SKYLAR LING DARING TO DRIVE

TAISHI TOZAKI
Jr. Athlete Profile

RAY HUGHES
Para-Karate Coach

YOSHIMI INOUE
Legendary Coach

ANTONIO DIAZ
CHAMPIONS AROUND THE WORLD ROAD TO TOKYO 2021

USA KARATE HEAD COACHES
DEALING WITH COVID-19 BRODY BURNS & AKIRA FUKUDA

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For almost all of us, the year 2020 has not gone to plan. No matter whom we wanted to visit or where we were planning to travel to compete, some things simply have not been possible. But regardless of what we have planned or where we want to go in 2021, here there are a couple of strategies to help make the most of the upcoming year. And 2021 it will be a fully packed year of Karate activities, if all gets into place and we pass the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The first is to be a student of your calendar. To start, examine all activities that you have planned for the year 2021 paying particular attention to what you have regularly scheduled in your daily life. We will have to “adapt” to a new order of things. Look to create efficiencies with your daily/weekly and monthly training habits. One tip to be efficient with your regular tasks and activities is to look for ways to save “useless” time every day. If you can find ways to save time in your activities every single day, that equals to many hours per week/month and year that you can use positively in other areas of your training and life.

Also make sure to study what you don’t have planned in your training calendar, or what some call the “white space.” To maximize your productivity, see how you can schedule more of the activities/sessions that are more directly affecting your training. To be more accessible, consider how you can use open time to connect with your teammates or the people you care most about and directly affect your state of mind and emotions.

Another area to examine when studying your calendar is your sleep. Your sleep is definitely your “recovery time.” I’m a firm believer that tomorrow begins today, so make sure to have a wind-down routine that ensures you wake up on time and re-energized to begin the next day. Sleep is one of the most important needs that all elite athletes share and it strengthens them in many ways, which is why it is extremely helpful to build a restorative routine.

The second strategy to make the most of 2021 is to implement the “Do It Now” policy. I know it sounds comically simple, but 100 percent of the things that you do now get done. Putting this into practice is one of the most common traits of high achievers. When you have a task to do, learn to ask yourself whether you can conceivably do it now. If so, go ahead and do it and get it out of the way. If you can’t, prioritize and store your tasks and training sessions based on what is the most important thing to accomplish that day. Like in business, urgent and important tasks get priority, but they are two different things. If an activity is important but not urgent, then plan it in your calendar. If something is urgent but not important, find a way to do it. That way you will get the best of your time.

The year 2021 comes with a lot of “questions marks”; many variables, a lot of uncertainty. It is up to us how to plan ahead and above all hot to learn to “adapt” to the changing circumstances that we have been forced to live in.
Developing athletes is more than just athletic performance. As we look at sport across the Olympic Movement the need to keep a focus on athlete well-being is crucial. The mission of USA Karate has been recently adjusted to include this focus.

The Mission of USA National Karate-do Federation shall be to enable United States athletes to achieve sustained competitive excellence and to promote and grow the sport of Karate in the United States while maintaining the well-being of our members.

The last year has been extremely challenging with uncertainty and fear around the Covid-19 pandemic, racial and social injustice, political unrest and a loss of opportunities to train and compete. Many of us are facing challenges we have never experienced. While we look forward to the promise of vaccination helping get us back to some sense of normal, we know this will take some time. We want to make sure our members have the resources necessary to navigate these challenging times.

We have been very fortunate over the last 4 years to have been working with Dr. Jessica Bartley as our Sport Psychologist. During that time our Elite athletes have had access to Dr. Bartley at our major events and through personal sessions. Over the last year we have started to think about how we can serve a larger base of our athletes and to include services for the Junior and transitioning Senior athletes. The pandemic has certainly put a challenge into bringing these services to life. We are hoping to be able to bring additional services in 2021 depending on our ability to bring back full programming.

Another change that is incredibly exciting is that Dr. Jessica Bartley was named the Director of Mental Health Services for the US Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC). We are so happy for Dr. Bartley and excited to see the difference she makes for the all the athletes in the Olympic and Paralympic Movements. Dr. Bartley will be continuing with our team through the Olympic Games and over the next few months we will determine the support model post the Olympics.

Under the leadership of Dr. Bartley, the USOPC will continue to expand mental health services to athletes. These services are highlighted on the new website:

https://www.teamusa.org/mentalhealth. Notably, the USOPC has already developed a mental health registry where athletes can locate qualified mental health providers who have experience working with elite athletes. In addition, the USOPC has created a mental health support line for Olympic and Paralympic athletes who might need support around their mental health.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-8255 https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/
Wishing you all the best to safe happy and healthy 2021!

USANKF

Phil Hampel
Chief Executive Officer
USA National Karate-do Federation
Training in Japan

This past 3 years, Karate-do had a positive impact with its inclusion in the Summer Olympic Games. With 10+ international competitions per year, every athlete trained to become the best karate-ka they can be.

I was privileged enough to visit the birthplace of karate, Japan, and get first-hand experience to learn from grandmasters of karate. With the Olympic race intensifying, I made multiple visits to Japan to refine and improve my karate skills. Although it took time away from my family and friends, I knew it was an investment that I needed to make. I knew there will be no other time in life that I can compete all over the world for something I am passionate about.

What I enjoy the most about training in Japan is the great environment. The echoing kiais, drifting bitter smell of tatami, and training alongside with great competitors, gives me the sense of accomplishment just by walking into the dojo.

“Back to the drawing board.” That was my main focus for this past visit to Japan. I needed to improve my karate foundation and broaden my perspective of kata. Kihon, kumite, kobudo, bunkai, and oyo-bunkai. I practiced everything I can to go out of my comfort zone and challenge myself.

One of the katas I started practicing was Sanchin, which is a Goju-ryu kata with a series of movements that focuses on breathing and “shime” techniques. Since I have a Shito-ryu background, it was difficult in the beginning to maintain the fluid circular motion of Goju techniques, while generating the maximum possible power. My sensei always tell me that I have to “be able to use my body like water, that can flow into any shape and crush with great force”. Practicing this kata consistently helped me realize that concentration, breathing, and strength are closely related. Sanchin kata helped develop my strength during my performance. To further challenge my strength, one of my senseis taught me to practice Sanchin with coins underneath my armpit to facilitate the activation of “latissimus dorsi” muscles, and depression of shoulders during my kata. This is really challenging! I encourage everyone to practice this too.

I am very happy to say, my hard work has paid off this year, by becoming the 1st seed Male kata athlete for the United States, and placing 9th overall in the world in the 2020 K-1 Ranking. I really appreciate all the senseis that put in their work to help me, my family for allowing me to travel to Japan, and my friends for always motivating me to strive for excellence. I wouldn’t be where I am at now without their support. I will be soon in Japan again to train and finish the year strong, and to keep the momentum going for the New Year. I am positive that 2021 will be another great year for me. USANKF
COACH’S CORNER

Effective Coaching Concepts

Coaching is very rewarding. It results in a strong sense of commitment and community. According to the International Olympic Committee, a coach plays a key role in an athlete’s entourage. The quality of the relationship between a coach and an athlete has a crucial effect on the athlete’s satisfaction, motivation, and performance. Given the shift to online learning, a deeper understanding of the target audience, methodological approach, and application is necessary to redefine one’s effective coaching style. The ability to interact with an online learner using various platforms i.e. Zoom, Skype, etc. is useful to your pedagogy (teaching) repertoire.

Finding common ground: Studies have shown that sharing personal experience can increase the effectiveness of the overall learning curve. Share your prior experience or a personal event in order to better engage with the learner. Here are some suggestions to help accelerate the learning curve.

- **Transitional Flexibility:** Be cognizant of what is going on; have tools to aid to your coaching abilities to individualize for each learner. Welcome your own growth mindset.
- **Engaged:** Interaction with students, keep it short, use one or two-word cues to reinforce directions.
- **Target audience:** Understand who you are coaching. The ability to adjust to different levels also demonstrates your ability as an effective coach (e.g. be like a kangaroo–keep your knees bent, and move like a ninja–be soft on your feet).

Methodological considerations: Teach with a broad spectrum of learning modalities i.e. auditory, visual, and kinesthetic. The use of words like rotate like a top, point your knees up to the sky like a rocket, drive off the ground drive, drive, drive. Give visual examples with demonstrations, diagrams, or videos. Have the target audience demonstrate the new skill set in a group setting–slow it down.

- **Create a positive motivational climate:** Include competitor peers in a group setting and as a coach, display a strong ability to encourage a wide range of learning styles.
- **Delivering cues:** Use words that are simple and to the point. Be consistent with the cue being used.
- **Check for understanding:** have others demonstrate and explain the new skill set in breakout rooms or small groups.

Application: Put in to play. Being able to transfer information to skill starts the foundational sequence of process-based learning. Avoid an outcome goal mindset or fixed mindset; a perfectionist mindset is a fixed mindset. Shift the environment to a learning experience, and recognize the process of goals and performance attributes.

- **Check for understanding:** Have the learner re-create cues to reinforce a new skill set. Create a narrative that works for you. Control your self-talk mechanisms.
- **Precision:** Decreasing the speed of your movement can promote a successful learning environment while ramping up precision. There is a direct correlation between speed and accuracy under certain skill acquisitions. Be cognizant about what you are doing–be present.
- **Learning capacity:** Studies have shown that augmented practice increases the learning curve. Randomize segments/parts to create scenarios of real play.

After each training, review and have a general summary of the material that was covered. Re-enforce topics and benchmarks that were covered. Creating a growth mindset allows your target audience the ability to adjust, focus on the performance aspect rather than the perfectionist approach, which can significantly enhance the acceptance of the online athletes to the online parameters. Build on past success to create a productive training session. USANKF
To a Fresh, Hopeful, and Healthy New Year!

As I write this column, I—like everyone else on this planet—am eager to say good bye to 2020 and start a fresh, hopeful, and healthy New Year! 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.

A new year in which COVID-19 will be gone, no longer able hold us back from hugging each other; a year that we will not have to hold karate classes over the internet; a year when we do not have to wear masks or be afraid or paranoid of being near people in public; a year when we will enjoy a coffee or a meal next to a friend in a restaurant; a year in which our karate competitions will resume and athletes can shake hands and hug each other after each fight. Just like in the Before Days!

For most of us at the beginning of 2020, business was good and the future looked bright. Then the world stopped turning. Life itself and the world economy became fragile as the pandemic forced a shutdown, the likes of which we had never seen before.

The pandemic has been hard on everyone, but we also know that some of us have been more impacted than others. Unfortunately, we believe that a significant number of karate schools were forced to close as a result of factors directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic and outside of their control. Our karate events were cancelled or postponed. Like the rest of the world, we suffered.

But as karate instructors or practitioners, we were and are resilient. We overcame difficulties and we created the new protocols to adapt to these circumstances. We are a strong industry. We changed our worries and our concerns into something positive.

As you know, the end of 2020 brought positive news of vaccine development by multiple companies and the initial distribution of vaccines to the first categories of people. That has given hope to the world that the end of this unprecedented time is near. It will take the well into 2021 until the remainder of the population gets vaccinated. But in the meantime, we can use all precautions and safety measurements to start competitions. We are a sport of discipline and the pandemic has taught us how to be even more cautious. We know how to be safe and play safe without sacrificing each other’s safety. Many countries around the world have already started some competitions with respect for all safety measurements. It is our duty to motivate our karate practitioners and plan for the year ahead of us. COVID or no COVID, we can plan for a safe environment where we give hope to our athletes and drive their motivations to go back to training and planning to compete again. We owe this to them, to us, and to our sport.

A New Year is ahead of us. We should show the example of strength and discipline. By helping and respecting each other, we will achieve our goals to come back to Tatami.

It sure has been a hard year for all of us, but now that we see the light at the end of tunnel. Let’s be strong together, have each other’s back, and move forward into a brighter new year! USANKF
2021 USA NATIONAL

Karate Championships & Team Trials

July 12-19, 2021

Chicago, Illinois

For More Information: www.usakaratenationals.com
Having switched largely to Zoom classes and virtual team trainings, I have found it increasingly more and more difficult to keep my students and team members actively engaged and focused. Like all of us, I’ve had to reinvent my program, adapt my methods and think outside of the box like never before in my 40+ years of teaching karate.

I’ve tried a number of new things, some more effective than others, and all the while I noticed that my students, especially those athletes with cognitive disabilities, were having a lot of difficulty during this pandemic. I recognize that this learning/teaching environment has been really hard for everyone, no doubt, but it seems to me that our para-karate athletes have been hit even harder than anyone.

I can speak from my own experience that this time has been extremely frustrating, on many levels. From having to learn new technology, having routines and expectations disrupted and navigating my feelings of grief over loss of income, travel, etc., it has been a time unlike any other in my life. If you add to that laundry list of challenges, as an athlete with disabilities, the lack of being able to receive in person services, classes, training, etc., it compounds the situation even more.

In my career, I have observed that my para-karate athletes work harder than anyone else, show up more consistently and truly need more one on one attention. Their abilities (although varied, depending on the athlete) to remain engaged in the room fluctuate, but on zoom its very, very challenging. The extra noises from audio feedback, the occasional wi-fi problems, the lack of socialization all contribute to sensory overloads, heightened anxieties and distractions.

One topic with which I’ve had some really great results has been in the area of incorporating breathing and visualization work. For 5-10 minutes at the end of training, I have tried this practice and have seen it work wonders. You may be wondering “what’s the big deal? We breathe in and out all day long and never give it a thought. Why is Coach making people practice breathing?”

This simple practice has helped students let go of the worry when they are stuck in a state of overwhelm and anxiety. Given that oxygen is the most essential nutrient for life, for an athlete, paying close attention to when, how and why you breathe has many benefits. Breathing exercises are a good way to relax, reduce tension, relieve stress and even boost sports performance.

When you are calm, your body is in “rest and digest” mode. Breathing is normal, muscles are relaxed, and heart rate is normal. However, when you experience a stressful event like having your school classes move to an online format, schedule changes and maintaining social distancing throughout the day, your body automatically goes into what is known as “flight, fight, or freeze” mode. In this mode, an alarm system is triggered in our brain, which can increase heart rate; stop digestion and breathing can become shallow. Living in a state of constant and chronic stress can impact our health negatively so using deep intentional breathing with visualization helps turn off the alarm and regulate the body back to a relaxed state. Once you calm the mind, it’s time to visualize yourself achieving a goal, completing a task or just experiencing peace.

After these few minutes of guided deep breathing and/or mediation, students appear more calm, focused and ready to face the world again. I had read that elite fighters, Navy Seals and even health care workers are known to use controlled breathing to clear the mind, reduce stress and make good decisions under pressure. And, of course, in a time when many of us have experienced financial setbacks, loss of work and income, etc., breathing and visualization are free. There are a number of techniques out there, on the internet or YouTube, just find what works best for you and your students. So when you feel out of control or stressed, that is the best time to take a deep breath.

I highly recommend this technique; it works for everyone. Just breathe.
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.

Respect is:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teammates</th>
<th>Opponents</th>
<th>Parents/Coaches</th>
<th>Self</th>
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<td>Praise positive contributions... don’t blame or shame</td>
<td>Be gracious when you win... and when you lose</td>
<td>Show respect always... even when you disagree</td>
<td>When you respect others, you respect yourself</td>
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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
n order to make karate a natural part of us, we must first develop fundamentals, which is to say, we must first develop a solid foundation. We “build” ourselves as karate students in much the same way a construction crew builds a house: We start with a solid foundation. Master Funakoshi explained this principle by talking about stance in particular, because stance is the foundation of every technique. When we learn to execute every technique with a low, strong, stance, we not only strengthen our legs (which are the constructs of our foundation), but we learn to get used to that feeling of stability; we learn to feel each technique at its most powerful. Learn to understand that feeling of optimum power. Then, as you develop, you know you have that base, and you can “move up” to training with natural stance. Once you have a strong foundation, this transition is absolutely necessary.

Just as it is important in the beginning to start out building your foundation with low stance, you eventually need to learn how to move into a karate technique from natural stance, for in a real-life self-defense situation that is likely the stance you will have.

If you’re walking in the street when someone attacks you, you’re not walking in zenkutsu-dachi, or “front stance”—you’re walking naturally. So you must understand how to immediately reflect the attack, using karate technique, from natural stance. As an advanced student, you are physically able to execute a strong technique, because you have developed your foundation, your fundamentals. But that alone is not enough. At a certain point in your training, you should have developed something else: Awareness. The advanced student not only understands how to execute a proper technique, but he understands mushin, or “no mind”—which we have talked about many times before. It is only with a clear mind that a person is able to defend against a sudden attack. You can have the best technique in the world, but if your mind is not clear, if you are not inwardly calm, you won’t be able to perceive the attack, and so you won’t even get to use your technique. What good is a strong technique if you don’t have the presence of mind to execute it?

So here Master Funakoshi is talking about the development process. Both are important—training in low stance, and training out of natural stance. But one must precede the other. First you have to develop a strong foundation. In the process of doing so, you are experiencing mental development. By training hard, by doing the basics out of proper, low stance, you are training your mind to focus, to block out what is unnecessary. By the time you become an advanced student, and are training out of natural stance, you should have some idea of what it is to really have a clear mind.

You should always have a clear mind in the shizentai position. Whether you are doing basics and waiting for the instructor to tell you what to do, or if you are at the beginning of a kata, your mind should be clear when you are in the ready position. Your body should be relaxed. To someone who doesn’t train, it may appear as if you are just standing there, staring at the wall. But if you are really training, you should have a clear mind while in the ready position. If your mind is not clear, you should be aware that it isn’t, and let go of whatever is filling your head. You have the opportunity to do this from the first day of training—even the white belt should be doing this in class, while in shizentai during basics, or at the beginning of heian shodan. Developing a clear mind is essential. If you have already decided someone is going to attack, and you begin questioning yourself about what you will do, your body cannot react immediately because you already have “set” your mind.

When you begin to learn karate, you start to make intentional changes; then you learn to put something into the movements. We practice basics first, developing a strong foundation, step-by-step. It takes years to develop those fundamentals; and practicing kata is key. With kata, we have the essence of karate movement: starting from shizentai, then moving around using basic stances, then back to shizentai.

Shizen means natural position. Kamae means ready position. Shizen is “no mind”—kamae is ready to move, anticipating but still without intention. From shizen the body reacts naturally. Sometimes you don’t even know how you move, because the body simply reacts. But if you don’t practice, you’ll never get to that point. It takes years of training in kata to learn to move naturally from shizen-tai, but it can be done if you approach training properly, beginning with the development of a good foundation.
2021 USA KARATE OPEN
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For more information:
www.usakarateopen.com
We just can’t exclude Skylar Lingl from the group of the most talented athletes in the USA Karate Team. Energetic and active from a young age, she became interested in sports early on and started karate training at age 5. Karate has served as an anchor in Skylar’s life and helped her to keep her sense of wonder and learning. Out of “Illinois Shotokan Karate Club” in Chicago, for Skylar strength is definitely her foundation, “My confidence makes me strong. Dedicating a lot of my life to my passion and feeling fulfilled makes me strong. Having a family and teammates who challenge me makes me strong.”
How long have you been practicing Karate and who is your teacher?
I started karate when I was five years old and from the very start, my teacher and coach has been Brian Mertel. He has been there through thick and thin helping to improve my karate and helping me to grow as a person, and because of that, I could not have asked for a better coach, mentor, and friend.

How were your beginnings in the sport?
When I was younger, my sister and I were always wrestling in our house. My mom found this very frustrating because she thought we would hurt one another or break something in our house but, my dad on the other hand took it as a sign to put us into karate. At our elementary school, there was an after-school program that we were a part of everyday until our parents were out of work. My dad saw an advertisement for Illinois Shotokan Karate Club, a club that he had done karate with while he was in college and decided to sign us up since it was at our school. So, once a week instead of staying in the after-school program, we would just head into the gymnasium of our school and practice karate.

Why did you choose karate over other sports?
From the start of my life, I have only done three sports: dance, gymnastics, and karate. I did dance when I was really young, before I even started karate and I stopped because at the time, I enjoyed gymnastics more than dance. When I was in high school however, that was where I had to make one of the biggest decisions of my life, the decision was between if I wanted to do college gymnastics or if I wanted to focus on karate. It’s crazy because originally, I thought that I wanted to do college gymnastics and give up karate. However, I had not even had this decision made for a year before I started to regret it. I had not stopped training or competing in karate during the time I made the original decision, but there was something about karate that I was already missing. When I changed my mind and decided to stick to karate, it was the best decision of my life. I could see myself doing karate for a long period of time going into the future and that is what made the decision change so much easier. Karate is not the most ordinary sport to be a part of, but I could not have been more excited about sticking with a sport that I love so much.

How important do you think is it for you – at this point of your career - the supplementary training like running, weightlifting, etc?
Supplementary training is very important at this point in my career because all of the competitors I face are the best of the best. I have found weight training to have the most importance when it comes to supplementary training because every little bit of muscle that is acquired helps to give you a little bit of edge over other competitors. It is not only about building your strength and having the muscle, but it also relies on being able to utilize the muscle that you are gaining in a way that is helpful for karate.

What do you see as the most important attributes of a good Kumite competitor?
For anyone who is a competitor, it is important to be tough both in practice and in a competition. When it comes to kumite however, it is necessary not only to be tough when you get hit or knocked down, it’s about being fearless. When I first started karate, I was terrified of kumite because I was afraid of getting scored on or getting hit. One time when I was in a competition, I was so terrified by the thought of what could happen that I did not fight at all, I just bounced around the ring the whole time and lost. This was a tough lesson to learn but was very necessary for me to learn. There was no way that I would ever win a match if I was too afraid to fight. Being
fearless is not always easy because everyone gets nervous and can become afraid at certain points, but you have to know that you have put in the work during training in order to be as ready as possible for what lies ahead.

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

I would say karate is a mix of self-defense, sport, and tradition. There is so much tradition involved when it comes to both learning and teaching karate and that is one thing I love about the sport because very rarely are other sports the same way. Of course, whenever you start to learn the art of karate, self-defense is a given aspect that many people look for. I feel very lucky that I have never had to use karate as self-defense in my everyday life, but I know that some people are not as lucky when it comes to that. At this point in my career, karate is a sport most of all because I love the competitive part of karate. I love being able to push myself both physically and mentally to see what I am capable of inside of the ring.

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

When it comes to training for an important competition, I always train very hard when the tournament is farther out. That means I can still be lifting heavy weights trying to gain muscle and increase my speed and agility. As it gets closer to the actual competition, I start to do more karate training, pushing myself very hard to start ramping up towards the competition. About a week or two before the actual competition date, I start to taper off on the very difficult trainings and focus on feeling confident with every training because it is super important that before I even leave for a competition that I am feeling confident with my ability to do the best I can do.
How’s your experience traveling with the National team and competing internationally?

Traveling with the national team is an experience like no other. Before I was even apart of the team, I had gone on a few of the trips alongside the national team with my sister when she first made the team. Seeing the team interacting made me realize it was something I wanted to be a part of. The national team may not see each other more than once or even twice a year, but when it comes down to it, we are all family. Traveling alongside and competing internationally with the best the United States has to offer gives me a ton of confidence walking into the ring because I know that everyone on the team has the same goal, and that is to walk away with gold.

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

I always struggled trying to find the right mindset to have when it got closer to a competition and even on the day of competition. There are a couple of things that I do routinely now that help me prepare mentally for an important competition. The first thing I do is I read a book called Mind Gym by Gary Mack and I generally start this book a week or two away from the competition. This book has so many tips and tricks for mental preparation to help you train your mind. I have read this book many times and no matter how many times I read it; it still helps every single time because it acts as a reminder for where my head should be at. The other very important thing I do to get in the right mindset is to rewatch some of my old fights in order to get the feeling of being back on the mat before I actually have to in the competition.

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

Being a part of the Olympic Games has a very positive impact on the sport of karate. Personally, when I was growing up, I hated talking about the fact that I did karate because people had no idea what it entailed. However, now that karate is in the Olympics, there are so many more people that I know or have known who are now starting to understand what the sport actually entails. Having the knowledge that karate is in the Olympics has allowed for the sport as a whole to improve on the way competitions are ran and has also allowed parents to believe in putting their children into karate, whether it is for the discipline or the sport itself, creating a whole new generation of karateka’s.

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

It is very upsetting that karate will not be in the Olympic Games of Paris in 2024, however karate will still go on. There will be so many international tournaments and World Championships that will still be held and my plan is to be on top of the medal stand at those tournaments. I want to be the best competitor I can be at the highest level and even though I won’t be an Olympic karate competitor in 2024, that will not stop me from trying to be the best.

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

There are so many ways that you are able to train at home with restrictions. I know that it can be difficult not going to the dojo and training with your sensei and friends, but there are so many ways to improve your karate from within your own home. Getting creative may be difficult at first but you will end up having so much fun thinking of different ways to train and as long as you are having fun, that is what matters.

“I would say karate is a mix of self-defense, sport, and tradition. There is so much tradition involved when it comes to both learning and teaching karate.”
“There are so many ways that you are able to train at home with restrictions. I know that it can be difficult not going to the dojo and training with your sensei and friends, but there are so many ways to improve your karate from within your own home.”

The pandemic of Corona Virus greatly affected the final phase toward Tokyo 2020 and all Pan American and World events. How did you approach and adapt your training to the circumstances?

There were so many aspects of my training that changed at first due to the pandemic of Corona Virus because when all the tournaments were being cancelled or pushed back to next year, I was not able to leave my house. I had to figure out a way to keep training at home which was difficult, but I am very lucky that I had a sister I was still able to train with. The main thing that had to change was my mind set because I was so used to knowing what the next few months were going to entail and I was able to plan how I would be training for these competitions, but I had to learn to be alright with not knowing when my next competition would be. I had to figure out that even though there was no competition in the next few months, I was able to still better myself by training consistently and trying to improve myself and my karate.

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

Karate can look super intimidating to anyone who has never done it before and does not know how it works. You have to give it a shot and try it because you may end up liking it more than you ever thought you would.

Finally, what are your plans for the future?

Lately with the pandemic of Corona Virus affecting everything that is happening this year, I have been trying to live more in the moment and only look into the near future because even now, no one really knows what will happen by the end of the year. Assuming that tournaments will be happening next year and returning back to normal, my main goal will be to make the National team and earn my spot for the Senior Pan American Championships and the Senior World Championships. USANKF
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A riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma, Sandy Scordo walks to the beat of a different drummer. With her ever-present smile, she is one of the most easily recognizable figures of Karate around the world. Sandy’s everyday path in life is the road less traveled, and every fork she takes usually goes in a direction not chosen by anyone else.

Her good-natured originality doesn’t obscure that fact that she has been for many year one of the top Kata competitors in the world. She has established herself as an international champion, but to Sandy Scordo, Karate is not only about competing, medals and trophies; it is far more than that. It is philosophy, principle, power, and strength. It is history and art – it is life itself.
How long have you been practicing Karate and who is your teacher?
I started karate when I was 10 years old, so 25 years ago now... My teacher is Nadia Dumont from France, and she has the best basics that I’ve ever seen.

Please tell us some interesting stories (anecdotes) of your beginnings in the sport of karate?
For my first European championship, I thought.. “if I’m talented I will be in final without a lot of training.” And I got the Bronze medal... So after that one I did the maximum number of trainings possible and I got Gold medal three times after that!

Tell us a little about your life and how you spend your days now working, training, etc?
So, I’m training everyday, a minimum of 3 hours. I don’t really have a day off but if I’m tired, then yes, I’ll take a day off. To go along with this, I have a very healthy life, no alcohol, no fatty food or fast food – my dietician is very strict. I stopped working to have a best of chance to go to the Olympics and doing some seminars to pay my traveling costs. On rare occasions when I’m not traveling, I like spending time with my family and my friends.

What made you to be interested in the competition of karate and when you decided to start competing?
When I was 10, I did a seminar with Mickael Milon, three times world kata champion. And he inspired me. After that I said I want to be like him, a champion, strong, fast, powerful... My sensei pushed me for my first year to do the state championship and I won. That’s how my story started.

“Martial Arts are very different than the other sports because it’s not only a sport but a lifestyle too.”
What are the most important points in your personal training methods now? How do you train and prepare for an important competition?

I’m trying to work on the fine details of my training to progress and improve. Last year, I went to Japan to do a one-week seminar and some private lessons with Kagawa Sensei to restart my karate from the basics, and that was amazing. I learned new things to prepare for the new Olympic season. And I’m still working on all these aspects.

How has your personal karate in competition developed and evolved over the years since you started competing?

I have been 3 times European champion when I was 18, 19 and 20 years old (this category was called “Juniors” at that time). I went to the Junior World Championships in 2005 and to the Senior World Championships in 2008 and did nothing, so I started to prepare myself for the Worlds and in 2010. I lost the flags 3/2 against Rika Usami and she lost to against Hoang Ngan Nguyen in semi-final, but it was a very good competition.

After that, I prepared for the Paris World Championships in 2012 where I finally got Silver that was a good competition. After that I wanted to prove I had the level to be in a World Championship final in 2014, and not because I was in Paris. And I did the best preparation ever – my diet, mentally, technically, physically, I was at my best level ever! In 2016, the French Karate Federation blocked me for the next Worlds. So I decided to spend 10 months in New York to study, and I didn’t participate at any tournaments in Europe except in January in the Paris Open.

In mid 2017, I left the US to have the best preparation for the Olympic qualifications program (KARATE 1). So, I’m pushing myself day after day to be at my best level. It’s in the good way.

Do you think different ‘styles’ (shotokan, shito ryu, goju ryu, etc) are truly important in the kata competition judging? Why or why not?

Yes. Unfortunately was and it’s important to practice more than one style. Shotokan is not the most popular style anymore and now with the new rules it’s important to train different styles to be able to choose the best kata you need for the round. I’m still practicing only Shotokan except for one kata – “Sansai”. It is the good one to practice if you are Shotokan stylist.

How do you think sport competition helps the athlete in their full development as karateka?

Martial Arts are very different than the other sports because it’s not only a sport but a lifestyle too. Because of this, you can learn discipline, respect for yourself and for the other people and fair play. You are a warrior but still humble and you can fight and remain friends.

You are a kata competitor, do you practice kumite regularly in your training?

Not really because it’s already full time training for kata and at level is so high than
you need to practice very specific for your goal. But I’m practicing kickboxing for fighting and I love it.

**Karate is nowadays often referred to as a “sport”... would you agree with this definition or it is a “Martial Art” (Budo)?**

I think it’s a Martial Art first, but because of the level of the tournaments we need to be like any high-level athletes. By this I mean we are in a really tough sport. The physical preparation is very demanding.

**How do you prepare psychologically for an important competition?**

Since 2011, I have a psychologist to help me to prepare for all my competitions. And because of him I got the silver at the Worlds. I was injured 6 weeks before the World Championship and he helped me to stay focused and on the good way.

**Do you follow some special diet for your nutrition before a competition?**

Of course! This is the most important part of the whole training. We are a real sport and with the high level you need to have a special diet. Whatever you do, kata or kumite, we have jumps, we need speed, force and power and for that physical training. So you need to eat correctly to have the best of chance to go beyond your limits.

**Do you have any general advice you would care to pass onto the beginners that are interested in start their career in competition?**

The first thing you need to know is why you are doing competition and keep your motivation high, that way you can train better and stronger.

**Do you think that having in the Olympic Games in Tokyo would help and benefit karate? Why or why not? Please explain. And what do you think of karate not being included in Paris 2024?**

Of course, it’s helping karate in general. We are going to be more famous and a more attractive sport. A lot of countries are professional now and I know how hard it is to have a job, and train karate full-time in the same day. That’s a good thing.

About 2024, we lost our Olympic chance, but you know what the most important thing is? Don’t give up! Keep fighting for 2028 or 2032 and again to staying forever!

**Who is your favorite competitor or athlete of all times?**

I love Usain Bolt he is really the best and most talented athlete ever.

If you mean only karate... Then Alexandra Recchia, kumite girl under 50kg, and 5 times World Champion. She is someone that I know personally for so many years and she is a model for everyone in karate.
What would you say to someone who is interested in starting to learn karate as a sport?

Karate is hard but if you don’t give up, you will be someone very special, use karate to help people, and be more confident with yourself. Go hard or go home.

What is it that keeps you motivated competing after all these years?

First, it’s my mother. She sacrificed a lot to help me to be at my best level. Second, it’s because I love competing – it gives me the rush I need in my life.

What do you consider to be the most important qualities of a successful karate competitor?

Be rigorous. That means you have keep your high level full-time.

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

I have many I can pass on. You need to find a good coach believe in him and give 100% of yourself every single training.

What are your thoughts on the future of the sport of karate?

Karate is and always will be the most popular martial art in the world. Yes, we don’t have a big sponsor to promote us, but we will always be a strong and a beautiful sport.

Finally, what are your plans for the future?

I want to move to the US and I have a big project for America. We will see if my dream will come true… USANKF

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HEAD COACHES:
Dealing with Covid-19 Pandemic

AKIRA FUKUDA
USA KARATE KATA
HEAD COACH

How did this Corona Virus Pandemic affect you personally in your daily life with the Dojo and the regular classes?

FUKUDA: Well, the COVID crisis here in California has dictated the measures of daily in-person training. Since my involvement in the field of Sport Psychology, my colleagues have noted that there has been an extreme rise in mental health cases. Issues arise e.g. motivation, focus, and constraints of the state mandates. Given that, one can see the correlation of how training at the dojo will be affected; resulting in a drop of overall daily participation in regular classes. The term, “Pandemic Fatigue” shares a strong correlation between sensory overload and a drop in attendance.

As for my wife and I, we have been engaged in many projects i.e. online coaching, seminars, and mental skills. Since the pandemic, I have taken the opportunity to really invest in my personal training and development (e.g. continuing education units, tactical kumite training, sport psychology counseling). I’m also fortunate to note that I spent more time surfing and mountain biking since restrictions at the beaches and trails have not been affected. Most noted is the quality time spent with family and friends.

Looking back more than two years ago…how do you see the evolution through the whole qualification process for Tokyo 2020 until now?

FUKUDA: This path to the Olympics is a tough and lonely road demanding a true sense of grit. Competitors have experienced the long haul of the stringent process, streaming from travels, competition, and training. These athletes have poured their heart and soul to fulfill their Olympic dream.
The Pandemic of Corona Virus greatly affected the final qualification phase toward Tokyo 2020/21. What is your opinion of how it is being handling the last qualification phase?

**FUKUDA:** As the pressure rises for all athletes contending to qualify for the final phase of Tokyo 2021. The reality of organization committees of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and World Karate Federation (WKF) are both working to maintain an open platform, offering the ability to adjust to any types of unpredictability due to the current pandemic state that we are in.

The WKF and IOC have outlined this to be consistent with the final phase of the qualification process.

1. To include missed opportunities in the initial Olympic Standings which were affected by the COVID-19, as defined below:
   a) The 2021 Karate 1- Premier League Rabat in replacement of the 2020 Karate 1- Premier League Rabat. However, the WKF Executive Committee keeps the possibility of replacing this event by other Karate 1-Premier League tournament to be held before the Qualification Tournament in 2021.
   b) The 2021 EKF Senior Continental Championships to be held in Gothenburg (Sweden) in replacement of the 2020 EKF Senior Continental Championships in Baku (Azerbaijan).
How did you approach and adapt the athlete’s training to the current circumstances in order to be in Tokyo at their very best level?

FUKUDA: Well, this is one of the most challenging tasks that we have faced in our community. The question is/was, how to have a positive outlook on the current situation? The next obstacle is how to turn a negative situation into the act of being productive. In order to do that, we have had to conduct personalized/independent training. Some were lucky enough to train virtually and create training seminars and coaching. These types of events held by several platforms e.g. Arawaza USA, Punok, Adidas, Tokaido, USA Karate, and VKW all played a vital role in keeping our athletes active.

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

FUKUDA: My advice for those that are at home is to revisit your goals. Start by making a plan based upon a timeline (i.e. Karate K-1, Nationals, WKF Worlds), and create a training plan that can ease you back into your competitive form. Note, if you have not been active since March, the likelihood of injury will increase if training is resumed at full capacity. Create a routine that is attainable and show a steady ramp up with the goal of back to play. Outsource, look at different options to assist in your personal training (e.g. strength and conditioning specialist, personal trainer, sport psychologist/mental skill training, nutrition, etc.)

Now that the Olympic Games have been moved into 2021, how do you think this affects the overall preparation for all athletes?

FUKUDA: The IOC’s postponement of Tokyo 2020 to Tokyo 2021, has made an impact on the overall preparation for athletes and the upcoming Olympic Games. One reason is because the Qualifications process has been moved and modified to work with the World Health Organization and IOC guidelines. All elite athletes had to restructure their training, extending the competition schedule to an extra 12 months. In some cases, we have noticed that athletes have been able to recover from injuries, recharge their batteries, and refocus their efforts for the upcoming qualifying events. On the other spectrum, athletes have experienced challenges (i.e. financial, training, competition, mental wellness). All of these factors are really hitting home and will have a direct impact (both positive and negative) on our athletes.
How did this Corona Virus Pandemic affect you personally in your daily life with the Dojo and the regular classes?

**BURNS:** Like many schools across the nation, we moved our classes to an online format for about a month, then we were able to re-open and hold in-person classes. In Texas, we do have a mask mandate and the students are required to wear a face covering while training. We still have about 40% of our students training online and 60% have returned to the in-person training with masks and proper distancing. We suffered approximately a 10% loss of membership income and 25% loss of total income. We are fortunate compared to many schools across the U.S. and I feel for my colleagues who have lost much more than me. The Fall was good to our dojo and we were able to gain back students and are now luckily at the same numbers as pre-COVID.

Looking back more than two years ago...how do you see the evolution through the whole qualification process for Tokyo 2020 until now?

**BURNS:** Even before the COVID Pandemic, the qualification process for Tokyo was very difficult. It was convoluted and particularly hard on Pan American athletes due to the intense travel schedule to Europe and Asia. Pan American athletes, were traveling almost every month for 15 months to international events. USA athletes could not risk missing even a Series A because the final qualification could come down to just a few points. Consequently, our USA athletes were on the road much of the past year and half before COVID. With the loss of the last point counting Karate 1 Premier League event and the uncertainty of the 2021 European Championships and how those will impact points, I would say the qualification process is even more uncertain than it was 2 years ago. I am hopeful there will be a “make-up” event for the missing Karate 1 PL and that the 2021 European Championships will be held. Even the slightest change in points in some categories as a result of those two events, can mean the difference between qualifying by points or needing to attend the Olympic Qualifying Event.

The Pandemic of Corona Virus greatly affected the final qualification phase toward Tokyo 2020/21. What is your opinion of how it is being handled the last qualification phase?

**BURNS:** That is a tough question, part of me understands what the WKF wants to do and honestly must do, which is to try and follow the original selection procedures as closely as possible. However, part of me thinks the world has changed. We are in a different
environment than we were two years ago and we should recognize that environment and look at procedures that keep the spirit of the original intent of the selection procedures, while at the same time minimizing the exposure of the athletes to COVID-19. Pan American athletes will be the ones spending the hours on the transatlantic flights going to the Karate 1 PLs in Europe and Asia that will take place in 2021. We truly can’t afford not to make the trip with so much on the line and just a few points making the difference. I think the WKF has enough information based on the previous 2 years intense competition. I would like to see a selection based on current ranking and inclusive of the Continental Draw phase that already exists in the Selection Procedures. Yes, that would be beneficial to the US Team and it is also a fair and safe solution to the problem of traveling across the ocean 4 times in the mists of a global pandemic. Using the existing ranking and continental draw spots, the WKF could announce all of the qualified athletes in early 2021 and reduce the risk of travel and assembly for any additional qualifications. The list of athletes based on that would be an outstanding group of athletes. BUT, this is only my opinion and I am sure there are many people who would disagree with my opinion. Let me say, I think the WKF has done a great job trying to keep the qualification process intact and communicating with the athletes. This has been a challenge they could not have seen coming.

How did you approach and adapt the athlete’s training to the current circumstances in order to be in Tokyo at their very best level?

BURNS: At first, we simply welcomed the break from travel and competition. We did as suggested by the government and shut down training while we focused on how to transition training to online and what the future might look like. After about 2 months of that, we formulated a plan based on trust and personal responsibility. The athletes training for the Olympic Qualifier committed to each other to be responsible and honest with each other and that if one person felt sick or behaved in a way that risked exposure they would not participate in the training sessions. The sessions were closed to just those high level athletes willing to commit to the other athletes. Of course the athletes wear masks when training with each other, we conduct temperature checks before each practice and sanitize kumite equipment at the beginning and throughout the practice. The training environment is professionally sanitized and everything is cleaned daily. Each athlete must think of each other before, during and after practice.

The National Coaching Staff has offered several online trainings for the US Senior and Junior Teams and even a joint training with the Venezuelan Junior National Team. It is a challenge to train Kumite online for 9 months. As fighters, the athletes want to hit something and feel the distance and pressure of the opponent. These are things that are difficult to replicate in an online setting, but I am proud of the National Coaches and the ideas they have come up with to keep that athletes engaged and training.
What advice would you give to those who have restrictions at home because of the Corona Virus quarantine but they still want to train?

BURNS: I would say there will be no excuse for a lack of conditioning or physical skills when this is all over. If you are at home and do not have someone to work with then you should be focusing on your physical conditioning and skill development. You don’t need a partner to do cardio or most strength training. You should be crushing it on your workouts and shadow boxing exercises. The second thing you should be doing is perfecting the physical skill. If you went into COVID unable to throw a left hook kick, you should certainly have had the time to work on it. If there is a technique you are deficient in, focus on it and get plenty of reps on it. I know it can be boring to work skills over and over, but it has to been done at some point. When you get in front of a partner again, you want to be working distance, timing and rhythm not the physical skill itself. I would suggest find trainers or coaches that are offering online sessions and jump in with them. I know there are several athlete groups forming online that include high level international athletes who are looking for people to train with online and share drills with. Many of these groups are free to join and be a part of.

This is also a good time to study the sport. Watch videos of previous championships but not as a fan, as a student of the sport. Look across all categories and see what the trends are and what regions and countries are doing things similar. See what the referees liked in 2019 vs 2018 and how have the fighters evolved. Take notes. Really study your sport. Do a deep analysis of your matches by seeing what your most common scoring technique is by counting how many times you score with it across 5 events. See what you get hit with most, is it on offense or defense, lead hand or rear hand, or foot. Are you in the corner when you get hit or in the center of the ring? These are stats we don’t often have time to collect but if you are training alone or unable to get to the dojo, this is the time to do it.

Now that the Olympic Games have been moved into 2021, how do you think this affects the overall preparation for all athletes?

BURNS: This is not a simple question. It might be easy to think since there is more time then we have more time to prepare, but this isn’t the case. First, in many cases the athletes can’t train because they are not allowed in the dojo or it is prohibited. Second, the athletes have to be careful who they work with even if they are allowed to train. There are no competitions taking place so the athletes aren’t feeling that pressure or getting the ring time they need to stay sharp. I would bet that about 80% of the elite athletes out there are outside their weight categories right now. If you take the holiday season, mix in the COVID and no clear timeline for the next weigh-in, you have a recipe for some out of weight athletes. (Of course we don’t have that problem here in Texas).

Uncertainty never works in the favor of preparedness. Athletes need clear goals, timelines and milestones. When the competition environment is changing frequently like it is now, it is hard on the athletes and their preparation. Elite Kumite Athletes are simple creatures. They want to eat, sleep, train and fight. When two of those things are in the air, it is a challenge for the coach to keep the athlete focused and motivated. We have to set smaller goals and check points for the athlete to reach until the timeline for the larger goal is set. Preparedness is not only the athlete’s job but the coach’s job as well and knowing when to step on the gas and fire the athlete up versus when to keep the athlete steady, is a constant challenge in the current environment. I am certain as the larger goals come into focus, elite athletes across the U.S. will hone their sights and we will be ready.
Taishi Tozaki is the younger brother of USA Karate Senior Team athlete, Gakuji Tozaki. He keeps himself away from the daily life distractions and dedicates his time to his training. Taishi’s main essence is his single mindedness as a karateka and has an outstanding determination and tenacity in everything he does.

The approach of this Junior USA Team athlete to training is based on quality more than quantity; “Real success in Karate, I think, it is based on the ability to perform a few things very, very well, rather than knowing a large range of items only a little,” he says.
How long have you been practicing Karate and who are your teachers and coaches?

I started karate when I was eight years old. So, I have been practicing karate for about 13 years. I have Senseis in Japan too, but my sensei is usually my brother (Gakuji), my dad, or Kyoshi Tomohiro Arashiro when I am in the United States.

How were your beginnings in the sport?

The main reason why I started was my brother. After seeing my brother practice at the dojo, it made me think, “Maybe I could try for a couple of weeks.” The training was hard, but my friends helped me push through many of them, which was the main reason why I continued.

I didn’t have the desire to do any other sports when I was young. I wasn’t skilled in any other sports, to begin with, and I did not know anything about combat sports also. However, after experiencing many tournaments, I realized that this would be the sport I would engage in my life.

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

I think it is essential in karate competitions. When it comes to endurance, speed, and power, I will do multiple supplementary training that involves weights and running. However, at the same time, I found it always essential to review karate basics too. My goal right now is to balance both karate and supplementary training to become stronger physically and as a karate-ka.

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

As a kata competitor, I think keeping your motivations up is an important attribute. COVID-19 was a significant impact on many athletes, but I am sure that these at-
home moments will connect to our careers’ future. Since kata is a repetitive sequence, seeking and exploring in-depth techniques helps build my motivation during training. Of course, this isn’t the only attribute, but this does help me become stronger.

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

All three of these aspects are part of karate for me, and all of these aspects helped me become who I am right now. Also, karate would be a never-ending journey for me. Even if I retire, I am planning to pursue karate and spreading it through many people.

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

It is always a great experience to travel with the best in the nation and see the top athletes from different countries. Even though there might be moments where I couldn’t get the best result, it is always an honor to have the flag on my chest.

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

I try not to change my training as much, regardless if it is before the competition. I don’t like to get overly excited when I am competing, so I try to keep all training consistent.

For a competition, similar to my training, I don’t have preparation. I usually can’t perform kata well when I think, “I have to do my best!” so I try to stay relaxed as much as I can. It’s impossible (for me at least) to rapidly increase my skill during the competition, so I trust what I went through in training when I am competing.

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

Absolutely. Being in the Olympics does help spread how great karate is to the world, and more people could join our sport. Sadly, karate would not be in the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, but I hope that karate would enter the competition again from 2028.

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

It is always important to have a goal. Even if it is to win a world championship or get better at basics, having those goals would help you motivate yourself throughout training, and it does allow you to be productive also.

Finally, what are your plans for the future?

My plans for the future are to compete in more tournaments internationally with my brother. I will keep practicing and improving myself so that I won’t get left behind by the other junior athletes. I am also planning to go to graduate school, so balancing karate with academics is another goal.
Recently I had the pleasure of speaking to Sensei Ray Hughes, of Arizona, to ask him about his journey in karate, his career, his dojo and specifically his para-karate program. What a joy to speak to someone so passionate and dedicated to helping so many people! Here are his replies:

Sensei Hughes, please tell me about your history and journey in karate?

I started in karate back in in 1976, around the age of 19. I went into the dojo kicking and screaming! I was forced into it by a friend and just did it to get him off my back. And now here I am, 44 years later, having devoted my entire life’s work to the field of martial arts. Funny how things work out like that.

I was born in Miami, Arizona, in a small mining town, and believe me, I already knew how to fight by the time I got into karate! I remember being forced by my buddy to go watch a karate class. I had a negative attitude and expected to see Kung Fu Theater or something. But I was stunned at what I saw. It was brutal, I signed up on the spot. After the first few classes I was hooked. And it became my life.

What style of karate do you practice? And in what ways did you participate?

“I practice Wado, and I’ve been full time dojo owner since 1986. I have done basically every role there is to do in karate. I was a competitor, a coach, dojo owner, and referee. Now I am a PKF referee and I enjoy travelling to different countries to judge. I feel honored to serve USA Karate as a Referee and to participate on the Governance committee.”

When did you start your own dojo and what was your mission?

“I rented a facility from 1986-2000 and then built my own facility in 2000 with 6000 square feet, three training rooms, bleachers, etc. I own the building. It’s the realization of my life’s dream.”
Well... basically the mission of the karate school was to be NOT what I came up from. I was part of a very dysfunctional organization. That organization taught me how not to run a school. I joke a lot about some of my greatest teachers were the ones who taught me how not to be. The arrogance and condescending attitudes of those teachers just about broke me. I realized I wanted to be a completely different teacher from what was modeled to me in the early days. I wanted to be different. So, I did my best to come at it from a humble place. I believe it has served me and the dojo and most especially, the students, very well.”

**How did you grow your karate school, and how do you include the para-karate athletes?**

“Through hard work and discipline, I grew a traditional karate school to over 300 students. What was my method? High standards, mutual respect and discipline, but always humble at its core. I wanted to prove that one could have success with a traditional karate program that had its basis in humility and helping people, not arrogance and intimidation, and guess what? It has worked! There are 13 brown belts testing this weekend for shodan and they have more than 7-8 years of experience each. You can go down the street and get a black belt in a year and a half, but in my school it’s not less than four years and more for many. I feel I have shown you can have high standards, stay traditional, and have high student participation.”
Can you tell me about your program for Para-karate athletes?

“Pre-Covid the average was 300 students in the dojo and of those 10% were Para-karate athletes with disabilities. Over the years I’ve seen and worked with many different types of disabilities, but mostly Autism, Downs Syndrome, ADHD, overall, mostly cognitively impaired. I don’t have classes specifically for them, they are included fully in the regular classes. This is an opportunity for the typical students work and train with these special people. Everyone benefits. This is welcomed by all parents as well. Our age range is 4-80, but 250 of 300 are 16 and under. Most of my parents of the students make up the adult program. My para athletes are treated the same as everyone else, with the same respect and same expectations. They do a great job! In fact, one of my instructors is a person with special needs, she is 20 years old, just received her brown belt, and she is excellent. She is well received by all.”
How do you attract your para-karate athletes to your dojo and program?

“We market for special needs on our website, social media and word of mouth. We, as a dojo, are very open to these students. My staff, all students that have been with me for many years, have learned the patience, the caring, the joy that comes with teaching persons of ALL abilities. Its embedded in the philosophy of the school.”

“What I wanted to do in Arizona is to promote para-karate at a higher level, then Covid happened. Since March, we have lost 150 students, and out of the ones that are left, half of those are on zoom. We are trying to keep them engaged. We were crushed during the summer; I was afraid we were going to close. But now we are breaking even; we’ll make it. But I need to tell you, there are two para-karate teenagers, ages 17 and 18, who have been on every zoom since March. One with autism and one with Down Syndrome and they are so into it! They are so excited and a true pleasure to have in my dojo. I’m impressed.”

What called you to work with the para-karate community?

“Ever since I was a kid, I’ve always been the type that if I saw someone being picked on, I would jump in to help the underdog, it’s just in my DNA. I am attracted to those who have harder struggles. And then after my competition career, and opening my school, I came to realize a few important things. What’s the objective of a school, after all, than to accept ALL persons. Karate training and its philosophy is for everyone. When you give something back to others it feels great and while helping others in the process! And that’s what a Sensei is, one who has gone before, and represents the chain of life - the people that came before and the folks who will come after. The reason for including special needs kids is because this is our world!”

For anyone who might like more information on Sensei Ray Hughes’ programs, please visit www.smacus.com
World Kata Champion, Antonio Diaz, makes his home in Caracas, Venezuela, where he enjoys every single day of his life, whether training, teaching or having a relaxed time with the family. Very few individuals conduct themselves the way he does, not letting success go to his head while displaying the qualities of a true champion. In the last decade, he has become one of the Karate’s all-time-greats in the history of the WKF.

When retirement was almost knocking at his door, the IOC opened the possibility for the sport of Karate to be in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. “I have to be there” he told himself, and immersed in a all-out journey of preparation and training. With his ticket to Tokyo 2020 in his pocket, he is still considering to make a final challenge at the WKF Worlds in Dubai at the end of 2021. “I don’t know yet. All my energy is focused for the Olympic Games,” he says, “We’ll see after that. No pressure.”

“If someone had told me that I’d end up where I am today, when I first started martial arts, I would have called them a liar and laughed in their face,” Diaz laughs. “But karate, just like life, doesn’t happen all at once; you gain knowledge one day at a time, and you better yourself through loyalty, friendship, and hard work.”
What does it mean for you to be the first Venezuelan male Karate athlete to ever qualify for an Olympic Games?

This is a dream come true. Since I was a kid I was hoping for karate to be in the Olympic Games, and at one point after the decision for Rio 2016 I lost all hope. So, I was going to retire that year but receive the news that karate was going to be part of the Olympic program in Tokyo 2020, and I said to myself, “I don’t want to be watching the Opening Ceremony in 4 years and say What If?” Therefore, I decide to give it a try and now I’m here already qualified and I’m enjoying the feeling of accomplishing my first gold, now I have to focus on be prepare to be a real contender for the medals.

How do you see your personal evolution through the whole qualification process until now?

The qualification period for the first step by ranking was very long and tiring, more than 20 tournaments, sometimes one each month. At the beginning it was a bit of a shock because I was not having the results I expected, I was used to be in the podium most of the tournaments, so it was frustrating, but at the end I decided to enjoy the journey and look at the big picture. It was not just about having medals in each tournament, it was about making the points to be in the qualification spots. So I think there was a growing moment and now I’m enjoying as much as I can this last part of my journey as an athlete.

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 the last qualification phase should be handled?

I think the pandemic the situation for the future of the tournaments and even the Olympic Games will be very uncertain. I know that WKF is trying to find options and solutions for the cancelled events, but also know there was a pressure to make decisions because IOC was saying that the Games were going to be in the original date. I know it was a disadvantage for some athletes that needed points from that last tournament. I hope now with the postpone dates of Tokyo 2021 the next steps of qualification can be as close as possible to the original to be fair with all athletes.
I’m part of the WKF Athletes Commission and we have been having virtual meetings to try to make proposals, but it’s important that everybody understand that every decision must be approved by IOC.

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

I think now that we have the new dates of the Olympic Games I can start thinking of a new plan, there’s still some uncertainty about when this pandemic is going to end and we are going to come back to normal life. At least we know we have few months to the Opening Ceremony in Tokyo, So right now, I’m trying to be creative at home to do some maintaining training, also mental training and using this time to share with my family, depending on how long it last the quarantine I will start making some adjustments to increase the rhythm of the trainings session and their intensity.

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

We need to all be part of the solution for this global problem, and the best way, our best weapon is staying home. Use this time to prepare yourself mentally; be creative on how you can use the space at home for training… a lot of athletes and trainers are posting ideas on their social media. Also use this time for personal growth, read that book you said you never had time, enjoy the company of your family if you are with them, and think that this sacrifice are for a bigger purpose it’s not for you it’s for the world, that will give an intention to staying home and your perception of the whole circumstance will change.

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

Of course, to wait one more year in my case it’s also postpones my retirement. Initially, I only had Pan-American championship maybe one series A and then Tokyo Olympics. Now I think I will have to in more events to prepare and be in shape. For example, I said my last World Championship was 2018 bu my I will have to do the 2021 if the WKF holds them. At the end, I’m trying to see the situation from a positive side – the silver-lining of it all, now I have more time to prepare and pay attention to more details in my preparation to the last competition of my career.

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

Not really as an athlete because I’m retiring after Tokyo Olympics, but maybe as a Coach it does because also one of my dreams is to help young generations to be world and Olympic medalists.

I hope the Organizing Committee of Paris 2024 reconsiders adding karate to the program and also to be in Los Angeles 2028 as an official sport.

USANKF
He taught extensively in Japan and Europe and trained privately some Kata world champions who looked for improving their technical performance in competition such as Rika Usami and Antonio Diaz and the US athlete and Pan American champion, Sakura Kokumai. Yoshimi Inoue Sensei was always generous with his time and agreed to speak freely about the present state of karate-do. He walked the path of Budo for many decades and was one of the few masters in the world who can transcend style and politics, understanding the transition from traditional to sport. If some men possessed a philosophical approach to life and can suffer in agonizing pain and still find some great instruction from the lesson learned, Inoue Sensei was without doubt one of them.

“The goal of karate should not only be self-defense,” explains Inoue. “The art should provide a guide for living and this encompasses the striving for self-control through the discipline of dedicated practice.”

In an age of meaningless superlatives, it is difficult to describe the debt of gratitude the world of karate owes to Sensei Yoshimi Inoue. His legacy will stay with all of us for many years to come.
REMEMBERING THE MASTER
Sensei, how does Hayashi-ha Shito Ryu differ from other karate styles?

Hayashi Teruo Sensei trained in different styles [including Kobudo] and finally decided what was the best approach to combat. He developed a series of principles that should be used in combat, and his main idea was not to face strength with pure strength. His approach was substantially different from other masters who emphasized more kata over kumite. Hayashi Sensei realized the limitation of some traditional techniques in actual combat and began to modify the technical structure of the techniques to better fit into a realistic fighting situation. He studied with great masters to learn new things and eventually to mold what it would be his creation: the Hayashi-ha style of Shito Ryu karate.

What can you tell us about the balance of the opposites [soft and hard]?

In the universe, all is based on the balance of opposites: day and night, cold and hot, etc. Karate is the same: relaxation and tension, hard and soft, body and mind … it is all in there. No Karate style is “hard” or “soft” per se if you truly understand Karate. Some people say Goju is “soft,” Shotokan is “hard,” etc… that makes no sense. All Karate styles use the principle of balancing the “hard” and “soft”. It is just a matter of the level of understanding and knowledge of the person or karateka who is talking.

What is your opinion about trying to make [in Kata] the external technique perfect from a visual point of view?

With the possibility of including Karate in the Olympics, there has been an attempt to standardize not only the actual kata but also make the physical movements “prettier,” to say at least. The idea of a perfect “outside” visual form has become the goal. But there is a big problem here because Karate kata is not gymnastics. Kata is not about the external technique only but about the “philosophy” and “meaning” of the actual technique. If we change the outside form to make it look better but lose elements that “show” the real meaning of the technique, we are losing a great deal of understanding. If we don’t maintain the “function” of the technical movement, then it is no longer kata. It’s gymnastics. Once kata is only visual (as we see these days), it has no point. The visual of the kata must represent technically the “bunkai application” of the movement. We have to consider the “bunkai” when we do kata.

Can you give us an example?

For instance, in some kata when performed in competition, the karateka jumps higher than what the actual technique requires; they slow down the techniques breaking the actual rhythm of the form, etc. Why? To impress judges. Every movement can be used and it has to be performed as it works. That is a choice you have to make: perform kata for looks or for true Karate. Real Karate kata may not be more beautiful but certainly is way more meaningful.

What about Kihon training?

Kihon training, although it may be boring is extremely important. If the foundations of a house are weak, as the house gets older, problems will arise. This is the same for all Karate styles, no matter their origins. A lot of people spend many years training to realize later on, after 30 years of karate practice, that they don’t have a solid foundation and their technique is not “polished” at all – that they lack solid basic, clean Karate technique and they feel embarrassed because they have a high rank. You find this situation mainly among karateka who have devoted their training mainly to kumite. Don’t misunderstand my words; kumite is not easy but it is not what makes a good karateka. Kihon and kata are the foundation for Karate.
is a “personalized” way of using Karate technique. But you should get that [technique] first. Unfortunately, you see high ranks who lack good Karate basics and they try to cover it up focusing on kumite. This shows what kind of “attitude” and “personality” these practitioners have.

**How can these practitioners who focus mainly on kumite correct that?**

Well, that is a little bit difficult. They will realize this problem later on in their Karate training; they may be 5th, 6th or 7th Dan already. They have a reputation at stake [some may be Asian, European, American or world champions] and it is hard for them to acknowledge what they truly lack in their Karate. They never had the motivation, patience, and sense of detail to begin with and that is why their Karate is like it is. So, it is very hard for them to accept that fact and go back and do thousands of basics to catch up with the deficiencies of their past Karate training. Karate’s basic movements are incredibly difficult to perform correctly and it takes a certain attitude and personality to focus on details. Kata is kumite at its most complex form. All the techniques and strategies used in kumite and also in self-defense are contained in the fundamental kata. You just need to know “where” to look and “how” to uncode them. In traditional Karate, kata equals kumite but kumite doesn’t equal kata.

**Some people may argue that good technique is alright…but Karate is about “if you can fight or not.” What do you have to say about that?**

Very simple; that show how little these people know Karate and their level of understanding. That mentality shows why they lack technique. And no, Karate is not about “if you can fight or not.” Mike Tyson at his best could probably have knocked down 90% or more of the karate practitioners around the world, but that doesn’t mean he knows Karate. Fighting is a part of Karate but it is not Karate. People use this excuse to justify they own inabilities. MMA champions can really fight, but it has nothing to do with Karate or true Martial Arts. So, if these people only are interested in fighting, why do they do Karate and not MMA?

**What can you tell us about kumite?**

Kumite is based on two principles: distance and timing. Without these two, nothing else matters. Not matter how good your primary elements (techniques) are, they will be useless. But even with a lousy technique, if you have developed a decent amount of ability in using distance and timing, you can be very good in sparring. You won’t have a “good” Karate but you can win competitions, even world championships.

**Would you elaborate, please?**

If you don’t have the right distance, your attacks will fail and your defenses will be useless. The right technique without the right [delivery] distance is useless. Then, if you have the right distance but the technique (attack or defense) is not delivered at the right time, it will either fall short in execution or won’t be done to its fullest potential. The “when” to move is at least as important as the “how.” It is useless to have a powerful technique if your body movement can’t put you in exactly the right place and at the right time to use it effectively.
How we can develop the “right” distance?

Let me begin by saying that there is no one “right” distance. It is true that the “basic” kumite distance is the one that is slightly farther than the reach of the rear leg of the opponent. For instance, if your opponent is facing you, he won’t be able to reach you with a kick from the back leg without taking a preliminary step toward you. That is your basic “safety” or “critical” distance. During a kumite match, the distance alters constantly so the key to obtain the right distance is “correct footwork.” If you don’t have the right kind of footwork, you won’t be able to attain the right distance efficiently during the match.

What do you mean by the right kind of footwork?

You need to know what kind of footwork you should use to defend, to attack, to intercept, to shorten the distance, to create distance when defending, or to create distance in order to simply create space, etc. Not all footwork patterns are the same and shouldn’t be used randomly. Right footwork “gets” you there and gets you “out.”

What about timing?

Timing is a very complex element because it requires a sense of rhythm – not only of the correct [intrinsic] rhythm of how the technique must be used and works but also of the rhythm of the fight. Then, you need to have an understanding of the opponent’s rhythm and the tempo and cadence of his movements. Distance can be drilled and developed by Sanbon and Gohon kumite but timing only through actual jyu kumite.

And …?

Then, it is when you can actually find a certain pattern in your opponent’s rhythm and find out how to break it. You can create it, too, and force it into your opponent, but that is more complex. You can read the opponent’s rhythm and then break it to hit efficiently.
You mentioned Sanbon and Gohon Kumite but some modern practitioners might argue that attacking someone with Oi Tsuki is not “realistic.” What do you say?

Oi Tsuki as a technique in itself shows a lot about the practitioner’s technical level. If you can actually hit somebody with a full Oi Tsuki, that tells a lot about us as karateka. But let me say that for prearranged kumite drills like Sanbon and Gohon Kumite, many people don’t actually do it right. The right starting distance is when you place yourself with your fist actually touching the partner’s face. Then, you take one leg back to Zenkutsu-dachi. From there, you initiate the Oi Tsuki. It is not a long distance but an actual “striking distance.” Your intention is to “hit” the training partner, not just pose the punch. The fact that Oi Tsuki is more “visible” allows the trainee to coordinate his reaction and timing better. This is a training process; it is not a fighting drill, but a training drill to learn how to time the defense, the counterattack, and the tempo of the response. If you don’t understand the actual use of the drill, then you may make nonsense statements because of lack of understanding on what you are talking about.

It is believed by many that the power comes from the hip but studies proved different. What can you tell us about this?

It is true that people say that the power in Karate “comes from the hip.” Let’s start using the words correctly. Power comes from the ground up. It doesn’t come or originate from the hip. This is pure physics. A Karate punch [or kick] does not begin with the hip rotation. It passes cleanly through the hips into the torso, but it is not the hips that cause the power or the turn. The power that starts/originates or comes from the ground is transmitted to the upper body [and eventually to the punch or kick] by the correct use of the hip and then directed to the target via the arm or the leg. Our hips will impede the progress of the leg force/thrust if we don’t know how to open them loosely as pivot points. Why the legs? Because if you have no base, you have no power. Once again, pure physics. Your connection with the ground is the base for the power. Studies have been made in universities where professional boxers and karateka have been placed in the air hanging, with no base or contact to the ground whatsoever. The result? Their punching power was gone, decreased to the simple arm power. Why? Because they had no base. Those studies proved that the power originates from the ground up, not from the hips. It is impossible to deliver a powerful punch without a strong stance to launch it from, as you cannot use the rotation of your hips without being rooted to the ground. This is the right way to express it. What is important to the body mass and the way the hip is used.

Body mass?

Yes. The real driver behind power in any punch or kick is the amount of mass behind the movement and the direction of that mass. Check all the physics equations for force, momentum, and impulse. The way to maximize the amount of mass behind your attack is to get as much of your body moving in the direction of your attack as possible.

So what is the role of the hip?

As I said, the hip is the transmitter of the power that originates from the ground and from your “rooted” stance. Hip rotation is an accelerator that adds speed, and of course, increasing the speed of your body mass will increase the amount of power. But hip rotation is only one way of increasing the speed of your body mass and never
is a substitute for proper application of your body mass to your techniques – which involves the whole body. You also need to know how to use the counter-rotation of the joint and when to use it properly. Hips are where the body’s center of gravity is located; our center point of mass is at the hip level and we should learn how to use our hips to increase velocity of the body mass – not necessarily speed. The right use of the hips helps to keep posture, balance, and stability for every move, but at the same time, being used incorrectly may shut off the powerful thrust of the legs. Hip rotation – not hip shifting – is used for adding speed to the body mass and therefore develop maximum power in karate techniques. That is why we say that in karate we always try to punch with the hips and kick with the hips, etc.

One more thing, the hips can’t generate power. Power is generated by the muscles around the hip. Two of the largest muscle groups in the body are the buttocks and the abdominal muscles; therefore, utilizing their strength, as well as rotating or shifting the hips, will add power to any techniques. As the hips turn, the torso and buttocks are added to the force of the technique. The hips are part of the bone/skeletal structure. A bone does not generate power …. muscles do. The real power comes from the buttock and the abdomen muscles. But a tight hip with no flexibility will decrease the potential power that you can use from your body mass and technique.

What about hip shifting? What is the difference from hip rotating?

These are two different things and should be used in different ways. Shifting is the movement of the entire body from one point to another in a straight line. Shifting includes both stepping and sliding the feet. And this is how the hips should be used because if you don’t move, you simply can’t hit your opponent. So shifting your hips is the real key.

Shifting the hips and not rotating the hips is the method which allows the karate-ka to develop the greatest amount of force. This is possible because we use the maximum amount of body mass by using the legs driving against the floor [origin of the power] to push forward against the hips.

The rotation is developed by the circular motion of the body mass. Control of rotation is centered on the use of the hips. The outside hip joint moves forward and
backward, while the inside hip acts as a hinge. This can be practiced without technique, and then with techniques added. It is very important that the knees remain locked in place without moving. The pivot point in hip rotation changes depending upon the situation. It is always either one hip joint or the other, never the center of the body. Rotating on the center of the body would mean that one leg is retreating while the other is moving forward, eliminating the effect of the rotation. With the use of hip rotation, it is possible to create very powerful techniques in a small space.

Another important aspect is to fully understand the hip rotation around a central axis and the application of the hip shifting in the same motion. This is a completely different concept and a more realistic way of using body torque to use the technique effectively. One aspect we should be aware of is that different styles tend to use or move the hips differently, although they are based on the same principles. Shotokan uses a very “wide” application of hanmi and shomen and Shito Ryu, Goju, and Wado use the same principle but with more emphasis on shifting.

**Why you think people explain it incorrectly?**

They are misinformed. Hip shifting and hip rotating are both important. Hip rotating by itself won't do anything to your punch unless you are punching a stationary object and your distance is already there. It is like rotating the tap of a bottle … it doesn’t move/shift forward to reach the target. You need to use hip shifting and body mass, and then you finalize the movement with full hip rotation that concludes at the moment of impact, not before. And this has to be synchronized and not divided in parts or different movement sections.

**What do you mean by “divided in parts”?**

You see many people snapping the hips back and forth. They really get good at “hitting” and snapping the hips but this is useless in real Karate. It is just showing off. When they punch, you see clearly when the hip movement (rotating) starts and when it ends. You can actually see the “separation” between the hips and the rest of the body movement. Well, this is wrong. The hip movement or rotating should be “hidden” along with the punch [or kick]. It should be “one” with the punch [or kick]. These people snap the hips and then punch. This is ridiculous. The hip movement should be coordinated with the rest of the body and not be visible. It is like the separate parts of a whip … when snapped in the air, you see just one single action, not several segments moving one after the other. Only one single perfectly coordinated movement, that is what a karate technique should be. So drop that hip snap. It may look “impressive” to a beginner and fellow karateka’s, but not to someone who knows and understands Karate.

**What would be your final advice for the readers?**

In Karate you never stand still. You always have to try to move forward, to get better and improve what you are doing. When you go to train every day, you have to go far beyond the idea of simply “training” and use your mind when you train. That is the only way to really progress. **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

Mission
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.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exclusive Authority</th>
<th>Discretionary Authority</th>
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<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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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
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