is transferrable. Over quarantine, Zach has attended his classes and completed his e-learning homework at The Cove School, persisting through tech challenges and executive functioning challenges of planning and preparing. He’s handled that with resilience. What’s more, he learned a new acoustic guitar piece from his teacher and performed it in recital, read about and memorized all 45 presidents, reciting them now confidently – and with commentary – as one of his quarantine projects, and he’s kept busy reading and writing. He refuses to be lazy. I learned that Sensei’s dojo travels: it gets internalized after enough time there. In short, Sensei teaches karate as well as academic behaviors, transferrable skills that teach students how to learn. Those are the behaviors that keep you progressing through quarantine and through life. Domo arigato, Sensei!”

Just yesterday, May 31, since Illinois went into Phase 3 of recovery, Zach was able to come back to the dojo for the first time in three months, for a social distance private lesson. It was great!

This is just one great example of how important it is that we all keep moving forward in this difficult time. Zoom, Face-time, social distance private lessons, whatever it takes, our athletes need us, and we need them. USANKF
GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE U.S. CENTER FOR SAFESPORT

LAUNCH, LOCATION & GOVERNANCE

The U.S. Center for SafeSport is a national nonprofit organization providing education, resources and training to promote respect and prevent abuse in sport. The Center is located in Denver, Colorado, and opened in March 2017. The Center is governed by a nine-member board of directors, which includes subject-matter experts in the areas of abuse prevention and investigation, ethics compliance and sport administration.

MISSION, PURPOSE & VISION

To cultivate and steward a culture of dignity and respect in sport.

Purpose
Enable every athlete to thrive by fostering a national sport culture of respect and safety, on and off the field of play.

Vision
Every athlete is safe, supported and strengthened through sport.

- **Safe.** Athletes are protected from emotional, physical and sexual abuse.
- **Supported.** Athletes enjoy welcome, respectful environments, and diversity is actively embraced.
- **Strengthened.** Athletes use the skills they’ve learned in sport to contribute to the well-being of their communities.
SERVICES

Education and Outreach Office

The Center’s Education and Outreach Office will administer prevention programming, raise issue awareness, and provide resources and training to promote respect and prevent misconduct, such as bullying, hazing, harassment and abuse. The Center will:

• Provide education materials, including talking points, fact sheets, brochures and training materials
• Centralize best practices, provide self-evaluation tools and offer specialized resources
• Offer sport organizations easy access to educational opportunities for their coaches, staff, volunteers, parents and athletes

Response and Resolution Office

The Center’s Response and Resolution Office will investigate and resolve alleged policy violations for the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movements’ 47 member National Governing Bodies, including the USA National Karate-do Federation.

• As a member organization of the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee, the USANKF has agreed to adhere to the Center’s policies and procedures, including the SafeSport Code, which identifies prohibited conduct and serves as the benchmark by which the Center determines whether or not a policy violation has occurred. These policies and procedures also outline:
  - Center jurisdiction and authority
  - Sanctioning guidelines
  - Reporting and confidentiality
  - Resolution procedures, including investigation and arbitration
• Aggregate data from Center investigations will be used to identify trends and patterns across sport, strengthening national prevention efforts.
JURISDICTION & AUTHORITY

The Center has jurisdiction over Covered Individuals. These are persons:

- Within the governance or disciplinary jurisdiction of the USANKF
- The USANKF or the USOC authorizes, approves or appoints to a position of authority over athletes or who will have frequent contact with athletes
- Identified by the USANKF as being within the Center’s jurisdiction

The Center will have the exclusive authority to investigate and resolve alleged SafeSport Code violations involving sexual misconduct. The USANKF will retain the authority to investigate and resolve alleged SafeSport Code violations that are non-sexual in nature. Although, at the USANKF’s request, the Center may exercise the discretionary authority to take on cases of this nature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exclusive Authority</th>
<th>Discretionary Authority</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All forms of sexual misconduct.</td>
<td>Other policy violations, including physical misconduct, emotional misconduct, bullying, hazing and harassment.</td>
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</table>

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS FOR SAFESPORT CODE VIOLATIONS

All individuals, regardless of membership with the USANKF, are encouraged to report suspected violations of the SafeSport Code. Covered Individuals who are over the age of 18 are required to report suspected SafeSport Code violations related to or accompanying sexual misconduct. Covered Individuals who fail to report SafeSport Code violations may be subject to disciplinary action.

How to Report

Individuals should report suspected SafeSport Code violations directly to the Center.

Reporting to the Center:

- **Online:** [https://uscenterforsafesport.org/report-a-concern/](https://uscenterforsafesport.org/report-a-concern/)
- **Phone:** (720) 524-5640

Confidentiality

Although the Center cannot guarantee confidentiality, it will, to the greatest extent possible, maintain the privacy of all individuals involved in the investigation and resolution of alleged SafeSport Code violations.

Anonymous Reporting

Anonymous reporting is permitted.

Legally Mandated Reporting

Reporting alleged criminal conduct to the USANKF or the Center will not satisfy any individual mandatory reporting requirements under state or federal law. Visit [https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/state/](https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/state/) to view state-by-state mandatory reporting laws to determine your reporting obligations and options.
THE INVESTIGATION & RESOLUTION PROCESS

In response to an alleged SafeSport Code violation, the Center may:

• Initiate an informal resolution
• Conduct a full investigation
• Conclude the alleged violation is out of scope and refer the matter to the USANKF or the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee

Informal Resolution

The Center may conduct an informal inquiry to collect preliminary facts to determine if the matter should be resolved informally, investigated further or not investigated at this time.

Full Investigation

At the start of a full investigation, the Center will provide notice to both involved parties. Each will be given the opportunity to present supporting evidence and provide contact information for potential witnesses.

Investigator’s Report

After reviewing the evidence in the case and interviewing relevant witnesses, an investigator will prepare a written report detailing:

• The facts of the case based on the available evidence
• Whether or not, based on a preponderance of the evidence, the investigator believes a violation of the SafeSport Code has occurred
• Recommended sanctions, if any

Director’s Decision

The Center’s director of investigations will issue a decision based on the available evidence. If the director determines the individual in question has violated the SafeSport Code, he or she may seek arbitration.
SANCTIONS

The disciplinary process is designed to protect all USANKF athletes, members and participants from future misconduct. With this in mind, all recommended sanctions will be reasonable and proportionate to the violation committed and will emphasize education to ensure that minor misconduct does not escalate into a major violation.

Imposing Sanctions

In response to the Center’s determination that a SafeSport Code violation has occurred, the USANKF will impose any sanctions recommended by the Center. Potential sanctions include, among others, any combination of the following:

• Warning
• Loss of privileges
• Education
• Probation
• Eligibility or participation restrictions

In determining appropriate sanctions, the Center will consider a range of factors, including but not limited to:

• The seriousness of the violation
• The ages of the individuals involved
• Whether or not the alleged policy violator poses an ongoing threat to the safety of others

Implementation Across the Olympic and Paralympic Movement

Participation restrictions imposed by a USOC-member NGB will be upheld across the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movement.

Visit www.uscenterforsafesport.org to learn more or to view the Center’s policies and procedures to determine your responsibilities under the SafeSport Code. The Center’s policies and procedures are subject to change. Should the policies and procedures vary from the information contained herein, the policies and procedures will govern. Visit safesport.usankf.org to review the USANKF Participant Safety Handbook and Minor Athlete and Officials Abuse Prevention Policy.
Some changes have recently occurred as part of the SafeSport initiatives which we partner with the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee and the U.S. Center for SafeSport to develop. As a result of these changes some changes have been implemented in our SafeSport Program. Latest Information on the program, the Safe Sport Code and Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies can be found on our website at SafeSport.usankf.org and the U.S. Center for SafeSport website at uscenterforsafesport.org

Highlights of our SafeSport Program

1. The following individuals are covered under U.S. Center for SafeSport’s Disciplinary Jurisdiction (the most current list of participants can be found at SafeSport.usankf.org):
   - Board of Directors
   - Staff (employee, contractor or volunteer)
   - Interns
   - Contractors with access to athletes
   - Operational and Governance Committee Members
   - Volunteer Event Staff
   - Event and National Team Medical Staff and Trainers
   - Photographers and Videographers with access to competition floor
   - Senior and Junior National Team Athletes over 18 yrs of age
   - Coach members
   - Official members
   - Athletes over 18 yrs of age
   - Volunteers over 18 yrs of age
   - Chaperones

2. SafeSport Training is required annually. Policies around training can be found in the USA-NKF Minor Athletes and Officials Abuse Prevention Policy and Participant Safety Handbook. Training is available at no charge to participants 18 years of age and older. Individuals under 18 years of age can take the course with a signed approval from their parents. The SafeSport Training is available at uscenterforsafesport.org and the course consists of the following topics:
   1. Mandatory Reporting
   2. Sexual Misconduct Awareness Education
   3. Emotional and Physical Misconduct
To obtain the code to create a login and have the results connected to USA Karate you can login to your membership account at usakaratemembership.com or contact the national office at natoffice@usankf.org. The course is also available to individuals not affiliated with the NGB for a small fee at AthleteSafety.org.

Training and resources for minor members have been developed. Youth toolkit is available on the resources page of the safesport.org website and training resources that are age specific for minors will be available soon at athletesafety.org.

3. Background checks will be completed every 2 years with our vendor NCSI rechecking annually.

The cost of the background screening is approximately $30 depending on your state. To complete the background check, you will simply need to do the following:
1. Visit www.ncsisafe.com and click on Background Screening Self Registration
2. Enter Self Registration Number 26244495
3. Enter Your Information as Requested

4. We have updated the Participant Safety Handbook which defines the SafeSport Policies for USA Karate. You should review these policies. The Handbook includes:
   • Training and Education
   • Criminal Background Check Policy
   • Athlete Protection Policy
   • Physical Contact with Athletes Policy
   • Electronic and Social Media Policy
   • Travel Policy
   • Reporting Policy
   • Disciplinary Rules and Procedures

5. We have added the USA-NKF Minor Athletes and Officials Abuse Prevention Policies in compliance with the requirements from the U.S. Center for SafeSport's Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policy to cover both our minor athletes and minor regional officials. You should review these policies. The Policy includes:
   • Training and Education Policy
   • One on One Interactions Policy
   • Massages and Rubdown/Athletic Training Modalities Policy
   • Locker Rooms and Changing Areas Policy
   • Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy
   • Local Travel Policy
   • Team Travel Policy
6. Training and resources for parents have been developed. Parent toolkit is available on the resources page of the safesport.org website and training resources are available at athlete­safety.org

7. Reporting

If you know of or suspect a violation of any of the SafeSport Policies or Procedures you are required to report the incident. Reports can be made at:

- Sexual Misconduct involving a minor:
  - U.S. Center for SafeSport – uscenterforsafesport.org/report-a-concern/ or 720-531-0340
  - USA Karate Ethics website usakarateethics.com or 844-598-1865
  - You should also report Sexual misconduct involving a minor to local law enforcement

- All other violations:
  - USA Karate Ethics website usakarateethics.com or 844-598-1865
  Report directly to the CEO or Ethics Committee Chairperson
  - CEO Contact Phil Hampel – phampel@usankf.org 719-309-6030
  - Ethics Committee Chairperson Contact Chris Hodgin – chodgin@usankf.org

USA Karate is concerned about the safety of all our members and has worked diligently to comply with the standards established by the U.S. Center for SafeSport. United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee and federal law. If you have questions on the policies please contact me. If you believe there is a violation to the policies or you have a concern please report that concern. Ways to make a report including anonymous reports can be found at SafeSport.usankf.org