MAYA WASOWICZ
THE VALUE OF TRYING

DAMIAN QUINTERO
#1 Kata Athlete in the World

PARA-KARATE
RYAN ROGERS

ERICK LAMELAS
Junior Athlete Profile

2017
The Juniors’ Year!

USA KARATE NATIONALS
Greenville, SC

JUNIOR PKF CHAMPIONSHIPS
Buenos Aires, Argentina

JR. WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS
Tenerife, Spain
2018 USA KARATE
March 30 - April 1, 2018

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The Official Magazine of USA Karate
2017 USA KARATE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP & TEAM TRIALS

2017 JUNIOR PKF CHAMPIONSHIP

2017 JUNIOR WKF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

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A long journey for the USA Junior Team started in Greenville, SC with the National Karate Championships. This was the first stop leading to the Pan American Karate Federation Championships in Buenos Aires, Argentina and at the WKF World Championships in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Spain.

Once again the PKF Championships proved to be the perfect “sounding board” for the USA athletes to find out “where” they were at international level. Because of the distance that separates USA with other American and European countries, it is hard sometimes, for our young athletes to get the necessary international experience.

These young athletes “handled” very well the pressure of a competition higher level than in previous years. Definitely, the acceptance of karate in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics has given a “push” for the young generation.

The island of Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Spain, was the chosen place for the 2017 Junior World Championships.

In comparison with the PKF Championships, the selection of athletes was reduced by country to accommodate all the participants from the rest of the world. This was the first World Championship after the IOC accepted the inclusion of karate in Tokyo 2020. All the athletes gathered in Tenerife knew what was at stake. Some U21 still have a chance for Tokyo 2020 but most of them were looking at Paris 2024.

Many countries like Iran, Turkey, Egypt, etc...have substantially improved their technical level. In team kata, for instance, the level of synchronization, technical skill, power, speed and focus, that the Junior athletes showed in this World Championships, has never been seen at these young ages. These Junior teams will be very hard to beat in a couple years at any Senior event, if they continue with this level of technical progression.

The kumite divisions showed the same determination; the young athletes were very mature for competitors of that age and from Cadets to Juniors the performances were outstanding. The elite in the U21 division, definitely has a “say” in any Senior event. They need to gather more experience but the technical skills showed in this Championships proved that they are the future of the sport.

The final analysis of individual and team performances at the 2017 PKF and World Championships shows that there is no country in the world that can be considered a clear leader in the sport of karate.

These Junior athletes are the future of USA KARATE. Tokyo 2020 may be too close for most of them, but definitely they have the time and passion to prepare and get ready for Paris 2024.

Let’s keep moving forward!
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As we reflect on 2017 all I can say is “What a year!” This is our first year as an Olympic sport and a lot has changed. I wanted to share a summary of what has occurred this year.

January:
- We selected our 2017 National Team at the Olympic Training Center.
- We held a camp at the OTC for our Senior and Junior Athletes.
- We presented our 1st Olympic Sport High Performance Plan to the USOC.
- Mr. Espinós - WKF President, Mr. DiPasquale and Mr. Hampel met with USOC CEO Scott Blackmun to discuss the future of Karate.

March
- We brought in one of the most sought-after kumite experts Antonio Olivia – for seminars in Chicago and New York.
- 4 of our National Coaches attended the USOC’s 3 Day Coach Accelerator Program.
- Coach Hood attended the Combat and Acrobatic Sport Symposium put on by the USOC.

April
- We received our Performance Partnership Agreement from the USOC that provided $60,000 in Direct Athlete Support and $75,000 in High Performance Funding Support.
- We held a National Team camp in Las Vegas along with international athletes
- Mr. Robert Hamara, WKF Referee Commission Secretary, presented at our referee course.
- We had outstanding seminars at the USA Open with Sandra Sanchez, Jesus Del Moral, Antonio Diaz and Douglas Brose.
- We ran an amazing 15th USA Open and Junior International Cup with our largest number of competitors to date and the best competition we have had.

May
- Our Senior National Team traveled to Curacao for the Pan American Karate Federation Championships with a significant improvement over the 2016 SR PKF where Team USA earned 1 gold, 4 bronze and a 5th place. The 2017 results had 3 gold, 1 silver, 7 bronze and four 5th Place finishes. This outstanding performance put Team USA in 4th place overall, up from 7th last year. An amazing outing by the entire US Delegation with 21 officials, 5 coaches, an Athletic Trainer, a Doctor and a team leader all supporting our athletes.
- Our Para-Karate Athletes competed in the inaugural PKF Para-Karate Championship and were fully integrated as members of our Senior National Team and received the same funding as the typical athletes. These 3 amazing athletes earned 1 gold, 1 silver and 1 bronze.
- Our leadership position in the PKF remains strong with our President Mr. DiPasquale being reelected to the 1st Vice President position in the PKF Executive Committee, Mr. Baxter was named Chairman of the PKF Referee Commission, Mr. Hill was reinstated to the Technical Commission and Mr. Kohn was reinstated to the Para-Karate Commission along with Mrs. Madani. It is extremely important for the United States to hold positions of leadership to keep the PKF strong and have a voice for North America within the PKF.
- Mr. Baxter joined Mrs. Madani as a member of the WKF Referee Commission.

June
- Tom Scott and Sakura Kokumai went to the Olympic Training Center for Elite Athlete Health Profiles to develop support plans for their training.
- We brought in our USOC Sports Psychologist and Sports Nutritionist for seminars with our Jr and Sr National Team athletes at the National Championships.
- Our own Tom Scott and Sakura Kokumai put on amazing Seminars at the National Championships.
- We relaunched the Coaches Education Program utilizing resources our national coaches received in training from the USOC to bring those ideas to our grassroots coaches.
- We made significant enhancements to the Dan Recognition Program and will continue to evolve that for a major relaunch in 2018.
- Mr. Nagura - WKF General Secretary, Mr. Sasaki – President Japan Karate Federation and Mr. Ham-
pel met with USOC CEO Scott Blackmun to continue discussions on the future of Karate and the Olympics.

- We held our largest National Championship ever in Greenville South Carolina with over 1700 competitors.

**August**

- We presented our 2018 High Performance Plan to the USOC.
- Junior PKF Championships were held in Buenos Aries, Argentina our athletes were amazing finishing 2nd overall with more medals than 2016. Our Juniors earned 8 gold medals, 10 silver medals and 15 bronze medals.

**September**

- Completed the USOC SafeSport Audit conducted by Baker Tilly with no observations of change required. We were one of only 3 NGBs who had no required changes as a result of the audit.

**October**

- Junior World Championships were held in Tenerife Spain our athletes performed well with Madison Malone earning bronze. Overall the team earned 1 bronze and 2 5th place finishes this is a great improvement over 2015 where we had only 1 5th place finish.
- We will receive an increase in our High Performance Funding by 65% and the USOC will provide $97,000 in Direct Athlete Support and $126,000 in High Performance Funding Support. We expect to have the agreement finalized in early 2018.

**November**

- Started work on a Regional Referee program to develop officials at the local tournaments. This program is based on Karate Referee Association program which we acquired and will be enhancing and rebranding in early 2018.

**December**

- Maya Wasowicz and Ashley Davis went to the Olympic Training Center for Elite Athlete Health Profiles to develop support plans for their training.

  We had a great year, and I’m proud to say that the athletes were supported at a level that is unprecedented in our history. Overall, we will have provided over $250,000 in financial support to our National Team. Our partnership with the USOC and a focus on results based funding is making a difference for our most elite athletes. We are proud to say that in 2018 we will have 4 fully funded athletes all ranked in the top 15 of the WKF Rankings.

  Our Event staff led by Brody Burns continues to provide amazing support to host incredible competition events. And our referee corps led by Cleve Baxter is one of the best referee corps in the World. Thank you to all the dedicated volunteers that make all this work and allow us to host the best programs and competitions in the United States.

  2017 also brought significant changes in the National Office Staff. Change brings an opportunity to look at the National Office differently and we have made and will continue to make additions to our Team. Elizabeth and Christina are amazing and our National Office is operating more efficiently and with better customer service than before and I look forward to continuing to build a great team to support our federation.

*USANKF*

_Wishing you all a Safe and Joyous Holiday Season!_  
*Looking forward to an Amazing 2018!*

_Happy Holidays,_  
_Phil Hampel_  
_Chief Executive Officer*

[Logo: USANKF.org]  
[Logo: USA Karate]
January 2018 begins a new era for those competitors who are dreaming of being chosen to compete in the 2020 Olympics, what we hope will be the first of many opportunities for Karate Olympians.

Karate Olympians will be chosen in part for the 2020 Olympic Games on the basis of points accumulated over the next two years. Athletes will accumulate points from their performances in continental and world championships. Added to those points will be any generated in any Karate1 Premier League or Series A competitions.

The World Karate Federation (WKF) is committed to guaranteeing excellent quality of competition in the premier leagues around the globe by ensuring the highest quality of officiating. The WKF has established requirements for all high-ranking WKF officials. Officials are required to participate in a minimum of two premier leagues and one series A competitions on three continents. There is a possibility that these requirements will become even stricter in 2019. In 2018, those of us who wish to officiate at the World Championship must fulfill these requirements.

These new requirements have raised many concerns among officials. Karate officials who work in professions other than karate generally do not enjoy as much free time as others; some officials feel that there is inadequate financial support of them by the federation; others are concerned about sacrificing their family time. These are valid concerns. In fact, I shared these concerns until I had a meeting with the President of World Karate Federation, Mr. Antonio Espinos during World Championship in Tenerife, Spain.

He asked a simple question: Can a world champion become a champion only by participating in one competition a year to become a champion? Obviously, the answer was no. It is only through consistent and intense training and application of that training in many competitions that each individual improves and becomes a champion. The same is true for officials. Can an official become a competent and Olympic standard official, if s/he is only participating in one world championship? The answer was clear. Regardless of how much of disagreement anyone might have with these requirements, the logic of it makes total sense and benefits our sport.

The result of USA team performance in the recent world championship was something that no one was happy about it. I do not believe that our team lacked of any skills or techniques. They lacked experience. They simply got defeated by other competitors because they only had one or two other competitions before competing at the world level. In addition, it is a regrettable fact that many US team athletes do not compete at the regional level once they make it to the national team. This mentality is wrong, because it denies the athletes vital experience and the change to progress.

By the same token, the way to become a good official is no different than the way to become a good athlete: practice makes perfect. If you want to be a good official at the national level, you must practice your skills in the regional and national level constantly. If you want to be an international official, then you must dedicate your time to practice nationally and internationally. And now if you want to be a competent, up-to-date and skilled official at the world level, then you must practice nationally, internationally, and, of course in the many premier leagues, to get ready for world championship and the Olympics. Once we are there, there will be no room for mistakes. This is our dedication to the sport and to striving for excellence! USANKF
Waza wai means misfortune, disaster, accident. Ketai means lack of effort, laziness, idleness. This precept calls upon us to foster the spirit of effort, both in our karate training and in our daily lives; and it tells us that if we don’t, we are likely to fall victim to misfortune.

Laziness takes many forms. At times we don’t feel like trying. That’s when it is important to use our mental training.

When attacked, you can’t say, “Oh, I’m too tired to defend myself.” You don’t have that luxury. You must exert every ounce of strength to defend yourself. That is the mindset you should have when you are training. Even when you are very tired, and you feel like you can’t possibly do any more, try harder—let your spirit take over.

To do this, to let the spirit take over, you must have a strong, disciplined mind. And that comes from training, the training you have done up to that point in time. Everything is connected—a strong body, a strong mind and a strong spirit. If you trained hard yesterday, you are better equipped, both physically and mentally, to give a hundred percent today. It is very important to have a strong mind. It gives us control of our bodies and our lives. A person who has determination and discipline can overcome great odds. That is why it is important to always test yourself when you are training. You are not only building strong muscles. You are, more importantly, developing a strong mind and a strong spirit.

Sometimes laziness takes the form of apathy. There is always a reason for putting out less than a full effort, on the floor of the dojo or in our daily lives. But in doing this, you cheat yourself and the people around you of a full experience.

Overconfidence is also a form of laziness. Often we think that, because we have done a thing many times, or because it feels easy, we don’t have to put out any effort. This is a dangerous attitude. When we do things without awareness, accidents occur. We get hurt or hurt others.

When we train, we must give as much effort as possible. To step on the floor and take it easy, for whatever reason, is wrong. Karate-do requires being fully in the moment, without concern for the moments before or after. In this way we can give one hundred percent to everything we do. And by being fully aware, fully “in the moment,” we are able to avoid accidents, misfortune…whatever term you want to use.

Everyone likes advanced techniques. Jumping in the air, or performing an intricate kata, often makes us feel accomplished. However to practice only those techniques is laziness. We must practice the fundamentals on which the more advanced techniques are based. We must work to improve these basics as well. If we don’t, our self-control diminishes, therefore our ability to control the situation around us diminishes, and we then become vulnerable to “misfortune.”

Similarly, in life we often begin to neglect simple things when we feel we are somehow beyond them. But common courtesies and the simple tasks in life are the groundwork for the greater things we want to accomplish. If we neglect fundamentals, we endanger what rests on them.

Whether we practice basics or advanced techniques, we must always practice hard. Apathy shows itself not only in training, but in the appearance and feeling of a dojo, and in the way its members behave on and off the floor.

The goal of martial arts training is perfection of character. We must always try our best to become better people and to make a better society. Everything comes from our minds. If our minds are lazy, misfortune will occur.

Approach everything with a full spirit. During training, don’t be lazy. In life, strive always to be better. If we approach everything we do with a spirit of effort, success will follow in good time.
RETURN TO THE FUTURE

The World Karate Championships embodies future Olympians to come, as Karate awaits its Olympic début in Tokyo 2020. This year’s highly anticipated 2017 Jr. WKF World Championships epitomizes the Olympic spirit with an attendance of 107 countries followed by 1067 athletes.

Team USA was not to be ignored as our Kata competitors took the tatami. 4 out of 6 rings were covered with stars and stripes representing USA KARATE. Brody Jacobs climbed his way to the quarterfinals, losing by a very close margin to Italy. Rey Chinen the reigning Jr. Pan American Champion had a great performance but fell short to Egypt in the second round. Jennifer Robinson a former World Silver Medalist and Pan American Champion had a controversial loss to Czech Republic, putting her out of the tournament.

Zoe Meszaro fought a strong 3 rounds defeating Hong Kong, Czech Republic, and Scotland. She found herself in the quarterfinals, losing to Japan and putting her in to repacharge. She then defeated Mexico and advanced on to the Bronze medal match against Egypt.

Ariel Torres fought a valiant 4 rounds defeating Kazakhstan, Czech republic, defeating the reigning Silver medalist from New Zealand, and Brazil. Climbing his way to the semi-finals, losing to turkey put Ariel in position for a bronze medal match against Japan.

Ariel said, “All I wanted to do was to have one more chance to get on the tatami. Just one more round! I’m not worried about the results. I just want to stay on the tatami. I’ve always wanted to compete against Japan and here I am going for the Bronze medal and opportunity to compete against Japan. I am blessed!”

Team USA Kumite athletes took the stage and performed with enthusiasm climbing their way to the top. An amazing performance by Madison Malone resulted in fighting her way to the semifinals. 1st match was won against Australia in Hantei decision (Madison displayed dominant control and initiated more attacks), 2nd match won against Canada (the Karate1 Youth Cup champion) by Senshu, 3rd match won against a strong Italian competitor 2-0, and semifinal match lost to Azerbaijan, putting Madison in repacharge. It was an intense match between the two North Americans, but the lone American captured the Bronze medal defeating Mexico.

Madison, a former student of USA National Coach Jim Buchen, expressed his happiness by telling the story when Madison first came to his dojo at age 4. He was so proud of Madison’s performance and was ecstatic that he could share this moment with her. Madison continues to train under Brian Mertel and John DiPasquale at Illinois Shotokan Karate Clubs.

Matias Nicolooulos climbed 3 rounds fighting against a tough Russian competitor putting him in repacharge, finishing off the tournament with respectable 9th place finish in his first World Championships. Alexandra Wainwright climbs her way to the quarterfinals only to lose by a close margin to Canada.

USA Karate found themselves in great contention for 2 bronze medals on the first day of competition. Both Ariel and Zoe represented Team USA with class and professionalism finishing at 5th in the WORLD.

Team kata cadet/junior was composed of Zach Ganoa, Ian Estrada, and Justin Ferrer, these boys battled to secure their position as 7th in the World Championships. A great performance considering this was their first world championships.

Overall this years Jr. WKF World championships was the premier place to see these future Olympians at work. As the Tokyo 2020 nears the Cadet, Junior, and U21 talent pool increases with their hopes of redefining the limits and projecting our sport to new levels. As a result, the Karate-Athlete has entered a stage of perpetual evolution; be on the look out for TEAM USA. Our time is near…! USANKF
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When Alicen McGowan ("Ali") walked into my dojo three and a half years ago I wasn’t sure I could really help her. First of all, she came into my dojo at 65. She couldn’t walk very well due to multiple injuries and operations, was a cancer survivor and therefore weak in certain areas of her body due to chemo treatments, had very little core strength, and had difficulty with sequence processing and memory due to Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). But, she is the mother of my good friend, and is a lovely person, so I said I’d give it a shot.

Let it be known that she is a fighter! Those of us who have been in this sport for a long time can see it in people right away. You’re either a fighter or you’re not. Fight or flight. And it can’t really be taught. Her spirit was strong, but her body was weak.

She came to karate to be with her daughter, and two grandsons, who also train at my dojo. She was hoping to gain a little more mobility. She would often have trouble with left or right in drills, crossing the midline and the order of moves in any given kata. It seemed strange to me, as she is a highly intelligent person, who works as a licensed therapist. One day we had a discussion about it.

“In 1975 I had a major accident. I was hit in the face with a heavy iron gate that flew open on a spring lock, unexpectedly. The impact crushed one side of my face. I lost vision in my left eye for six months, I had to have my nose and cheekbone reconstructed and it affected my brain function. Actually, I’m pretty lucky I didn’t die.”

Wow. And since that time she has raised two children, now adults, has earned three college degrees and her licensing, run successful clinics and maintains a thriving therapy practice. But her body wasn’t keeping up with her fighting Irish spirit.

We’ve all known friends in the karate world who have suffered from concussions, even extremely severe or multiple concussions. This is a form of brain injury as well. It can REALLY affect your day to day life.

In Ali’s words: “To put it very simply, your brain has two halves, the right brain and the left brain. Each side is in charge of different functions. In a healthy brain, both sides work together seamlessly. In an injured brain, sometimes there is a “lag” or “misfire” and only one side of the brain will process at a time. This is the type of injury that makes it very difficult for crossing the midline of your body (left hand to right ear, for example), or for auditory processing, or memorization, to name a few. But karate has CHANGED MY LIFE!”

She continued: “I came to the North Shore Dojo to be with my family who study karate there with Sensei Jeff Kohn. I was hoping to gain some core strength, and see my family more, that was it. But I got back SO much more! Something about the specific way we are trained, actually started improving my neuroplasticity (helping to build new pathways in the brain), and improved my muscle memory and core. I found myself remembering things faster and better, as well as reacting more quickly to directions. It was amazing, to say the least!”

Then, in February 2016, when Ali was leaving the dojo to go home, she suffered a major car accident. Breaking her leg in two places, sustaining a concussion, and many more minor injuries. Her doctor said that if she hadn’t been doing karate, she would probably have been severely injured or even may have died from this accident. But a scan of her bone density (regular occurrence for cancer survivors) showed an increased in bone density of 7% from the time she started doing karate. Her bone strength, her core strength and her reaction time, all improved because of her karate training. And this, in her opinion, was what made the difference.

“I owe my life to the study of karate and feel so very blessed to have it in my life. My only regret is that I didn't find it 40 years ago, so I could try out for the national team!”

Ali has resumed her karate training, comes to the dojo three or four days a week and is a first Kyu Brown belt. She looks forward to someday earning her black belt. In the meantime, she is excited to train towards her first Nationals in Reno 2018. Go Ali! USANKF
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MAYA WASOWICZ

The Value of Trying

By Jose M. Fraguas

Maya Wasowicz is one of the USA National Karate Team’s most relevant athletes. A Bronze medalist in the 2016 WKF World Championships held in Linz, Austria, Maya’s easy-going attitude reflects her relaxed approach to life. A perpetual student of any kind of subject related to her passion for the art and sport of karate, Maya always strives to be better at whatever she does. “I have learned that if you work hard in life, the rewards you receive will have value,” she says. “The greatest reward is not the winning; it is the trying, itself – it is the value that will be seen in you by others because of the person you are.”
How long have you been practicing Karate?
I started practicing karate when I was thirteen. We used to live in Brooklyn. One day, my dad, my brother and I were walking to the Deli down the block from our apartment. A new dojo just opened up and there was a class going on. My dad asked us if we wanted to watch for a little bit. We ended up signing up for classes that day. When my brother and I started practicing karate, neither of us spoke English. I remember my Sensei kept pronouncing our last name wrong but we didn’t say anything. I didn’t really know how to tell him since I didn’t speak English but I think even if I did, I wouldn’t have had because I was so intimidated by him. It went on for a couple years. Eventually, my brother and I told him, and Sensei couldn’t believe we went so long without telling him the correct way to pronounce it.

What made you enter in the competition world?
I didn’t start karate because of the competition world. I actually didn’t know anything about it until I was sixteen. We went to nationals and my Sensei told me about the Elite division. He said it would be a good idea to enter and see where I’m standing. I was going to see what I have to work on in order to make the US Jr. Team the following year. To everyone’s surprise, I made the team that year and that’s kind of where it all started.

Karate is nowadays mostly defined as sport... Do you agree with this definition?
I think karate can be defined in many ways. To some it’s a sport, to some it’s an art and to others it’s a way of life. I don’t think there is any “right” definition. It’s just what you choose to see it as. To me it’s a mix of all three! It’s a sport because of its competitive side. It’s an art because it’s very technical and beautiful. And it’s a way of life because it really dictates the way I live mine.
What are the most important points in your current training methods?

I think every aspect of practice is important. Whether it's working on new techniques, improving current ones, strength and conditioning or visualization; they're all important parts that come together to create the whole product. I don't think one is more important than the other. The focus shifts depending on what we believe I need to work on most at the moment.

Are there any mental exercises or meditations you would recommend to strengthen the mind for strategy and creativity in karate?

Visualization is part of my training. I've read a few books and seen some documentaries on the power of mental exercises. I've definitely noticed a difference in myself ever since I began implementing them into my workout routine. It's one of my favorite parts and I definitely recommend it!

As an athlete, what specific drills do you like and dislike [but still need to do]?

I don't really have specific drills that I like or dislike. I think sometimes there are just tougher practice days but they're necessary. My understanding of karate is still developing as I continue to grow as a fighter. It's always evolving because karate is always changing and so am I. I try take away as much as possible from each competition. Then I go back to the dojo and work on those things to prepare for the next one.

What is the most thrilling moment you've experienced?

I love competing. It's a thrill every time I step on the mats, no matter how big or small the tournament is. The most unreal experience was winning a Bronze in Team Kumite at World Championships. Also, winning Bronze at Dubai Open was pretty extraordinary. A lot of my family members came from Poland to watch me compete and it was incredibly special to have them there.
What do you feel was your biggest loss, and what did you learn from it?
To me, every loss is a big loss. I think the bigger the competition and the more I prepare for it, the harder it is to cope with the loss but there is something to learn from each one.

Have there been times when you had doubts about your karate training?
I’ve definitely doubted my abilities and skills. I think those kinds of thoughts are natural in athletes but it’s important to find ways to turn them into positive thoughts.

What keeps you motivated to continue training and competing after all these years?
I just really love karate. Being passionate and truly loving what you do is important. Not everyone gets that kind of opportunity. Surrounding yourself with supportive and loving people is also vital and I’m lucky to have the best people behind me. My sensei, who’s taught me everything I know about karate; My parents who have supported me and pushed me to follow my dreams; My brother who’s my number one fan; And my close friends who always check in and who are genuinely curious about my karate career. Having those people with me and seeing that they want to see me succeed keeps me motivated.

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

Do you have any general advice you would care to pass onto young competitors?
I know it gets hard for younger competitors to continue training especially when they go off to college. As we get older, we develop other interests and sometimes life takes us in a different direction. It happened to me when I went to college. I played basketball for NYU and it got harder to train. I guess my advice would be to keep training. If karate is really your passion find a way to get to the dojo. If you go away to school, find a dojo nearby. Keep training and keep fighting.
Karate is finally part of the Olympic Games, what is your opinion about it?

I’m very excited! Every athlete wants to see their sport in the Olympics. Having karate part of the 2020 Olympic Games gives all of us a shot at competing at the highest level possible.

Finally, what are your plans for the future?

I’m honestly not a huge planner. Most days I don’t know what I’m doing tomorrow. I do hope that karate is something I will be able to do for the rest of my life. Obviously, winning the Olympics is my biggest dream! But wherever I end up, I hope I can spread positivity and love. I want to use whatever tools I have to encourage young athletes worldwide to be themselves and continue pursuing their passion. USANKF
He holds the number one position in the WKF world kata ranking. USA KARATE Magazine managed to grab an exclusive interview with Damian Quintero during the last Junior World Championships in Tenerife, Spain, to get the naked truth on becoming a world-class karate athlete, overcoming the huge hurdles thrown your way and keeping focused when you’re surrounded by challenges and distractions.

Ask him about his success and he’ll unfailingly offer a catalogue of people who deserve the credit – his family, his first teacher, his coaches, even the friends who played with him in the school when he was a little kid. “Karate has been a very important part of my learning process in life,” he says. “When you leave the dojo you should take with you the important principles of the training. The correct attitude, the proper ‘mushin’. For me there is no distinction between the inside and the outside of the dojo.”

Quintero is a highly inspirational athlete and somebody any aspiring karate competitor should be looking up to for sheer determination and dedication.

Here is the champion in his own words.
“Thousands of repetitions and out of one’s true self perfection emerges.” - Zen Saying
Please tell us a little bit about your beginnings in karate.
I was around 5 years old and my father decided to take me to a karate school in the city of Torremolinos, Malaga, where we lived at the time. Mostly, because I wanted to do something different to basketball or soccer. I was very little and the teacher said to my father that it was not possible for me to start yet. I decided to wait and one year later I went back and asked the teacher to join the dojo. I did [probably] grow one inch in the whole year but this time the teacher [for some reason] accepted me. I think he saw how “serious” I was about it [laughs].

What do you remember of these early days?
I had a great time in the classes. We used to practice the basic techniques, the kata, the kumite in a very traditional way and I really enjoyed the guidance and kindness of Sensei Lorenzo Marin. He created a very good atmosphere amongst all the students in the dojo; we had little trips on the weekends and we used to go all together to practice karate and have fun. This built a good relationship in the dojo and all the students were very close to each other. We became friends and that really made us stick to the dojo. We were like a “family”. Every time we had a competition we traveled together, we competed together and enjoyed growing up together. I think this was the “key” to really keep training.

When was your first appearance with the Spanish National Team?
When I was 14 years old, the National Spanish Federation called me for a Senior Training Camp. Of course this was a big surprise because all of a sudden you are training with those athletes that you deeply admire. When I was 16, it was when finally I could represent the National Spanish Team. At that moment, you start thinking that maybe “there is a future in karate for me”. I won the European Championship in my division and began to see the possibilities. I began to train more and more to better compete. I started then to have a “goal” for my training.

When was your first competition?
My first championship was when I was 7 years old. I won a bronze medal. I really enjoyed the feeling of the competition. My father was crying not because I won but simply because I did get a medal. It was an interesting picture [laughs]. I kept participating and competing more and more and definitely got addicted to the thrill and emotions of the competition. You train hard to go out there and show your progress. Obviously, nowadays, I have more experience and I know better how to control the emotional aspects of the competition which allows me to enjoy it even more. I can focus more on the feeling and the sensations of elite competition. I train 6/7 hours everyday to make sure that my level is my highest possible.

You won three major titles in the same year, correct?
Yes. I won in the same year, the Junior Kata National Championship, the Senior National Kata Championship and the University Kata National Championship. This was the first time that anyone
in Spain won the three titles in the same year with all the top people competing at the same time.

The same year, being [still] a Junior, the National Coach took his chances and replaced the number one [at the time] with me for the Senior European Championships. I made it to the final against Luca Valdesi, so I think he felt proud about it and I was extremely happy because he took a big chance with me. I remember that before the semi-final my coach asked me: “Do we settle with making it to the final or we go for the gold medal?” And I said; “Gold medal!” We took out chances with the choice of the kata, won the semi-final and made it to the final.

It was that year, 2004, when I realized that there was a solid future for me in karate.

**How is your training nowadays?**

My training now is 100% professional. I train around six to seven hours per day divided in 2 or 3 sessions under the guidance of Spanish National Coach, Mr. Jesus del Moral. Training is my job. I wake up, train, eat, rest and back to training. The training is very detailed and specific…from general conditioning, specific body and skill development for kata practice and movement and obviously strictly technical kata training. Every session is around 2 hours and is perfectly designed for what we need.

**What are the specifics of kata competition compared to kumite?**

In comparison to kumite, kata competition “is” only about you. There is no reaction to an opponent. It doesn’t matter who you are competing against…it is all in “you”. Obviously there is strategy in what kata to use and the selection for each round based on who we are competing against but in the overall approach…it is just “you” in the center of the mat.

“The best way to control when you make a mistake is to stick to your plan. Do not try to “compensate” it immediately by going faster or stronger in the movements after. Stick to how you prepared your kata and maintain that.”

*Photo Courtesy Alberto Nevado (MARCA)*
At the elite level, where I compete now, I can honestly say that the psychology and the mental training is the true key for success. It is about you controlling the pressure, the nerves, how to feel strong and confident without going “overboard”.

In kata competition you depend on yourself. One can be faster or more powerful than the rest but at that very moment when you perform your kata, it is all “you”. Your mind will make it or break it because the differences separate the 3-4 top athletes in the world, are not that big. Your confidence and calmness; how you control the nerves or the excitement will determine the winner.

It is very important for an athlete to understand where is “their” 100%”. In order to know where is this “personal 100%”, you need to train at 120% or you’ll never find out. Controlling your nerves is critical at the level because they may slow you down if you are “nervous” or “afraid” in that moment but also an over-excitement will make you go “too fast” and you will make mistake because you are “over-accelerated”. You need to understand the kata that you will perform and how the referees are going to judge it, control your nerves and find the correct balance between the physical, the emotional and the mental aspects of the competition.

How important are the mental aspects in kata competition?

The mental aspects have to be trained as much as the physical part. Otherwise, you won’t succeed in elite competition. I personally use breathing and visualization techniques to keep everything under control, although there are other methods available. One important aspect is to have your body “ready” to perform at that “precise” moment. In kumite, you start moving in front of the opponent so you can “catch up’ with that increase of the tempo in the action, but in kata you go from being quiet, standing in a corner waiting, to full speed in a matter of three or four seconds.
seconds and without having the chance to loosen up or warm up a few seconds before. When you go to the tatami you have to be 100% ready to go because if you are not, your kata performance will be affected by it. Even if you are a champion and you don’t control this “simple” aspect in one competition…you can lose in the first round. Never trust, always go to the tatami ready to go at a 100% both physically and mentally.

Is it true you work on breathing techniques?

Breathing control is something fundamental. When you are waiting to go, you need to feel your heartbeat. You need to know “where” is the right heartbeat for you to perform at your best and through breathing techniques you can either slow it down or speed it up to bring it to the necessary point. It takes time to learn how to do it and more importantly, how to do it under the stress of a competition. It is very different to do it at home that doing it in the final of a World Championships. It is here when the other mental aspects come into play.

Some people may think that having a sport physiology coach is not important. Let me tell you one thing….all, I mean all elite athletes at Olympic and world level, have one. You need one regardless of how confident, strong and well-prepared you are.

What is the mental mechanism you use to “overcome” a mistake during the performance of a kata?

In kata we don’t have any margin to make a mistake. When you make a movement that doesn’t feel “right” or has been a mistake of some kind, you need to know how to “stop” that negative feeling and thought immediately with mental techniques and keep going through the rest of the kata at full speed and power. You need to know how to “shut down” that feeling or thought.

One tricky aspect is that sometimes you “feel” that a movement is not correct but from the outside it looks perfect; there is nothing wrong with it. The difference lies in the fact you have trained it so many times that maybe that day the “feel” for that action is not the same and that makes you think that it is wrong when actually it is not. You need to know how to control that moment.

What is the best way to regain the control?

The best way to control when you make a mistake is to “stick to your plan”. Do not try to “compensate” it immediately by going faster or stronger in the movements after. Stick to how you prepared your kata and maintain that. Many people when they make a mistake then try to go “full blast” to compensate for that error and what they do is end up making more mistakes and performing even worse. You can still win even if you make a mistake, but you need to stick to your plan and how you have trained that kata.

Do you test or check the mat (tatami) before a competition?

The current mats (tatami) are all the same. They are all official mats with a very specific measures and thickness. They have to...
be all the same but...it is true that they all “feel” different. There is a difference if the mats are new or not new, they may have some kind of oil still on top or too dry. All that definitely affects the “feeling”. I personally don’t like to step into the mat until the moment that I am going to perform but that is only my personal preference. It is not superstition but...I don’t step in before doing the first kata. Some competitors like to step in, get the feeling for the area and warm up there. I don’t, but that is just me. On the other hand, some competitors like to put some stuff in the plant of their feet for traction. I don’t and I don’t think this should be allowed but...it is what it is. One thing is to make sure that your feet are dry. Some athletes have the problem that the plant of their feet sweats a lot and they have to use a towel or something to dry them right before stepping in. I don’t have that problem so...but you still have to be careful because on the way to the mat you can step on an area that is not clean and that may mess up the plant of your feet.

**What kata represents for you?**

I think that kata exemplifies in many ways the traditional Budo principles of “ji” (skill) and “ri” (inspiration). It is only when the practitioner understand and sees into the underlying principles that their performance becomes inspired. This understanding is not based on cognitive or intellectual comprehension. It is based on an intuitive awareness of the principles of that particular kata.

The philosophy of teaching karate is to teach these underlying principles [that can not be fully described] through the repetitive practice of the physical techniques. These techniques represent the formalizations of the old masters’ understandings of certain principles. The techniques can only bring the student to a certain point. Each student ultimately must “see” and find those underlying kata principles by himself. I know this sounds very philosophical but for me that’s the beauty of kata... expressing the old masters’ work.

**Finally in the Olympic Games, how has your life, as an athlete, changed after the acceptance of karate in Tokyo 2020?**

My life has changed completely with the acceptance of karate in Tokyo 2020. I am a professional athlete. Like I said before, I train, eat and sleep. And repeat. For many years all karatekas wanted to be in the Olympic Games and that moment has come. What not everybody understands is the ‘reality’ of this dream. To be an Olympian with possibilities of getting a medal requires a lot of sacrifices. To begin with... your daily job. If you think that you can keep a normal 8 hours job and have a chance... If you think you can keep a normal diet and have a chance.... If you think that you can train a couple hours four days per week and have a chance for that Olympic gold medal... you are wrong. Your family and your friends won’t see you much, you’ll live in a “parallel” world and your relationships may suffer too. The “fun” in your social life will be minimal for three or four years.

There are a lot of sacrifices you’ll have to make for that Olympic dream. You need to find a way to support yourself for the 3-4 years that you will fully dedicate yourself to...
that dream. It is not easy…it all boils down to how much you want it and how much are you willing to leave behind along the way to that Olympic podium.

It will be four years of your life going through an extremely hard training and a lot of sacrifices for the opportunity of performing three or four kata at the Budokan in Tokyo 2020…and take the first kata gold medal in the history of Olympic Karate.

As the interview winds down, the door of the room opens to reveal a line of people who want to say hello or goodbye. He knows all this comes with the territory. And he knows the expectations will be bigger the next two years on the road to Tokyo 2020. More attention, more pressure. The road ahead is long and there are many difficulties ahead, but as Mencius said, ‘The way is lofty and beautiful. It leads to Heaven. It is far in the distance. But should we not try to bring it nearer by advancing a little, day by day?’”

One thing is for sure, if Damian Quintero is feeling any pressure, it doesn’t show.

USANKF

Twitter: @DamianHQuintero & Instagram @damianquintero
career in Karate was something that was chosen freely and conducted diligently by Erick Lamelas. In this issue, we’ll find out more about his experience of what it is like being a young athlete with all those tight schedules, hard training and pressure to achieve those future goals. This interview will take you behind the scenes with a one-on-one interview with one of the best prospects and young athletes of USA Karate.
How long have you been practicing Karate and who is your teacher?

I have been practicing karate since I was 6 years old. I took my first karate steps in Zanchin dojo with Sensei Luis Sanchez, who which I still keep in contact with and hold very dear to my heart. He taught me the fundamental character values that come with doing karate such as, discipline, respect, and courage. However, he taught a more traditional style of karate and at the age of 12 I had a strong desire to compete. This led me to become very interested in sport karate and through personal association, I was connected with my now current Sensei, Noel Hernandez. Sensei Hernandez was part of the Cuban National Karate Team for 10 years and in that time he became a 5 time Pan-American and a Shito-ryu World Champion. Now, he is the Sensei of Musashi Dojo in Miami and his main goal is to pass down what he has learned to his students. We have a very close bond and sometimes we even get confused for father and son.

How were your beginnings in the sport?

My parents made me join karate after they witnessed that I was getting bullied by the older kids at the neighbor’s house. So, my parents thought it would be best if I learned how to defend myself. Immediately after a couple of classes I grew a passion for karate and really enjoyed it. I could honestly say that my parents essentially changed the course of my life for the better and karate has made me the person who I am today. Also the neighborhood kids were no longer able to bully me.

Why did you choose karate over other sports?

I did not exactly choose karate, at least throughout middle school and high school, I just played other sports alongside karate. Since I was a freshman in high school I was a starter on the Varsity basketball team. This meant that throughout my 4 years of high school I would have to go to school, go to basketball practice, leave straight from practice and go straight to karate. I would end up getting home at around 9 and that’s when I would finally get a chance to do some homework. It was exhausting but it was definitely worth it. My senior year I decided to do wrestling after the basketball season was over. With only 3 weeks of training I was able to win one of the first FHSAA District Championships for my high school. I was one point away from making it to the FHSAA Regional Finals and earning my spot to compete in the FHSAA State Championships. Nonetheless, I was named Athlete of the year for the class of 2015. However, my sole focus today is karate because it is truly the sport that I have an intense passion for and I owe so much to it.

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

In every champion, of any sport, whether it be a team or an individual there are three attributes that I consider very crucial for success in sport or in life. First, Confidence. If you don’t believe in yourself, how can you expect other to believe in you. I pride my-self on believing that I am the best at what I do and never doubt my training or my abilities. Second, Passion. To become successful in any skill or profession in life, you must have passion. A
burning desire to obtain what it is you are after. My goal is to become World Champion and I will strive towards that goal because I have a burning desire to achieve it. Lastly, the most important attribute of a good karate competitor is courage. Courage is what allows a person to persevere against all odds and not let anything or anyone stand in front of them and their goals. Without these three attributes in mind, it will be very difficult for anyone to achieve success.

How do you structure your personal training when you are preparing for an important competition?

My Sensei and I usually structure our training depending on how much time there is until the competition and try to make a schedule that works for both me and him. For example, when training for the PKF Jr. Pan-American Championships in the summer we have two training sessions, one in the morning and one at night. I also usually do some movement training once I get home just to keep my joints strong and my movements fluid.

Being a Junior athlete, how’s your experience traveling with the Senior team and competing in senior events?

I would like to break down the experience of traveling with the senior team into three parts. First, getting to travel alongside and form bonds with the people you once looked up to as a child. Having the opportunity to be with athletes such as, Tom Scott, Brian Ramrup, and Cheryl Murphy was amazing and something I will never forget. I got the opportunity to listen to their past experiences and add that to mine. Second, realizing the difference between the Junior and the Senior level.

“I have goals in life that are clear and determined, and I will never stop working towards them.”
Not only are you introduced to the greats of karate like Rafael Aghayev but you also notice their mindset. The Senior athletes are more serious and professional than the junior athletes and the tone of the competition is much sterner. This seriousness is a direct cause of experience. Lastly, as a junior athlete I believe it was very beneficial for me to participate in senior event and expose myself to that environment at a relatively young age. I was able to catch a glimpse of my future in the sport and understand the steps I must take in order to be successful.

**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 visualize myself winning constantly in a very detailed manner. I visualize myself receiving the first-place medal, calling my parents and telling them that I won, I picture specific points I will score, I think about how I will react after winning, I also think about how winning this competition will impact me and lead me to further success. All in all, I keep a very positive and confident mindset. As the competition day approaches I like to clear my mind and try to focus on other aspects of life, while keeping the positive thoughts and visualization in the back of my mind. I try to enjoy the moment as much as possible and I do not let the competition put any unwanted stress on my mind or body. Ultimately, I remain composed, relaxed and confident which is how I try to be at all times.

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

I believe it is the best thing that could have happened for sport karate. By being in the Olympics it brings more attention to the sport which provides bigger and better opportunities for current and future karate athletes. The Olympics is the most prestigious sport an athlete can attend, and now that karate has been added we will
have the opportunity to represent our country on the Olympic stage. This will also affect how people look at karate because it will demonstrate to the average person that karate has become much more than just a form of self-defense. Hopefully karate being in the Olympics will make more children want to get involved with this beautiful art and sport.

**How is your personal training these days?**

I am in competition mode. I have weight training in the mornings Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. In the afternoon I perform my daily stretching routine and I have karate Monday through Saturday at night. Throughout the day I like to either watch videos of other fighters or I review my own fights and look for details that I can improve upon. My aim is to be improving consistently.

**What keeps you motivated to keep training and teaching?**

My goals. I have goals in life that are clear and determined, and I will never stop working towards them. When I wake up in the morning I know there are people that I must work hard for because they are counting on me or they have put their belief in me. I also know there are people that do not want me to succeed and I need to prove them wrong by accomplishing my goals. I want to live a comfortable life, but I understand that will only come through hard work. Through hard work I will be able to provide for my family and be able to give back to those who have given to me. There is no other way around it. I am also very grateful to be where I am today, and that gratitude keeps me motivated because I know there are people in the world who wish to be in the position I am in. And I’m not talking about karate, I’m talking about being able to sleep in a bed, in an air-conditioned home, having food at whatever time of the day and having my family around me. This is what keeps me motivated and give my all every single day.

**Finally, what are your plans for the future?**

I usually do not like to focus to much on the future and I prefer to focus on the present, but I do have goals that I know I will accomplish in the next 10 years. First, I will represent the United States on the Olympic Stage in 2020 in Tokyo. Second, I will become a World Champion. Third, I will be recognized as one of the best sport karate fighters in the world. Lastly, I see myself becoming a coach of the US National Karate team. Aside from my personal focuses, I also want to be a role model for children and inspire them to follow their dreams.
JUNIOR KARATE WRAP-UP!

Max Segal in action!
Along journey for the USA Junior team started in Greenville, SC with the National Karate Championships. This was the first stop in a journey that would lead to the Pan American Karate Federation Championships in Buenos Aires, Argentina and end up at the WKF World Championships in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Spain.

The city of Greenville was the starting point where athletes were going to be selected and classified for the international events. The Juniors took over the Nationals and the final day (Sunday) was focused on them in all the different divisions finals. They took the center stage and didn’t disappoint. The finals were filled with great action and promising display of technical skills. Young athletes gave their best in order to be part of the USA Team that was going to represent the country in the international events.

From a technical and tactical perspective, the athletes proved to be “mature” in many aspects of the competition but, understandably, they showed that still had to grow and progress in other relevant elements of the competition.
Some of the best coaches in the country were seated with the athletes to make sure they received the best support during the competition. This is an important element since experienced coaches can substantially shorten the development time an athlete needs to reach a higher level.

In the kumite divisions, the competitors showed excellent ability and in many instances trying to “copy” gestures of the members of the Senior USA team. It is a positive thing that they look up to the USA Team Seniors in order to improve themselves.

After the four long days of competition came to an end, the Junior USA TEAM was elected and a short meeting was held by the USA KARATE staff with the young athletes and parents to explain the logistics for the “next stops”: PKF Championships in Buenos Aires, Argentina and World Championships in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Spain.
1) Matthew Hillyer attacking with Jodan Tsuki. 2) Deuce Jacobs during his Kata performance. 3) Dorian Pajor and Noel Hernandez in action.
The 2017 PKF Junior Pan American Championships, hosted in Buenos Aires, Argentina, offered three days of elite competition August 24-26, 2017. Team USA brought an astounding 94 Junior athletes, aged 12-20, to compete among the other 25 Countries represented. It was an amazing few days of intense competition and Team USA did exceptionally well with 33 athletes placing!

Individual Male and Female Kata kicked off the first day of competition with the U14, Cadet, Junior and U21 divisions.

U14 Kata Female and Male did well with two females and one male placing!

Teammates Mikela Ancheta and Joelle Inciong both breezed through their first three matches before competing for gold in a final match against each other. They finished with two outstanding katas bringing home both a gold (Inciong) and silver (Ancheta) medals! John-Michael Rivera breezed by Brazil 4-1 and Canada 5-0 but fell to Colombia 3-2 to place third in Male Kata.
In the Cadet division, Kaitlyn Shimohara breezed past Costa Rica (5-0), Brazil (5-0) and Canada (5-0), making it to the gold medal match against Zoe Meszaro of Team USA, winning gold in Cadet Kata Female! Zoe Meszaro started strong winning her first three rounds, placing second in the gold medal match bringing home silver for Cadet Kata Female. Male Cadet Kata athlete Kevin Stevens finished with a bronze medal.

Junior athlete Rey Chinen had a really strong day defeating Peru, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic to take home the Gold in Junior Male Kata!

Jennifer Robinson, U21 Kata Female, defeated Chile 5-0, breezed by Mexico and Venezuela 4-1, and fell to Peru 5-1 in the final match bringing home silver!

Congrats to all individual kata athletes!

Cadet Kumite had a great showing with four females and four males medaling in their weight divisions!

Madilyn Jennings had a strong start in Cadet Female Kumite -47kg with a win over Colombia, but fell to Canada in a close match 1-0 taking home bronze. Victoria Tatarynova competed in the -54kg division breezing through her first matches before falling to Mexico in the Gold medal match, placing second in the division overall bringing home silver. Alexandra Wainwright also competed in the -54kg division taking home bronze. Magdalena Zucek, 54+kg, had a strong start by breezing by Ecuador, Argentina, Chile and Mexico before defeating Colombia in the finals bringing home gold for Team USA!
2017 PKF JUNIOR PAN AMERICAN CHAMPIONSHIP

12-13 Male Kata
John-Michael Rivera - 3rd Place
Hunter Rodriguez

12-13 Female Kata
Joelle Inciong - 1st Place
Mikela Ancheta - 2nd Place

14-15 Male Kata
Kevin Stevens - 3rd Place
Deuce Jacobs - 7th Place

14-15 Female Kata
Zoe Meszar - 2nd Place
Kaitlyn Shimohara - 1st Place

16-17 Male Kata
Rey Chinen - 1st Place
Myles Monton

16-17 Female Kata
Brisa Colon - 5th Place
Rose McLaughlin

18-20 Male Kata
Ariel Torres
Joseph Tolentino - 9th Place

18-20 Female Kata
Jennifer Robinson - 2nd Place
Giselle Kaneda

12-13 Male Kumite +50kg
Matthew Hillyer - 3rd Place

12-13 Male Kumite -35kg
Ayano Moore
Alexa Lewandowski - 5th Place

12-13 Female Kumite -40kg
Victoria Princi - 1st Place
Aziah Santizo - 5th Place

12-13 Female Kumite -45kg
Joelle Inciong - 2nd Place
Emily Moody

12-13 Female Kumite +45kg
Stephanie Hillyer - 3rd Place
Kathleen Socorro - 5th Place

12-13 Female Kumite -52kg
Edgar Torres
Marco Garcia

12-13 Female Kumite -57kg
Matias Nicolopoulos
Riley Smith - 3rd Place

12-13 Female Kumite -63kg
Noel Hernandez - 3rd Place
Adam Rosario

12-13 Female Kumite -70kg
Kevin Stevens
Christian Moncada - 3rd Place

14-15 Male Kumite +70kg
Bradie Ivey - 3rd Place
Emre Kivanc - 5th Place

14-15 Female -47kg
Marilann Jennings - 3rd Place
Gianna Pelzer

14-15 Female Kumite +54kg
Claudia Lee
Magdalena Zucek - 1st Place

16-17 Male Kumite -55kg
Aaron Kaneda -9th Place
Rey Simon

16-17 Male Kumite -61kg
Ivan Fernandez - 3rd Place
Saiheren Senpon - 1st Place

16-17 Male Kumite -76kg
Nolan O’Rear
Jared Smith - 3rd Place

16-17 Female Kumite -48kg
Eva Alexander
Madison Malone

16-17 Female Kumite -53kg
Taylor Chung - 2nd Place
Chelsea Hurtado

16-17 Female Kumite -59kg
Sabrina Martinez - 3rd Place
Trinity Allen

16-17 Female Kumite +59kg
Skylar Lingl
Allison Watts - 5th Place

18-20 Male Kumite -60kg
Dany Cabello
Taisha Tozaki

18-20 Male Kumite -67kg
Christopher Penna - 7th Place
Kenneth McLymore
TEAM USA
ROSTER

18-20 Male Kumite -75kg
Thomas Pappalardo
David Sauceda - 9th Place

18-20 Male Kumite -84kg
Maximillian Segal - 2nd Place
Storm Heredia

18-20 Male Kumite +84kg
Erick Lamelas - 1st Place
Benjamin Harrison - 5th Place

18-20 Female Kumite -50kg
Giselle Kaneda - 5th Place
Rachel Satterfield

18-20 Female Kumite -55kg
Ellora Jaggi - 3rd Place
Sabina Ramic - 7th Place

18-20 Female Kumite -61kg
Ann Hsieh
Sabrina Hostettler - 2nd Place

18-20 Female Kumite -68kg
Taylor Wood - 5th Place
Carly Crawford - 5th Place

18-20 Female Kumite +68kg
Nicole Fisher
Le’Quay Willis

Female Team Kata
Sarah Stallings - 5th Place
Aditi Mutagi - 5th Place
Sampriti Ramakushnan - 5th Place

Male Team Kata
Ian Estrada - 5th Place
Justin Ferrer - 5th Place
Zachary Gaona - 5th Place
Athletes Riley Smith (-57kg), Noel Hernandez (-63kg), Christian Moncada (-70kg) and Braden Ivey (70+kg) all had excellent matches with each bringing home a third place finish and a bronze medal for Team USA!

Our Junior Kumite athletes competed very well six athletes total placing in the finals!

Taylor Chung defeated Brazil 4-2 and Argentina 4-3 in a close match in Junior Kumite female -53kg. She went on to beat Uruguay 4-0 and fall to Chile 5-0 taking second place. Sabrina Martinez had a rough start falling to Canada 4-0 but came back to beat Brazil 3-0 in Repechage. She then defeated Mexico 2-0 to place third in -59kg.

RJ Domingo competed in -61kg and started off the event beating Uruguay, Mexico and Colombia, but lost to Mexico 2-1 in the finals taking home silver for Team USA. Saisheren Senpon defeated Argentina 2-0 and Brazil 0-0 in Hantei. He then went on to to beat Bolivia 1-0 and the Dominican Republic 3-0 to take home gold in -68kg. Ivan Fernandez also competed in -68kg and breezed by Argentina 8-0 in the first round and took on Bolivia 3-0 in the second. He went on to beat Peru 4-3 and fell to the Dominican Republic 6-0 taking third place. Jared Smith had a rough start in -76kg losing to Argentina but came back in Repechage to place third overall!

U14 Kumite had a great showing in this year’s Pan American Games with three female and four male athletes making it to the podium!
1) Ben Harrison in action. 2) Taylor Wood getting ready. 3 & 4) Cary Crawford getting ready for her match.
1) John–Michale Rivera waiting his turn in Kata competition. 2-3 & 4) Erick Lamelas against Canada for Gold!
Stephanie Hillyer placed third in +45kg by defeating Argentina 6-0 but falling to Brazil 4-0. Victoria Princi excelled in -40kg with a bye in the first round and then beating Ecuador 1-0 in a close match. She then defeated Argentina 3-0 and breezed by Brazil 7-1 to take home the gold. Joelle Inciong (-45kg) had a strong performance beating Brazil 5-0, Chile 4-2, Mexico 2-0 before falling to Chile 5-1 to place second overall in the finals.

Matthew Hillyer had a strong start defeating Argentina 4-0 and Bonaire 5-0, but fell to Canada 5-5 placing third in +50kg. Lester Diaz also competed in the +50kg division and began with a win over the Dominican Republic 4-0 and over Ecuador 2-0. He then lost to Mexico 2-0 placing him third. Matthew Cihlar competed in -45kg alongside teammate Riky Garcia. The two breezed through their first matches to make it to the gold medal final bringing home gold for Garcia and silver for Cihlar!

U21 Male and Female Kumite finish out the competition on the final day. They did well with two females placing in -55kg and -61kg and two males in -84kg and 84+kg. Great work from all the U21 Kumite athletes.

Ellora Jaggi took home the bronze in -55kg with a tough first round winning 0-0 in Hantei. She then beat Canada and fell to Chile in a close match. Sabrina Hostettler breezed by Ecuador 4-0, beat Colombia 3-2 in a close match, defeated Brazil 3-0 and then fell to Chile 3-0 placing her second in -61kg.

Max Segal (-84kg) made it to the gold medal match against Venezuela and brought home a silver medal placing second overall. Erick Lamelas had a great competition beating Brazil 4-2, defeating Mexico 8-0 and finally beating Canada 0-0 in a close match in Hantei placing first in 84+kg.

Thank you to all our coaches for their hard work training and working with our athletes before, during, and after the PKF Pan American Competition.
Top - Opening ceremony walk in for Erick Lamelas, Cirrus Lingl, Taylor Wood, Max Segal, Madison Malone, Brisa Colon, Deuce Jacobs, Ann Hseih. Bottom left - Female Team Kata - Brisa Colon, Katie Shimohara and Natalie Hertogh. Bottom right: The 6 mats ready and waiting for the athletes! Page 49 - The USA Delegation waiting for the transportation to the venue in Santa Cruz de Tenerife.
The X WKF Junior World Championships headed to Santa Cruz De Tenerife, Spain for five days of exciting elite competition October 25-29, 2017. The United States of America represented one of 109 Countries gathered at the Sports Hall Santiago Martin with 38 Junior Athletes prepared and ready to compete!

Team USA was well represented on the first day of competition with strong competitors in the male and female Cadet and U21 Kata.

Zoe Meszaro started off strong in Cadet Female Kata making it to the bronze medal match where she unfortunately lost to Japan 5-0 finishing out her season with a 5th place finish. Ariel Torres kicked off the U21 Male Kata with a win over Kazakhstan 5-0. He went on to beat the Czech Republic, New Zealand and Brazil before falling to Turkey in the bronze medal final finishing in 5th place overall.

Day two of competition brought excitement as Team USA’s Junior divisions kicked off the morning with a full day of Kumite eliminations.
2017 WKF JUNIOR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

14-15 Male Kata
Brody “Deuce” Jacobs

14-15 Female Kata
Zoe Meszaro - 5th Place

16-17 Male Kata
Rey Chinen

16-17 Female Kata
Brisa Colon

18-20 Male Kata
Ariel Torres - 5th Place

18-20 Female Kata
Jennifer Robinson

14-15 Male Kumite -52kg
Edgar Torres

14-15 Male Kumite -57kg
Matias Nicolopulos - 9th Place

14-15 Male Kumite -63kg
Dorian Pajor

14-15 Male Kumite -70kg
Matthew Hillyer

14-15 Male Kumite +70kg
Emre Kivanc

14-15 Female Kumite -47kg
Madilyn Jennings

14-15 Female Kumite -54kg
Alexandra Wainwright

14-15 Female Kumite +54kg
Natasha Kudelya

16-17 Male Kumite -55kg
Aaron Kaneda

16-17 Male Kumite -61kg
Noel Hernandez

16-17 Male Kumite -68kg
Ivan Fernandez

16-17 Male Kumite -76kg
Jared Smith

16-17 Male Kumite +76kg
Braden Ivey

16-17 Female Kumite -48kg
Madison Malone - 3rd Place

16-17 Female Kumite -53kg
Gia Mazza

16-17 Female Kumite -59kg
Sabrina Martinez

16-17 Female Kumite +59kg
Skylar Lingl

18-20 Male Kumite -60kg
Dany Cabello

18-20 Male Kumite -67kg
Christopher Penna

18-20 Male Kumite -75kg
Nolan O’Rear

18-20 Male Kumite -84kg
Maximillian Segal

18-20 Male Kumite +84kg
Erick Lamelas

18-20 Female Kumite -50kg
Eva Alexander

18-20 Female Kumite -55kg
Sabina Ramic
TEAM USA
ROSTER

18-20 Female Kumite -61kg
Ann Hsieh

18-20 Female Kumite -68kg
Taylor Wood

18-20 Female Kumite +68kg
Cirrus Lingl

Female Team Kata
Brisa Colon - 7th Place
Natalie Hertogh - 7th Place
Kaitlyn Shimohara - 7th Place

Male Team Kata
Justin Ferrer
Ian Estrada
Zachary Gaona
1) Kata Athletes; Jennifer Robinson, Ariel Torres, Rey Chinen, Deuce Jacobs, Brisa Colon and Zoe Meszaro. 2 & 3) Rey Chinen in action!
As a Senior USA National Coach and veteran of both Senior and Junior World Championships, I felt the excitement and the intensity in the air at the 10th Junior World Championships in Tenerife, Spain. I am very optimistic of Team USA’s future. The Junior National Team demonstrated great team unity and support during this major championship. Although, the US won one medal at these championships, we had several athletes in the medal rounds that came up just short of winning. Many athletes went several rounds which was a big improvement compared to the 2015 Junior World Championships held in Indonesia. Our athletes talent and technical skill is as elite as any other country, but our athletes need to have the belief in themselves. This mindset comes with experience and competing more on the international circuit. I believe that it is imperative that our athletes take part in as many team oriented trainings and competitions in the 2018 youth league to get the experience needed to succeed. As a coach, it is very frustrating knowing that your athlete is capable of defeating their opponent, yet does not trust themselves enough to take the points. However, the future of the Team USA foundation is being poured and the talent pool is growing thanks to the grassroots instructors. Hopefully, these athletes do not pigeon hole themselves into what was successful this year and become complacent. Each athlete has tremendous strengths which got them to where they are in the elite world of our sport. To be the best in their division internationally, athletes need to continue to build on their strengths and continue to make improvements in the areas that they may be lacking.

As always, it was an honor to be part of Team USA and watch these great athletes that are on the same success path as our most successful senior athletes and to know that any setbacks that they had at this event will only drive them to be better and improve each and every day they step onto the tatami. Athletes that have had the honor of representing the USA on this grand of a stage should be held in the highest of respect because until one has stepped onto a tatami mat at a World Championships, you do not have any idea of the pressure that these young athletes feel. I am extremely proud of all of them and I look forward to seeing how far they can go in the world of our sport!
1) Some of the USA athletes posing with Coaches Limcaco, Chinen, Fukuda and Baldis. 2) Coach Baldis posing with some of the athletes. 3) José García Mañón (President Pan American Federation), Craig Vokey (President Canada National Karate Federation), John DiPasquale (President USA National Karate Federation), José M. Fraguas (Editor-in-Chief USA Karate Magazine).
Madison Malone (-48kg) brought a thrilling day of competition to Spain. She started off the day with a win over Australia, Canada and Brazil and put up a good fight against Azerbaijan, but ultimately fell 3-0. She breezed through the repechage pool and put herself in the bronze medal final. After an exciting match, Madison brought home a bronze medal and proudly received her medal from USA Karate President Mr. John DiPasquale on the podium.

Day three brought the Team Female and Male Kata competition! Both the Kata teams fought well, with Male Team Kata (Ian Estrada, Justin Ferrer and Zachary Gaona) placing 7th overall with a strong win over Portugal 3-2 before falling to Turkey 5-0.

The weekend continued the excitement of the week with Team USA competing in Cadet Male and Female Kumite as well as the U21 Female and Male Kumite divisions.

Matias Nicoloplus had a good day in the -57kg Cadet Kumite Male division. He started strong beating Slovakia in a 3-0 match. He breezed by Malaysia 2-0 but felt to Russia 2-0 placing him in 9th place for the event after a chance to come back in repechage.

Team USA was led by the coaching staff of Maile Chinen, John Limcaco, Tommy Hood, Dustin Baldis, Akira Fukuda and Jim Buchen and Team Lead Elizabeth Sottile. Thank you for all of the hard work they put in before, during and after with both our athletes and parents to make sure each athlete achieved success! A special thanks to our Medical Staff with Greenville Health Systems that put in timeless hours at both Junior Championships this year to make sure all athletes stayed healthy throughout competition. We are proud of each athlete that trained and competed in this year’s Junior World Championships and we look forward to seeing them in 2019! USANKF
Movement begins with intention. Breath drives action, and breath and body finish together. Arm and hand flash to the target with all the energy generated by the hips, legs, and torso. At movement peak, there is full kime, with complete engagement of the posterior chain and the trunk, which is the conduit for energy transfer to the arm and hand. Impact lasts a split second, after which there is relaxation before preparation for the next technique. Sounds like a soundly delivered gyaku-zuki, right?
It is actually also the formula for a hardstyle, ballistic kettlebell swing. Hardstyle kettlebell training, a Russian creation (so, too, is the kettlebell), is grounded in the breath-driven, tension-relaxation rhythm of Okinawan karate. As such, hardstyle kettlebell work is the perfect strength and conditioning match for any enterprising karateka, young or old, or for any person seeking a higher level of strength, power, and mobility.

The current popularity of kettlebell training springs from the diligence of Pavel Tsatsouline, head of StrongFirst. Pavel, who is expert in martial arts, hand-to-hand combat, and kettlebell application to both, has the unique experience of having advised both Russian Special Forces and the U.S. Marine Corps and Secret Service on the use of kettlebells for maximal fitness with minimal equipment, but with high concentration on complex training concepts that produce the four essential elements of athletic excellence: strength, aerobic capacity, mobility, and explosive power.

The Big Six kettlebell moves divide neatly into two categories: ballistics and grinds. Ballistics -- the swing and its two complex cousins, the clean and snatch -- are the power moves that build explosive hip extension (vital to nearly every karate action) and the achievement of full kime at the end of each movement through engagement of the posterior chain (the calves, hamstrings, glutes, and spinal erectors) as well as the muscles of the trunk (in particular, the obliques and both rectus and transverse abdominal muscles) before a rapid relaxation, preparation, and transition into the next explosion.

The grinds are a different flavor altogether. The Turkish Get Up (TGU), overhead press, and both front and goblet squats teach the athlete how to engage his or her whole body in the generation and radiation of strength, relying once again on the breath to initiate and full kime at the conclusion before commencing a relaxation phase. The two types of squat offer terrific potential benefits for trunk strength, hip mobility, and leg power.

Interestingly, with the exception of kettlebell squats, the other five moves incorporate both open chain and closed chain training, allowing the athlete to remain rooted to the ground (the closed chain element) while simultaneously delivering energy through the trunk to the distal hand and arm that are holding the kettlebell away from the midline of the body (the open chain element). This is exactly what happens in a punch or kick.

In combination, kettlebell ballistics and grinds are unparalleled in their ability to improve force production, power output, complex neuromuscular drive and coordination, and mobility, without the anachronisms of muscle-group-by-muscle-group conventional lifting, running, and long-hold, static stretching, which is not only overrated, but has never been proven to produce lasting improvements in athletic mobility (1).

In his article Strength and Conditioning Training: Unlocking A Risky Business, in the Spring 2017 issue of this magazine, Jake Botto nicely opened the door to a robust discussion about the benefits of strength training for traditional karateka. The critical question, however, is whether the American karate community is ready to embrace modern training principles and adapt them to highly competitive needs of contemporary sport.
Because the karate competition in the Tokyo Olympics will have only 80 athletes from around the world, the scramble for another American, in addition to Texan Tom Scott, to crack the WKF rankings, earn a spot, and compete for medals will be intense. This makes the 2020 games a singular opportunity to raise the profile of karate in the U.S., where it is a niche sport that is broadly misunderstood and underappreciated (no, ma’am, we are not MMA, and we do not teach body slams, armbars, and choke holds). American media and sports fans love winners. If American karateka stand on the podium while the National Anthem plays, the trajectory of karate in the U.S. sports and fitness marketplace is almost certain to change.

For many dojos, it is impractical and cost-prohibitive to implement Olympic-style weightlifting programs that build power and coordination in the posterior chain. The space, equipment, and coaching expertise required present daunting obstacles. The power of kettlebell training, however, is available to every dojo that is willing to invest modestly in equipment but be extravagant in letting go of the myths that strength impedes power and explosiveness and that long-hold static stretching builds mobility (2).

The Urban Myth That Strength Impedes Power

Traditionalists in many sports have historically eschewed strength training for their athletes on the misguided and non-evidence-based belief that strength impedes power production and speed. This is demonstrably wrong; no one looks at modern athletes and proclaims them to be “bigger and slower” than their predecessors. They are virtually all bigger and faster, and everyone from sports announcers to sport scientists knows this to be true.

Norton and Olds proved in 2001 not only that today’s athletes are significantly larger, but that size facilitates success. Today’s bigger athletes play better, have longer careers, and more financial success than their smaller ancestors. The largest changes in body mass (a unitary way of expressing height and weight) are all in the power sports: track and field throwing (shot put, hammer, discus, javelin), the National Football League (NFL), the National Basketball Association (NBA), rugby, and boxing.

Before Tiger Woods, the golf establishment openly ridiculed strength training for its genteel pursuit. Tiger Woods was the best golfer of his era and arguably the best athlete the sport has ever seen, with a robust strength training strategy and unrivaled rotational power. Michael Phelps, the greatest swimmer of all time, lifts and pushes a power sled in training. Kayla Harrison, American Gold medalist in judo in 2016, is renowned for her commitment to her strength training regime. At the 2016 Games, Russian athletes, whose devotion to hardstyle kettlebell training and Olympic lifting is rich and enduring, dominated the combat sports of wrestling and boxing.

Brazilian Shotokan legend and MMA star Lyoto Machida is an avid and accomplished Olympic weightlifter (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkTvxAvgMaaM and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldI2Gzoahh8). Loturco, et al, showed in 2014 that on the Brazilian national karate team, the strongest punches and kicks come from the athletes who also demonstrated the greatest strength (4) in testing.

The best demonstration of the difference strength and mass make to speed and quickness comes from the NFL. Few sports so diligently record the performance parameters of their athletes, starting with the ostentatious NFL combine. Looking at data for three NFL greats (Gale Sayers predates the combine) allows only one inescapable conclusion: today’s athletes are bigger and faster, demolishing the myths that size and strength impede explosive power.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NFL Athlete</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Ht (in)</th>
<th>Wt (lbs)</th>
<th>BMI</th>
<th>40-yd dash time (sec)</th>
<th>Bench press (lbs)</th>
<th>Vertical leap (inches)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gale Sayers</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>6’ 1”</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>200 (estimated)</td>
<td>Not recorded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry Sanders</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>5’ 8”</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4.37 (7% faster than Sayers)</td>
<td>350 (15% more than Sayers)</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Jackson</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>6’ 2”</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>4.35 (7.4% faster than Sayers)</td>
<td>335 (17% more than Sayers)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
No thinking person who’s ever seen film of Barry Sanders would regard him as slow afoot. He was, almost literally, a bodybuilder with the agility and shiftiness of a ballerina.

Even more interesting are the data comparing Jesse Owens, the iconic American sprinter, to Usain Bolt, the greatest sprinter ever. Bolt, who routinely hit the weights throughout his historic run of Olympic Gold medals, is a bona fide strength training devotee, and no one will ever say his time in the gym slowed him down.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sprinter (year)</th>
<th>Ht</th>
<th>Wt</th>
<th>BMI</th>
<th>100 m time (sec)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesse Owens 1936</td>
<td>5’10”</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usain Bolt 2016</td>
<td>6’4”</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>9.8 (4.4% faster than Owens)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Strength-Power-Speed Continuum**

Understanding how hardstyle kettlebell training can develop powerful and durable karateka requires clarity about what the elements of strength, power, and speed really are. Strength and speed lie at the two ends of a continuum. Strength is maximal force exertion (recruitment of the motor neurons and biggest, strongest muscle fibers), while speed is maximal rate of movement (recruiting those muscle fibers quickly and making them fire rapidly). Hence, strength is primarily a neuromuscular phenomenon and only after neuromuscular function is optimized does the contribution of increasing muscle mass come into play. Typically, if you are trying to lift the heaviest object you can, you will move relatively slowly; conversely, if you aim to move as fast as possible, you will not be able to overcome much resistance.

Power is the happy medium, the point at which the athlete finds a sweet spot between the two extremes. Karate -- like most sports -- is a power sport. No matter whether the need is kata, kihon, kumite, or, actual self defense, it is not enough to move fast without force or or move forcefully without some speed. The athlete must be both fast and strong...powerful.

**The Karate-Kettlebell Match**

Hardstyle kettlebell training is almost endlessly adaptable to the needs of individual athletes. By manipulating the movement mix, number of sets and reps, weight, and rest vs. work periods, dojo leaders can craft training programs that allow for a year-round training program that is safe, sustainable, and directly applicable to the needs of the sport and the individual athlete. Because competitive karate involves both anaerobic and aerobic energy systems (5, 6) and mobility, hardstyle kettlebell training's functional value is unrivaled; you can build all three with a commitment to just one tool and sophisticated grasp of program development even if you never venture beyond the Big Six moves.

Because hardstyle kettlebell training is submaximal (i.e., the purpose is not to seek out or test maximal strength), it can, with some tinkering, provide athletes with training options that they can use throughout their karate year, and it allows for targeting of specific movement needs. The submaximal element reduces the risk of injury, helps to prevent training burnout, and encourages attention to movement-specific technical refinement, as opposed to the ego satisfaction of “hey, I lift more than you do.”

Hardstyle kettlebell training also allows the athlete to train in a manner that provides a functional mechanical and breathing match to the needs of the sport. In the kettlebell swing, for example, the athlete’s body arrives at a vertical plank posture at the same time that his powerful exhalation finishes, and there is a lightning bolt of full kime through the posterior chain and trunk. The kettlebell, held at arm’s length, having absorbed the energy of the hips slamming forward, arcs upward while the arms and hands are partially engaged. As the bell floats back down, the karateka relaxes, breathes, and then pulls himself into a full hip hinge for the next technique. This mimics the body dynamics necessary for full todome waza strikes and return to zanshin.
The other element at play is the eccentric loading (negative work) that the kettlebell facilitates. In the ballistics, the kettlebell returns to the athlete's midline at velocity and is then pushed through the opening between the legs with a force that is significantly greater than the nominal weight of the bell. The body absorbs this force and then must overcome it to propel the bell back out. Put another way, a 53 pound kettlebell being swung by an experienced athlete can move up and down with greater than 250 pounds of force; analysis of kettlebell masters such as Pavel himself, show that force generation can reach 500 pounds. Done properly, the plank-hinge-release-return-to-plank sequence lasts between 0.75 and 1 second.

The speed of movement in hardstyle kettlebell ballistics make dramatic use of the stretch-shortening cycle of the muscles. The brief, almost violent stretch imparted to the muscle fibers of the hips and hamstrings when backing into the hinge facilitates powerful contraction that is not possible moving slowly. The stretch-shortening cycle is the “rubber-band” element of muscle contractility that is achievable only through this kind of plyometric-style engagement. Notably, if an athlete pauses and holds the hinged position (or any posture from which explosive power is the desired result), most of the potential energy is lost as heat. Moving quickly from neutral to stretched to contracted is the key to all the ballistics.

This system is far closer to actual plyometric movement, as envisioned by its founder, Yuri Verkoshansky, than are commercially popular programs such as P90X. P90X is not plyometrics; it is, at best, stylized aerobics with jumping and as-many-reps-as-possible (AMRAP) calisthenics training that encourages technical slop. AMRAP might improve athletic dynamics, particularly in untrained subjects, but so, too, would virtually any other formal training system. P90X and AMRAP calisthenics are not systems adaptable and scalable for the needs of progressively stronger and fitter athletes; they do not rely upon or require technical proficiency; they lack a mechanical and breathing match for karate, and there is zero evidence of their utility in highly demanding sports that require not just power but the complex coordination and baseline strength of a martial art.

In the grinds, the kettlebell's offset center of gravity provides for a unique way of building rotational stability and power. Because the center of gravity is outside the grip and away from the midline, that's the direction in which the kettlebell is pulling the athlete. The athlete must constantly correct for this force, counteracting it by engaging the muscles on the opposite side. Hence, the resistance to rotation strengthens the same muscle groups of the hips and trunk that must generate rotational force. The TGU is the single best whole-body strength movement that virtually any athlete can do. It not only teaches development and control of whole-body tension and relaxation, but also movement flow, controlled deep breathing, rotational control, and proprioception (knowing where the limbs are in space without seeing them). These skills are directly transportable to karate.

The Challenge

Hardstyle kettlebell training is hard, and it is complex. It is a technique driven training modality that require both physical and emotional maturity and diligent devotion to learning and skill development, not just slinging weights around. All of the Big Six moves requires whole body coordination and engagement, as well as zealous attention to timing, intention, breathing, and knowing when to contract and when to relax. Learning the ballistics and the grinds takes time and skillful, knowledgeable coaching, but most importantly, engaged students who believe that strength is a skill worth learning.

In nearly every sport you can think of, the top athletes strength train. It has taken four decades to reach that point; in 1977, there was virtually no scientific literature on the health or athletic benefits of strength training, and it was unheard of for teams to have strength coaches or the weightlifting resources they have now. Now, if you don’t strength train, you are the odd person out and almost certain to not make the cut.

Hardstyle kettlebell training is coming into its own across the sports spectrum. Teams in the NFL and National Hockey League (the athlete’s rotation on a slap shot is almost exactly the rotation of the first move of the TGU) and MMA fighters are taking up this form of training in increasing numbers.
To do so effectively, they all have to let go of preconceived notions about what works and what doesn’t to integrate new data. Not everyone is up to this challenge.

Many dojos are small businesses led by karateka who are skillful and accomplished, but mostly trained in an aging paradigm that has outlived its utility. Further, successful athletes often don’t make great coaches. Their perspectives on what works are frequently clouded by their deeply ingrained biases (in particular, confirmation bias and survival bias). They pursue validation of their experiences rather than new information, substituting egotism for evidence. This educational malpractice is the opposite of strategic thinking.

The potential payoff for devoted dojos is huge, however, if they are willing to reach out and introduce into their training regimes coaches with the right expertise. Building and showcasing more dynamic, athletic karateka on local, regional, national, and international stages is the most important way to expand karate’s footprint in an ever more competitive sports marketplace. It is also key to helping dojos compete more effectively in their local markets, showing that productive martial arts training is about more than collecting belts; that, indeed, a martial arts dojo is a place where anyone can learn a well-rounded set of life-enhancing skills that will help them withstand the march of time. Considered in this way, it is clear that hewing to tradition at the expense of effectiveness and efficiency will be the same thing losing ground.

Vik Khanna is a StrongFirst SFG 1 Kettlebell Instructor, and First Kyu in Shotokan karate in Chesterfield, MO. In addition to academic training in exercise science, internal medicine, and public health, Vik has over 40 years direct, personal experience in strength training.

Zar Horton is a Master SFG with StrongFirst. He is a professional firefighter in Albuquerque, NM, where he a member of the command staff. Zar is also a certified Ground Force Method movement instructor and has trained professional MMA fighters at Greg Jackson’s Wink MMA Academy in Albuquerque, NM.

2 Flexibility is the passive range of motion of a joint. Mobility is the useful range of motion of the joint; in other words, the range of motion through which the athlete can produce force. Mobility matters.
Para-Karate athlete and US team member Ryan Rogers, age 28, started karate when he was 14, during his final year of middle school.

“My mom was the one who got me started in it. She was looking for an activity for me to participate in, as I wasn’t very healthy and needed to drop some weight. Someone at her work suggested karate over at the local YMCA and that’s where it all started. After a few weeks I fell in love with it!”

Born and raised in Chattanooga, TN, Ryan is an only child of a single, hard-working mom. When he competes in the Para-Karate divisions, it is under the category of “Intellectually Disabled”, as Ryan is a person on the Autism Spectrum. But he enjoys competing in both the typical and the Para karate divisions.

“I just love to compete! I will be in as many divisions as they have.”

Thriving on structure and discipline, Ryan loved learning the basics of kumite and the kata in Shito-Ryu Karate. He started attending trainings two or three days a week and was very consistent in his schedule.

“In high school I also did wrestling and weight lifting in addition to karate, so I was doing something every day. It helped me to drop weight and be healthier all around. I loved it.”

Being a recreational karate program at the local YMCA, it was well run, but a little limited in its scope and depth of karate. Ryan made a lot of friends there, people he still in touch with today, but he knew there would come a point when he would need to leave this group in order to move forward with his serious karate training. That’s when he met Sensei Corey Green.
“I recall the day Sensei Green came to the YMCA karate class I was taking to promote his tournament. I had never been in a tournament before and I really wanted to participate. That was around 2009. I was excited to have some new and different opportunities. And although it was truly heart-breaking to say goodbye to my old dojo friends and family, I really wanted to explore other ways to train. It was time for me to go, and I did. I made the switch to go study with him and less than a year later I was in my first tournament and officially joined his dojo, Green’s Karate”.

There have been a lot of “firsts” for Ryan in the last two years. Before attending the 2016 World Championships in Linz, Austria, Ryan had never left the United States before. In fact, he had never been on an airplane. And in the span of twelve months he went to Austria and then to the PKF tournament in Curacao.

“I loved the tropical island! I loved getting to experience these adventures. They were the two best adventures of my life! And I especially loved being able to see other competitors. That’s why I really enjoy going to tournaments. I get to see what other people are doing and learn from them. I just love to compete, I want to do as much as possible. I love to see people who really serious and dedicated to the art of karate, just like me.

For the last 7 years pretty much Ryan has been training regularly with Sensei Green in Chattanooga, TN. He also assists in teaching some classes and works part time as a medical carrier for a hospital. He is currently a first KYU brown belt, planning/hoping to test for his black belt in April 2018. USANKF
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Where Olympic Journeys Begin