BRAZIL 2016 PKF CHAMPIONSHIPS

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2015 PAN AM GAMES
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Tom Scott delivers a perfect “Ura Mawashi Geri” during an international competition.
Photo Courtesy Shelley Lipton (www.shelleylipton.com)

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BRAZIL 2016 PKF CHAMPIONSHIPS
By Jose M. Fraguas
We open the premiere issue of “USA KARATE” Magazine with the news of the International Olympic Committee accepting Karate for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. Almost 40 years of political struggle have delayed the final decision. Many years ago, the W.K.F. leaded by President Mr. Antonio Espinos, was selected by the IOC as the only recognized organization for Karate in the world. And today, here we are…in Tokyo 2020.

But interestingly, the acceptance of karate as “Olympic sport” seems to upset few people. Budo or sport? To be or not to be? The answer is not easy. I guess, we’ll never find one because there’s no answer to be found. It’s a simple matter of giving up something and commit ourselves to the excitement of the new course. Whether we like it or not, times have changed.

During his opening address for the First World Karate Do Championship Tournament in Japan, in October 1970, Ryoichi Sasakawa who passed away on July 1995, the president of the former “World Union Karate Do Federation” and also president of All Japan Karate Do Organizations said: “Needless to say, Karate Do is a traditional sport of the Japanese, which, unlike other sports whose substance depends on winning or losing determined by the record, distinguishes itself as an art of justified self-defense directly stemming from the spirit of Budo, and as unique sport strictly governed by a number of distinct codes of courtesy, benevolence and righteousness. Thus the winner is not to boast of his feat, nor is the loser to be discouraged; the match is to be fought with spirit as clear and open as the firmament: is this not one way to true mutual love of mankind and world peace”. After reading his words, I think we can strike a “balance”.

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Federations and Olympism are here to promote the art and sport of Karate via tournaments, social events and activities. It is up to the dojo’s teachers, to educate the students and practitioners about what Karate is as a whole. Promotion and education are two different concepts. To survive, we need both concepts working together in unity. The key factor is about finding what unites these two ideas and not what set them apart.

“The Olympism is not a system, is state of mind” said the great Baron Pierre de Coubertin. The art of karate is also a state of mind.

In the meantime just remember that… as we think, so shall we be. Our future is in our own hands.
As you all know, it has been a very exciting time for Karate, which has been recommended by the International Olympic Committee Executive Board to be included in the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo!

It’s been a few years since the USOC turned our federation back to us. Since that time there have been many other positive changes. As we all reflect on these achievements, there are other areas of growth that we should also be proud of, relating to our athletes, referees, coaches, management, signature events and our vision moving forward.

Our Athletes

The senior U.S. team athletes are fully funded to the Pan American Karate Federation (PKF) and the World Karate Federation (WKF) World Championships. We have also instituted training camps and other development opportunities for our athletes in preparation for the World Championships and possible inclusion in the 2020 Olympic Games.

Our Referees

Our officials program is one of the best in the world, evidenced by the fact we are in the top 3 relating to the number of licensed officials in the World Karate Federation.

Internationally, we continue to hold prestigious positions, including Fariba Madani who is a member of the WKF Referee Council, and Cleveland Baxter who is a member of the Pan American Referee Council. Other international karate federations have provided very positive feedback regarding the fairness and competency of our U.S. officials.

Our Coaches

Our program for coaches has come a long way over the last few years under the leadership of Tokey Hill, who has done a great job preparing our teams as well as educating our coaches. Earlier this year, Tokey turned over the reins to our new Head Coach, Tommy Hood. Tommy’s experience both as a competitor and an assistant coach will give him the edge he needs to be successful, and bode well for the start of his tenure.

Our Signature Events

Our signature events have been excellent. We have continued to grow our U.S. Open, as well as our National Championships - despite the fact that we have had a weak national, and global economy.

We believe this is a direct result of our tournament staff and national office, who are consummate professionals and constantly looking to make improvements for our federation members. However, none of this would be possible without our national official corps, who work tirelessly for the benefit of our athletes. They truly deserve our admiration.

Our Management

One of our best decisions was to hire Phil Hampel as our CEO. Phil’s background in project management, information technology and not-for-profit management have helped to drastically improve our financial circumstances. Phil has been extremely accessible to the membership, and improved administrative organization at the national office.

In addition to all of the updates above, I would like to personally thank and give a ‘shout out’ to my fellow board members, Doug Stein, Matthew Ralph, Cheryl Murphy, Brian Mertel, Doug Jepperson, Alex Miladi, Tokey Hill and Roger Jarrett.

As many of us know, when we took over several years ago, the Federation had significant debt and legal issues. Our entire board has done a tremendous job leading and guiding our federation through some very challenging times and situations. Without the board’s assistance, the federation wouldn’t be on the solid footing that it is on today.

I believe I speak for all of us in saying that we eagerly anticipate all of the positive changes to come, as Karate continues to become a dominating sport across the world.

John DiPasquale
President
Welcome to the premier edition of “USA Karate Magazine”. I’m really excited to bring this publication to our members. So much has changed in the last 2-1/2 years (much behind the scenes) and the Federation is definitely moving in a positive direction. Until now, we haven’t had a good way to communicate with our members regarding our progress, so my hope is that this publication will provide an opportunity to share with you all the great things we are doing in USA Karate.

This is one of the greatest times for our sport because it looks promising for karate to be included in the 2020 Tokyo Games. Simply amazing! In the 32 years that I have been involved with the sport, we’ve been close to having karate included in the Olympics but narrowly missed several times. This time it looks even better and, the recent approval by the IOC Executive Committee puts us just one approval away from being in the games. The Olympics are important to our sport and participation in the Olympics will also make our sport better.

In 2010, when I first joined the Board of Directors of USA Karate, the USOC was running a campaign called “Amazing Awaits”. This campaign at its core was about the dream of excellence - not just the dream of the young athlete becoming an Olympian but everyone being part of that journey. From the Sensei to the coach to the administrator to the donor to the fans, everyone has a part in the amazing things that await athletes in their pursuit of Olympic excellence. We can all use a push into dreaming big about our sport. Dreams are powerful and the goals they fuel will take karate to new level in the United States. We will be focusing on the Olympic Dream and Ideals as we prepare for the 2020 games during the next four years.

We’ve increased athlete support and funding. We started increasing the support to our National Team over a year ago. We held a funded camp prior to the Pan American Games and laid the groundwork for what we want the future to look like. Today the Pan American Games are our biggest competition - they are effectively our Olympics. It is amazing to have fielded a team of 7 athletes and to have 3 coming back with medals including a gold. Congratulations to Tom Scott, Brandis Miyazaki and Brian Irr for their great performance in the Games!

In 2016 we’ve increased support to $40,000 for athlete development as we drive towards the World Championships this November in Linz Austria. We held our Team Trial event at the Olympic Training Center along with a developmental camp open to all our pool athletes from the team trials and it was exciting to see our athletes surrounded by all the great Olympic History of Colorado Springs. We also held a second camp in Dallas to prepare the Senior National Team for the PKF Championships in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. We are planning a third camp in August to prepare for the World Championships.

In addition to the athlete improvements, we have also made some really exciting changes to the support we offer to our referee corps. We could not provide the high quality events to our members without the officials’ tireless work. Here are some of the changes we have made to support our officials:

- Standardized and increased per diems for domestic officials at Signature Events
- Provide a prorated reimbursement of expenses related to SafeSport Background Checks for officials participating at Signature Events
- For officials who travel with Team USA internationally to PKF and WKF championships
  - Provide supplemental medical insurance while they are out of the country
  - Provide financial support through a distribution of $18,000 in support funds.

I’m excited about the changes we have been able to make so far and we will continue to refine and adjust the programs. I have had many great conversations with our members on areas to look at improving and look forward to continuing the dialogue.

I hope you enjoy “USA Karate Magazine” and “Thank You” for your support of our great Federation. USANKF
What is the difference between elite and developmental level training programs? Of what significance is a developmental camp? We’ve all heard the expression, “you must learn to crawl before you can walk.” Perhaps no other circumstance holds true to this philosophy more than sports training. Karate-ka are no exception to this rule, the best example being the succession of belt rankings one must endure before reaching the status of black belt. All development occurs systematically; however, this concept often is overlooked in the realm of sports training. So, instead of a safe and deliberate training plan, improvements in performance are expected and in some cases demanded. In these conditions, it is not uncommon for athletes to follow rigid routines that lead to overtraining and underdeveloped technical skills.

The development of an athlete to elite level status requires meticulous planning, organizing, and monitoring of every facet of training, we call this The athletes Pipeline Exposure to intense training loads must be approached systematically in a series of cycles that ensure safety, technical proficiency, and the success and longevity of an athlete’s career. The product? A developmental training program that systematically cultivates the competitive qualities that result in victory.

Safety and longevity of career go hand in hand and are of primary concern to the coach training young, aspiring athletes. Exposure to constant heavy training, or heavy training during sensitive growth periods, will not produce maximum gains in performance, but instead will lead to diminished performance, burnout, and injury.

Athletes engaged in elite level training and competition who have not taken adequate measures to prepare properly often suffer from overtraining. Overtraining leads to irritability, loss of weight management, restlessness, poor performance, high blood pressure, dangerous training loads, depression, exhaustion, slumps, and even illness.

Strength training & the use of plyometric is a prime example of this concept. Use of resistance that is too great for a particular stage of growth can overstress bones and ligaments, causing damage to a child’s body. Small children should develop strength using Body weight based exercise has a variety of exercises that incorporate jumps, throws, and body weight exercises in a controlled environment. Children up to age 11 should train with resistance permitting 13-15 repetitions. The maximal weight of great resistance should not be attempted until High levels of bone growth periods have slowed down, from my experience 17 years of age is a great time to start, not that all athletes are exactly the same, on a case by case basis.

A good coach educates himself and takes into account these sensitive periods when planning a Athletes Pipeline training program.

Without adequate levels of mental & physical abilities, technical skill training is impossible. Even the greatest proficiency of technical skills is useless without sufficient levels of flexibility, endurance, or reaction speed.

Most skill sets & technical training is developed early in an athlete’s career. This foundation of kihon (or basics) then is built on at later stages of development, when the athlete has a better understanding of application. Before any parallel to actual competition can be explored, it is first imperative that the athlete learn the skills set & correct form.

Camps at the U.S. Olympic Training Center always have been divided into developmental and elite training sessions. Upon entry into our developmental program, athletes are exposed to the latest developments in sport-karate training, and adequate time is permitted for athletes to acquire these newfound skills. Entry level strength and conditioning programs are tailored to suit the needs of individual participants and begin to develop a strength base. Low to moderate level plyometrics, such as agility drills, skipping rope, and speed hurdles, also are taught.

In addition to these sport-enhancement exercises, basic technical skills are presented. Fine-tuning of the athlete’s prior knowledge of basics, methods of entry, and evasive movements make up a major portion of the developmental technical training.
It’s June 2016, and we finally have the “Official Publication of USANKF”. I would like to welcome the magazine to the USA Karate community and congratulate Jose M. Fraguas, our Editor-in-Chief. This magazine will be focusing on the USANKF and will give us a forum to communicate with our officials, coaches, athletes and parents. I look forward to keeping you apprised of the referee’s program and the rules as it pertains to us.

Over the years as the coaches program has grown, the officials have had to learn how to work cordially with the coaches. At times, this has proven to be difficult for some, while others have exhibited much tolerance. Going forward, selected coaches will be given the opportunity to vote for the most outstanding official of each day of the championships. This privilege will foster a better working relationship between both parties.

As you all are aware, the Referees and Judges work tirelessly at our signature events each year so that we can have a successful championship. It is also the desire of the Referee Committee that we maintain the quality and integrity of each event. To this end, in order to sustain our standards, we have modified the rules given to us by the WKF. We will then further tweak those modifications as it becomes necessary. This year at the National Championships, the duration of a bout will be one and a half (1 ½) minutes for all divisions, except for the team trial divisions. Although this will not have any significant impact on the competitors, it will be appreciated by all officials at the end of the day.

More importantly from a competitor’s perspective, there will be the adjustment to simultaneous kata performance in all divisions. Of course, the WKF divisions will remain the same in accordance with the WKF rules. For competitors twelve years and older in the advanced divisions, medal matches will continue to be individual performance.

In the last twenty years, the WKF has made several changes to the rules of competition as we know them. As the governing body for the sport of karate in the United States, the USANKF is mandated to follow these rules for our international competitors. However, we also are obligated to adjust these rules so that we can accommodate our grassroots program and the thousands of other athletes that we cater to. This is a responsibility that we take very seriously, and therefore must constantly monitor the performance of everyone that is involved in the program; not only the competitors, but officials and coaches as well. I look forward to seeing you all at the National Championships in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
n a way—in a very important way—this principle gets to the very essence of what we are trying to accomplish as karate-ka, in both our daily training and the way we live our lives. The Japanese word rei, literally translated, means salute, salutation or bow. That is easy enough to understand. But if you are to understand the true meaning of rei, you must understand the meaning, the significance, of the bow.

When you bow to someone, keep in mind you are communicating to that person. Though you are not saying a word, you are communicating by gesture. I have traveled all over the world and enjoyed many experiences in many different cultures, and the one thing I have learned is that everyone is the same. Human beings are human beings. We come to learn this through communicating with one another. To communicate what you really feel, you have to do so properly. Therefore when you are communicating to someone with a bow, in order to communicate clearly and effectively, you must bow properly, with proper form and proper feeling.

Think about it. If we learn another language, we learn how to pronounce words a certain way. If we’re trying to learn how to speak Spanish or French, we can’t just say, “Oh, I’m an American, I don’t want to pronounce French that way.” If you say that, then you can’t communicate. It is the same at the dojo, when we greet each other with a bow. We communicate in this way. So we must know how to bow properly.

To understand one another, we must communicate clearly. And if we do not understand each other, we cannot help one another. Our purpose for training is to improve ourselves as individuals, and we sometimes need help from others to accomplish this. We need help from our instructors, our sempai…and our opponents, too. Opponents are like instructors. We learn from them in defeat. They point out to us the weaknesses in our technique.

In tournaments, especially during sparring, many of the contestants do not bow properly. I have said this many times before: If you do not show courtesy, you’re not a real martial artist. As a martial artist, it is more important to constantly think of Master Funakoshi’s principles—so you are thinking more of how to better yourself as a person—than it is to always think, “Oh, I want to get stronger,” or, “I want to be the champion.” As a human being, you get older. At some point in your life, physically, you reach your peak, and you cannot get any better. But karate is for a lifetime of training, because as a person, as a human being, you can always continue to grow. And by doing so, you can help other people do the same.

I am ashamed when I see those contestants in a tournament who have forgotten about rei. These individuals have forgotten the true meaning of karate. They have lowered themselves to the level of the animal. Their sole purpose for participating in the competition is to win the match, and that is wrong. Karate is technically a fighting art, yes. However if one looks at it only on the surface, without considering the underlying principals, it is merely an act fit for animals. Karate movies depicting our art as a form of ruthless fighting appeal to the animal instinct of man. We must separate and distinguish the human being—who has intellect and reasoning power—from the animal, which acts solely on instinct. Anyone or anything that you encounter in your daily living should be thought of as your instructor, because you can always learn something—in any situation. In the act of bowing, you are communicating to someone who can help you. And as I just said, we need to understand each other so that we’re able to help each other. When we show courtesy, it helps us to understand each other.

So what is it, then, that you want to communicate when you bow? Certainly, you want to express your respect for that person. Here is someone who is able and willing to help you. That person, then, deserves your respect. Bow properly to this person, with proper form and feeling, and you communicate to that person your respect. That person understands your respect, because you have communicated it clearly. I see students, and they have good techniques. But the students who think of Master Funakoshi’s principles…they are different. I can see it. When they bow to me, I can feel it. When you bow deeply, you should feel respect in your heart. When you bow to sempai, you are saying from your heart, “I need more help; I need more practice.” What, then, does one say with a half-hearted bow?

So I’m saying that when we bow, when we show courtesy, we should feel something in our hearts. In one sense, it is an easy thing to understand, but in another way, it takes time. You have to learn this from experience.

Sometimes people don’t bow for religious reasons. Bowing is not a religious expression for a martial artist. It only means, “I need more practice.” When your head is down, you are showing humility. In showing respect to the instructor, your sempai, your opponent, or the person you encounter in everyday life, you show to that person your willingness and desire to learn from him or her, and that person will respond. That person will help you. You are showing not only respect, but humility as well, and that, too, is very important. People who have many good friends are usually people who understand the principle of rei. With your head down, you experience humility, and when you are humble, you see more. You are more open to learn.
USA Karate has had some outstanding showings this past year. Tom Scott and Sakura Kukumai have shown ideal leadership skills through their work ethic and consistency in competition. The Junior National Team continues to churn out fantastic competitors, but as always, the crossroads of schooling and transitioning to the senior divisions tends to thin out the pool. For many people, this is the biggest obstacle for USA Karate to overcome.

Karate is a formality away from being an Olympic sport! This is a very exciting time for athletes all around the world! With karate pending inclusion in the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo, the preparations have already begun. Team USA has some immediate front-runners looking to claim a spot, but nothing is promised at such high levels of competition. However, it is guaranteed that the quality of competitors in this sport will grow rapidly. There will be countries that were relatively obscure in the past that will start to receive funding and reach new levels. Therefore, the overall level of competition will increase. Every athlete is different, therefore, their motivation to reach the highest level of karate varies, just like the cultures they originate from. For U.S. athletes, the Olympics will be a new goal, but the path will be mostly the same.

As a competitor, you will need to sacrifice many of the luxuries and activities that your friends will enjoy. You will need to skip parties, wake up early, and conduct your day all while managing exhaustion. You make these sacrifices hoping that every extra punch and kick will be the one that separates you from the rest of the pack. There is going to be an influx of athletes wanting to be the FIRST Olympic karate champion from the United States. It is very important that the philosophies and ideals that karate were built on remain prevalent. Karate has the opportunity to grow in a positive direction, but it is up to every participant to be an ambassador for their sensei and the other athletes.

Karate does not have to be lost, as many would suggest. More interest in karate can and should mean more great karate. It is our responsibility to maintain the integrity of this martial art that we love. Karate in the Olympics will means that athletes in karate will realize that competitors from other sports face the same physical and emotional challenges as we do. All athletes that reach that pinnacle have sacrificed more than most ever would. However, most of these athletes will never be on T.V., they will have relatively little sponsorship, and few will transfer their accomplishments in this sport into a great career, but they do it anyways. Karate athletes in the United States are no stranger to this. We do it for the love of the art and competition, and now for the right to represent our country in the Olympic Games! DREAM BIG TEAM USA! USANKF
My name is Sensei Jeffrey Kohn and I am a native of Skokie, Illinois. I have been involved in the martial arts as a competitive athlete, a teacher, and a dojo business owner since the age of 5. Now, over 50 years later, my journey has led me to dedicate a large portion of my life to training athletes with disabilities through the medium of karate.

As a very active and sometimes difficult child, my mother put me in Judo class with the hopes of getting my behavior under control. If I had been a kid today, there would’ve been a team of people, an IEP and specific classes to help an overactive hyper child like me, but back then there wasn’t anything of the sort. By luck and with the guidance of a few key people, I found my way. My Judo teacher, Sensei Ray Newman, was a large part of that. He taught athletes with and without disabilities and taught them all the same. He included everyone and made it a meaningful experience for us all. I learned a lot from him.

As time went by, and after having transitioned to the practice of Shotokan Karate, I found the structure, discipline and artistry I needed to thrive. I witnessed first hand the direct benefits of regular and disciplined training, being part of a team, and strengthening my body, mind and spirit connection. It was at that point I knew I was called to pass on the training I had been given.

My teaching career started almost 40 years ago, with two deaf students. Things were very different back then, without the same resources we have today. I had to “learn by doing” in many respects. The exciting challenge of making karate accessible to my students was one that I dove in headfirst to tackle. How to modify my methods of communication, and my ability to show movement through physical example instead of just words, were just two of the topics I found myself staying up all night pondering.

As the years went by, students came to me with a wide range of issues, including Downs Syndrome, Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Hemiparesis and much more. During this time I collaborated with hundreds of doctors, therapists, speech pathologists, physical and occupational therapists, neurologists and parents to hear their stories, learn from them on which things worked or didn’t work in their experience and to gather as much information as I possibly could.

The idea of taking a method that had been used for years, and changing it to achieve the desired result for my athletes with disabilities was definitely controversial to some of my professional colleagues. But fortunately I was inspired by some of the greatest forward thinkers on the planet including observing and taking workshops with the late Moshe Feldenkrais, and was encouraged to never give up my quest.

What a privilege to be asked to write a regular column to educate and advocate around the topic of athletes with disabilities in the martial arts. I look forward to sharing my experiences with you, and hearing about yours.
Karate competitions at the 2015 Pan American Games in Toronto, Canada, were held from July 23 to 25, 2015 at the Hershey Centre (Mississauga Sports Centre) in Mississauga. A total of 80 karatekas qualified to compete and the host nation (Canada) automatically qualified athletes in each event.

The competition was held under the kumite discipline, with men and women each competing in five events each. A total of ten karate events were held: five each for men and women.

The USA Karate Team brought home two bronze medals with the athletes Brian Irr and Brandis Miyazaki and one gold in the hands of Tom Scott.

USA Karate approached our three American medalists and asked them to revisit for our readers their personal journey to the Pan American podium.
TOM SCOTT
Style: Wado Ryu
Pan American Games Gold Medalist -75kg

My preparation for the Toronto 2015 Games was a blast. I have always enjoyed my routine, and there is no other place on earth I'd rather be than training. I am gracious to have the best Sensei, Brody Burns, the best assistant coaches, the best training partners, and the best facility any athlete could ever ask for. My family, friends and fiancé Morgan gave me their utmost support. You don't need to train with the best to beat the best. Our school has kept our vision and stayed true to developing our own students and staff and today we are a world-class training site.

The people closest to me sacrificed a lot for me to get this job done. My teammates were always there to train, my Sensei gave me so much extra one-on-one time, coaches woke up early for me to go the track before sunrise. I really felt like all aspects of an Olympic athlete's life were covered and I felt accomplished in my hard work regardless of the tournament. The summer of 2015 was more than a great karate season, it was the best year of my life. I believe something else that contributed to my confidence in Toronto was the sense of accomplishment outside of karate. I had decided to propose to my girlfriend the same summer right before the Games. When I saw the opportunity to propose it occurred to me that such a heavy life moment might distract me from the Games which was another life goal of mine. However, I didn't want to become over protective of my Games performance or let it dominate my life so I went ahead with the proposal. It was a good decision. I believe that keeping a strong faith and planning for my future with my fiancé, helped keep the Games in perspective which freed me to fight my best, even during the toughest matches.

The Pan Am Games is an amazing experience. Being a part of Team USA was so valuable from living in the village, to having the USA medical staff and trainers there for all of us. While having conversations with Olympic American track stars it occurred to me that no matter what sport you do, when you're on Team USA you share that global tradition of victory and overcoming the odds. When I am on Team USA, the unlikely becomes likely and I can expect to achieve whatever I want.

Toronto 2015 was the culmination of all my experiences proceeding the Games. I remember being very calm in my final match against the Venezuelan competitor. I loved hearing that this was the largest Pan American Games ever. That 3 million people were watching on ESPN that night therefore making this event the most viewed karate tournament I had ever heard of. I had no doubts at any time during the match, I have learned that doubting or anxiety or panic cannot help me. Even once, I was down by one point, and then by three points after getting hit by my favorite technique, all I was thinking about was my movements and what to do next. I am proud that my mind never wandered to the external factors. I just stayed in the match. When we were tied with 5 seconds left, I stood at my line during a video review and remembered losing the Pan Am Games in Guadalajara 2011 in a decision at the end of the fight. I was not going to let it go to decision… no matter what; this time, win or lose, it would be by points. Those last five seconds were so fun. I had no idea what it was going to look like, but my training took over. With movement and patience I used all 5 seconds and drew my opponent out first. I moved back from his technique and came back in to score with a buzzer beater punch at the last second. It was a moment I will never forget.

Editor’s Note: Tom and Morgan got married on June 18th, 2016. USANKF
My preparation for the Pan American Games was based on a very serious injury that I had on my back and partially affected the nerves going down the leg. For over a month and a half, I could not train and all what I did was physical therapy in order to try to get my body to move normally without the pain. This injury really put me a little behind schedule as far as the training that I had to do. When I could start training again, I felt very good and even being cautious to not make it worse, I began to perform at my normal levels.

By the time we were traveling, I had no doubts that the back problem was not going to be an issue, although once you get injured there is always something “there”, in the back of your mind.

The first day of competition I felt very confident because my back was not bothering me and because all the opponents that I was going to face, I did compete against before. I knew that knowing the opponents was going to be an important factor in the championship. I knew their strong and weak points. With the hard work that I put in the recovering from the injury and the knowledge about all the possible opponents, I can say that my level of confidence was very high.

All went well until obviously the last match where I lost the possibility of getting into the finals. I was winning 5-2 and with only 4 seconds left, my opponent rushed right off the bat and attacked me with punches, instead of letting him score with one punch (this could have given him only one point), I did react to the punches and he used my defensive reaction to set up the leg movement and score with a kick. I knew he needed a kick and not a punch, but I made the wrong decision at that moment and he scored with the kick. With the exception of that specific action, I think that I performed well during the whole championship.

Looking back, I felt very happy because my level of excitement after the injury was very high. I felt very motivated knowing that the event was being followed by many fans in the USA and ESPN was going to broadcast it. I was not nervous and if any nerves were present, they were due to a “happy excitement” and not due to be “concern” about my possibilities.

The Pan American Games only happens every 4 years so I think it is a great opportunity for any athlete to be there and represent USA Karate. I am extremely happy I did get to bring another medal for the USA Team.
Throughout the years many people have asked me how training and preparation was for the upcoming competitions and as an athlete I would feel like I have to respond with an answer that is positive. For this competition, everything was perfect. Everything in 2015 that led to the Pan American Games was exactly what I needed to succeed. Although the results weren’t showing, my training back home had the greatest strides.

I felt very confident at the time of travel. Very excited to finally be going to the Games. I had weighed in the previous day and made weight easily. The Pan American Games was different in that there were no early morning competing. The competition wouldn’t begin until noon-1pm. It was so great and refreshing. I felt so calm, relaxed, and ready for anything that stepped before me. Plus, I was one of the first competitors on our team to fight so I really wanted set the tone and start it off with a bang.

The one piece of advise that is most memorable to me was said by my personal coach, Shannon Nishi-Patton. She told me “Fight simple and remember to enjoy the moment.” My confidence level was sky high. I was ready to go from the night before. I had a great night’s rest, ate an awesome breakfast, and had a nice peaceful walk before the start of competition. Plus, I felt so good wearing official team USA apparel and gear. I looked good, so I felt even better and more confident of my possibilities.

I was so excited to have to the opportunity to compete with Douglas Brose again. We’ve fought each other four times before that day and I had beaten him once. Despite only being able to beat him once, I still felt confident and ready for an exciting match. One of my most favorite moments from that match was the ring entrance. I remember getting dressed in the warm-up area in the back and just listening to the crowd cheering outside. We’re both called on deck and are waiting at the entrance to stage. Few minutes later we were being introduced and walking to our opposite sides of the mat. Before facing my competitor, I always turn around, close my eyes, take three deep breaths, and on the third breath I hold everything in and all at once exhale everything out. From there, I turn around and bow into the ring and sit ready for action.

The ultimate goal of becoming a Pan American Games champion was not accomplished but that doesn’t mean I was disappointed. The overall experience of the championship was unbelievable and I soaked up every single bit of it.
Michael McCarthy has overcome incredible challenges. Born with deformities in both legs, Michael walks with the aid of two above-the-knee prostheses and crutches. But that hasn’t stopped him from becoming a black belt in karate, winning national karate championships, skateboarding and climbing sky scrapers.

Growing up in an orphanage in Russia, Michael could only get around by scooting and walking on his hands. Julie and Dave McCarthy adopted Michael when he was four and brought him to Chicago where he could get the kind of medical treatment not available to him in Russia. Upon meeting Michael for the first time, his orthopedic surgeon said, “With surgery and prostheses this child will walk.” Michael certainly did walk, and has accomplished far more than his surgeon ever thought possible.

“Michael has never felt limited by his disability. He is the most determined person I know,” said Michael’s mother, Julie McCarthy. “I don’t feel different or special,” said Michael, “I just find a way to do the things I want.” At the age of six, Michael’s mother knew her son needed to find a program to develop his incredible athletic potential. She met Sensei Jeff Kohn, a national karate coach and Chairman of US Disabled Karate. At first, Michael’s mother was unsure how a child with prosthetic legs would be able to do karate. However, after meeting Sensei Kohn for the first time, there was no doubt he would find a way to train Michael. Their connection was immediate, and Michael began training the week after their first meeting.

Michael’s karate training began with working on balance and walking without crutches. After about a year, Sensei Kohn began working with Michael on kata movements. He started by sitting on a chair and progressed to standing. Eventually Michael would learn to perform katas and bo with movement across the floor. “Karate has been hard for me, but I never gave up,” said Michael, and when asked about his disability he said “I don’t really think about having no legs, it’s just how I am.” Other
students are impressed and inspired by Michael. Many parents have expressed what an impact Michael has made on their children. Many of the students have written essays about his achievements for school projects.

Michael has now been training and competing in karate for nine years. He has earned his black belt and has won numerous national championships. Michael competes in both disabled divisions as well as typical divisions, placing third in kobudo at the Arnold Martial Arts Festival. “I have trained world champions and Michael is no less of an athlete. He has more courage than anyone I have ever known,” said Sensei Jeff Kohn.

Martial arts has been a tremendous impact on Michael's life. It has given him confidence, strength and most importantly, a place where he can excel. “The dojo is like a home to me. I have lots of friends there and like teaching other kids with disabilities,” said Michael. He adds “I think kids with disabilities should take karate. In our dojo, the word ‘can’t’ isn’t allowed, even if you have a disability.” According to Michael's mother, karate has changed his life. “He has met athletes from all over the world, many of whom look forward to seeing his progress from one year to the next.” I am always amazed by his progress. To me, that is the sign of a true athlete, one who continues to train and improve. Michael keeps working hard to be the best athlete he can be.”

In addition to many benefits karate athletes gain, Michael, because of his disability, has developed far more physically than he could have without karate training. His balance and walking has improved far more than anyone expected, and his upper body strength is incredible. Michael is able to do forty pull ups without stopping. Few years ago for a fundraiser, Michael climbed the Willis Tower, the tallest building in Chicago, in 95 minutes. “Imagine doing 2,500 dips – that’s what this kid did. I have never seen anything like it,” said Sensei Kohn.

Michael is focused on his training for the World Karate Federation Championships for persons with disabilities. This event is significant to the sport of karate as it may provide an advantage in accepting karate as an official Olympic sport. “I have always had a dream to become an Olympic world champion. Now my dream may come true,” said Michael.
The 2016 USA Open and Junior International Cup took place March 25-17, 2016. Over 42 countries and 2,300 competitors traveled from around the world to compete in Las Vegas, Nevada at the Paris Hotel & Casino. They arrived to represent their countries and the arena was filled with spectators hungry to see some of the best athletes from around the globe. Many of these countries brought their best competitors, including WKF World Champions Douglas Brose, David Dubo and Luigi Busa.

The event was a great success and USA Karate would like to thank all of the officials, coaches, competitors and volunteers who made this an enjoyable event for everyone once again! Three days of intense competition in several categories including, individual kumite, kata, weapons and team kata and kumite peaked on Sunday evening when the finals took place.

Overall, the USA Open Karate Championships was a huge success and better than ever. With a record number of competitors, spectators and special guests, it is going to be a challenge to top it in 2017. The National Karate Federation is growing larger each year through its reputation of putting on some of the best tournaments in the country, and now, in the world.
2016 RESULTS

Male Elite -60 kg Kumite
1. BROSE, DOUGLAS (BRAZIL)
2. MARESCA, LUCA (ITALY)
3. TORRETTA, CALOGERO (USA)
3. BESSO, NATHANIEL (CANADA)

Male Elite -67 kg Kumite
1. MADERA, ANDRES (VENEZUELA)
2. HILLIARD, BRIAN (USA)
3. VIVEROS, DANIEL (ECUADOR)
3. FERRERAS, DEIVI (DOMINICAN REPUBLIC)

Male Elite -75 kg Kumite
1. SCOTT, THOMAS (USA)
2. BUSA, LUIGI (ITALY)
3. NOVO, DENNIS (USA)
3. MENEZES, MILTON (BRAZIL)

Male Elite -84 kg Kumite
1. MAESTRI, NELLO (ITALY)
2. CHOBOTAR, VALERYI (UKRAINE)
3. HERRERA, CESAR (VENEZUELA)
3. PEREZ, JORGE (DOMINICAN REPUBLIC)

Male Elite +84 kg Kumite
1. IRR, BRIAN (USA)
2. CASTILLO, ANEL (DOMINICAN REPUBLIC)
3. ROJAS MACCHIAVELLO, RODRIGO (CHILE)
3. MUHAMMAD, DAVID (USA)

Female Elite -50 kg Kumite
1. DELGADO, DORALVIS (USA)
2. VILLANUEVA, ANA (DOMINICAN REPUBLIC)
3. CUellar, CECILIA (MEXICO)
3. GARGANO, GIORGIA (ITALY)

Female Elite -55 kg Kumite
1. BITSCH, JANA (GERMANY)
2. BROWN, JENNA (USA)
3. HSIEH, ANN (USA)
3. ROBINSON, BRANDI (USA)
2016 RESULTS

Female Elite -61 kg Kumite
1. BRITO, FRANYERLIN (VENEZUELA)
2. STEFFEN OLIVEIRA, MAIKE (BRAZIL)
3. PASQUA, LAURA (ITALY)
3. KOVACEVIC, JELENA (CROATIA)

Female Elite -68 kg Kumite
1. CABALLERO, XHUNASHI (MEXICO)
2. MURPHY, CHERYL (USA)
3. SEMERARO, SILVIA (ITALY)
3. MOLINA FERNANDEZ, OMAIRA (VENEZUELA)

Female Elite +68 kg Kumite
1. WASOWICZ, MAYA (USA)
2. YAMAZAKI, MINAKO (USA)
3. QUINTAL, GUADALUPE (MEXICO)
3. VITELLI, GRETA (ITALY)

Male Elite Open Kumite
1. SCOTT, THOMAS (USA)
2. RAMRUP, BRIAN (USA)
3. CHOBOTAR, VALERYI (UKRAINE)
3. MARTINA, MICHELE (ITALY)

Female Elite Open Kumite
1. MURPHY, CHERYL (USA)
2. PASQUA, LAURA (ITALY)
3. LI ZHANG, SUSANA YVETTE (CHILE)
3. GONZALEZ LAVIN, JAVIERA FRA (CHILE)

Male Elite Team Kata
1. HOSPITALET INFANT
2. UPPER-AUSTRIA
3. COSTA RICA
3. TEAM CALIFORNIA

Female Elite Team Kata
1. TEAM USA
BAEZA, TANYA
VALLE, JORDAN
YAMAZAKI, MINAKO
2. TORCOUVER
FERGUSON, ALANA K
LISARA, MONIKA
LEE, SHALENE
Male Team Kumite ELITE
POWER RANGERS (USA)
CHILE
CHILE 2
SOUTH AMERICA

Female Team Kumite ELITE
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
USA
CHILE

Male Adv Kata
1. PAZOS NAYA, DANIEL ENRIQUE (VENEZUELA)
2. VON EGGERS, SETH (USA)
3. MARES, RAMON (USA)
3. PADALKA, VITALY (USA)

Female Adv Kata
1. VALLE, JORDAN (USA)
2. ROY, AURELIE (FRANCE)
3. SKLYAROVA, YELENA (KAZAKHSTAN)
3. PEKAJ, LENA (USA)

35-44 Male Int/Adv Kata
1. RAMIREZ, OSCAR (SPAIN)
2. RAMAN, SURESH (USA)
3. CANALES, RENE (USA)
3. ROBINSON, LORNE (CANADA)

35-44 Female Int/Adv Kata
1. DUQUE, RAQUEL (SPAIN)
2. BADULESCU, CONSTANTA (CANADA)
3. LAGUNAY, VANESSA (USA)
3. CHARLOTTE CHANYAPUTHIPONG, SUNISA (USA)
ANTONIO DIAZ
The Ties That Bind

By Jose M. Fraguas

Antonio Diaz is one of the top kata competitors in the world. In this up-close interview, he shares insights on his training and experience as a competitor and World Kata Champion. He has been spending time in the U.S. training and taking classes pursuing his academic education and training under well-known instructors, such as the late Inoue Sensei. We did catch him on one of his U.S. tours and interviewed him for USA KARATE magazine.
Who have been your influences in Karate and your main instructors and coaches?

Fortunately, I have had the possibility to train with excellent instructors. I had Sensei Shoko Sato in my first years as a child, and in his dojo I met Sensei Javier Mantilla, who was in charge of helping the children’s classes. When Sensei Shoko Sato left Venezuela for a few years, Sensei Mantilla opened his own dojo and under his instruction I received much of my basics. He also introduced me to competition events and he has been one of the most important factors of my success.

I have had the opportunity to train with Sensei Julio Martinez, Sensei Tomohiro Arashiro, and Sensei Robert Young. Another great experience was to travel to Okinawa and train with Tsuguo Sakamoto Sensei for one month. With him, I learned very much about karate history and his training techniques. Tsuguo Sakamoto Sensei was one of my karate idols, along with the late French kata competitor Michael Milon. Both were my inspiration in my karate career.

You have a degree in marketing and are pursuing other interest like physical training. Do you see a career for yourself in these fields?

I believe that the mixture of marketing and sports physical training is very interesting. I have many projects that I would like to develop in the future that will benefit from this mixture. For example: I want to start in Venezuela a series of sport events that will be attractive to all type of public, like shows where we can promote our best sports and athletes and maybe invite also famous athletes from around the world. Of course, I would like to have my own karate dojo that also will be a complete gymnasium with specific physical training. There are many things, but I am sure that I will be able to do each one at the right moment.
How do you like it here in the U.S. and have you considered working here?

I very much like the U.S. and I don’t discard the idea of eventually working here, but it has to be something very well planned. I know that many of the courses that I have been taking and the certifications that I am obtaining will be a great help in the future if I decide to work in the U.S. If a good opportunity appears and there is a good offer, I think I will no doubt come and work in the U.S.

What do you think of American karate, meaning the athletes you have seen from the U.S., and can you make some comparison to other countries?

U.S. Karate has always had very good karateka, and very good results in all the events where I have seen them. But I think that taking into account the amount of karate practitioners in the U.S., there should be many more and much better. I have seen excellent individual performances many times. I think that in the last years, there is more harmony and cooperation between the directing leaders to give more support to the U.S. karate athletes. I hope these changes will generate much more and better U.S. competitors.

Can you tell our readers about your training regimen and how to prepare for an event, specifically how you improve your techniques to be the best you can?

I train six days a week, two sessions a day. I generally do the technical part in the morning when I do many rounds of kihon exercises, and then I work each kata by sections, and I do the complete katas to finish. Then, in the afternoon, I do the physical training; I work with weights where the exercises and the amount of weight vary depending on the periodic plan in time for the next event. I also work the aerobic resistance base, running between 15 and 30 minutes, and finish with stretching. I have different training programs that change accordingly.

How you specifically train a competition kata?

Well, when competing in kata at the elite level, you have to look at the kata like a musician looks at a song. You have to break it in pieces, train and develop these segments to the maximum level of perfection, and then put all the parts together in a cohesive way. When you have to correct mistakes in a specific part of the kata, you don’t have to repeat the kata from beginning to end but go to that segment and work on it. It is easier to correct the mistakes, but you have to understand the whole rhythm of the kata because all the pieces have to be put back together. Of course, there is one thing that we forget … kihon. You need to have a solid technique-base because that is what kata is made of. Kihon repetition is extremely important. If we don’t push ourselves into a strict regimen of kihon repetition, we will never learn how to use our body efficiently from a bio-mechanic point of view. I know this type of training may be boring and sometimes difficult, but that is why we need to fully understand the reason why we are doing it.

What are the differences between competition kata and traditional approach to kata in Karate as an art?

Well, kata for competition focuses on ‘outside’ elements, like power, rhythm, physical ability, etc. This is what’s required by the judges. You try to make every movement precise and perfect from a visual point of view. Traditional kata focuses on Budo “expression” from the karateka … not all body movements have to be “perfect” from the outside. The perfection
is to be found in the “inside” of the karateka expression, in his spirit when doing the kata.

Would you give us an example?

For instance, look at the way we [competitors] perform the kata “Superimpei.” Clean, coordinated and perfect from an outside point of view. We have modified parts to make them more attractive in competition for the judges, and that is all fine. Now, look at some of the old masters doing the same kata. If you have to judge their performance based on sport competition rules, they may not do good in competition because their kata is not “flashy,” but if you look for the best traditional way of doing the kata, they are the ones to learn from. In competition, we look for strong visual aspects. Real Karate should look powerful with strong spirit.

Do you think the personality and psychological profile of the karateka influences whether he chooses Kumite or Kata?

That is a good question. At the elite level, you pretty much have to choose one or the other. In Karate-do, you have to be well-balanced; you need both almost at the same level. As an athlete, you have to go for one in order to get as far as you can. Now, it is true that in order to be a good kata competitor you’ve got to have a very detail-oriented mind. You have to be a patient and detailed person, someone who looks for long-term rewards instead of something “here and now.” Kumite requires a different approach; it requires an “excitement coming from outside,” your opponent. Kata’s excitement comes from “inside.” So yes, both aspects require certain personalities. That is why karate-do is a great way to balance those two aspects of the individual.

What are the differences between sport Karate and Budo Karate?

Sport is sport, period. You train, you compete, and you retire. Budo Karate is a way of life. You can always go back and start again, over and over, because like life itself, it is a process. We should use Karate as a discipline to look at life. Budo philosophy is not only about karate or Martial Arts but about anything you do in life, your job, your family, etc. The key is to use Budo for anything you do in your life.

What for you is the biggest lesson in Budo?

Not to give up. If you give up in anything you start, that shows who you are. You may succeed or fail, but never give up.

Let’s talk about bunkai. How important is it?

Very important. My personal take on it is that it is not good to introduce students into bunkai very early in their training. The mind starts wondering about the applica-
tion of the movements instead of perfecting the movements. If we keep in mind that the application or bunkai of the movements depends on the instructor's level of understanding of kata and actual self-defense, we come to a point where teaching bunkai too early may prevent the student from fully reaching his or her technical potential as far as technique-skill level is concerned.

**Competing in a WKF World Championships is something very special; what are your thoughts on your participation in this kind of elite competition?**

The World Championships are always a very important and exciting event. For instance, competing in the Tokyo Budokan where many karate masters have performed creates a mystic atmosphere and it is the best scenario to work to obtain a medal. It is like playing baseball in Yankee Stadium or soccer in Maracana, Brazil.

**What advice do you have for young athletes getting started?**

To train with passion and dedication, and to love what they do. This is the only way – to give 100 percent, not to think all the time of the prize and rewards at the end of the road, but to enjoy the journey, because sometimes one concentrates too much in winning or losing a medal, and we forget the little details of the day-by-day training. Have a vision of where you want to be and understand the small steps that will take you there and will allow you to reach that vision. And also perseverance, since it is what really is going to help us win and most of all be better people when our competitive career ends. In this way, we not only will be champions in many tournaments but champions of our life as well. At the end, all these Karate principles are like ties that bind us to the art and make the art part of our lives.

**Finally, Sensei Inoue...How do you remember your training with him?**

He was a genius. He was the teacher who put everything together for me to reach a higher level in karate. Everything I trained before...made sense under his guidance.

He had a special talent to dissect the physical body movements and find ways to improve them so the execution of the kata performance got better. I really miss him and I wonder how much knowledge he never shared with us. It is sad that he left us so early but his work definitely impacted the world of karate and he will always be recognized as one of the best Sensei-Coaches that ever existed. Many of his students have become a “blueprint” of kata for the WKF competition. I just wish we had more time with him.
Sensei Fukuda has served on the USA National Karate Team capturing 9 US national titles, Pan American Games “gold medal”, Top 4 in the World, and was awarded the Olympic Athlete of the Year award.

Currently, Sensei Fukuda is a USA KARATE (USANKF) 6th Degree Black Belt under the auspices of the US Olympic Committee; in succession of achieving the rank of Roku-Dan (6th Degree Black Belt) under “Shuko-kai International.”

Sensei Fukuda is a member of the USA Karate National Coaching staff and serves on the USA Karate National Coaching Committee.
Would you tell us about your early days in karate?

I grew up in the state of Hawaii, and at the time, martial arts were really popular, especially Judo and Kempo. Dojos where everywhere and kids where always trying to test their skills on each other. It was really fun. Training in martial arts was like playing baseball or any other sport. The only difference was you had to be very discrete about it. That was just the Budo culture.

As a child I started Wado-ryu with Hirano Sensei and Tsuchiya Sensei. I was fortunate that both Hirano Sensei and my own father were JKA instructors, so I was taught both Wado and Shotokan concepts throughout my youth. Fortunately, I later trained under Kunio Miyake Sensei, a Tani-ha Shito-ryu practitioner. As a JKF instructor (shidoin), he understood the correlation between the four major styles, resulting in a naturalistic transition for me.

In high school, I participated in both Judo and Wrestling. My judo coach made the Olympic team and my Wrestling coach was the former Olympic Greco-Roman national team coach. I'm currently a 3rd Dan in Judo and train under Takeo Iwami, an Olympic Games Silver Medalist. This has lead me to a fascination with ne-waza (grappling techniques), and I still train with Brazilian jiu jitsu practitioners and wrestlers to this day and find that this validates the effectiveness of karate with both application and theory.

I also train in Shorinji Kempo and Iai-do, which I've learned from Miyake Sensei over the years. Shorinji Kempo has really helped me with bunkai in Karate and the Iai-do has aided me in the educational and traditional values of Budo.

Explain for us the main points of your style and its differences with other styles?

My style is based upon the principles of biomechanics movements. Shuko-kai is a branch of Shito-ryu, and the emphasis is kumite. I was really fortunate that Miyake Sensei was a Kumite Shuko-kai All Japan Champion and a High School and College Coach, so he was really open minded to different ideas and concepts (other styles). Tani Sensei was a student of Miyagi Sensei in Goju-ryu before training with Mabuni Sensei. He continued his studies wanting to study a shuri-system, since Mabuni Sensei was well versed in both Higaonna (Naha-te) and Itosu (Shuri-te) Tani Sensei opted to study from Mabuni Sensei in Shuri-te and Shito-ryu, and Shuko-kai was created.

Please tell us a little about training specifics and plans of the kata department of USA Karate?

USA Karate has a unique situation when you consider the total population of our country. In this respect, it is very difficult to have a national training center, where USA Karate has direct access for both developing and current National Team athletes. Because of this, the USA Coaching staff must be able to work with the athletes in various ways, not always face-to-face.

Since I am a Sport Psychology Practitioner I use a mental skills checklist with our athletes that I work with, things such as visualization, imagery, centering, and other mental skills techniques. I really try to transmit the ideology of becoming “a disciple of one’s discipline” and to engage in perpetual learning.

What do you learn as a Coach when you travel to international competitions and see other elite competitors?

Each international competition offers coaching courses organized by either the PKF or WKF. In those courses, topics such as clarification of the rules, criteria of kata, and what the referees and judges are looking for are all covered. When I see other
competitors, I try not to make comparisons, but rather put all of my effort into our athletes that are competing, I do take note of other countries’ trends of katas choices and performances, and they do seem to exist in 5-10 year trends.

How did you get involved in coaching for USA Karate?

Being a former kata athlete for USA Karate, my former coaches Tokey Hill and Hideharu Igaki first approached me and asked if I would like to work with the junior national team. Then, Head Coach Tokey Hill offered for me to work with both the junior and senior national team. Since then, it has been an honor working with all levels of athletes.

What is the level of competition in kata of the USA compared to the rest of the world at this moment?

Just by looking at the results themselves, we have medalled at the WKF Senior World Championships, World Combat Games, World Games, Panamerican Championships, and North American Cup. There has been a finalist in the US Open almost every year. In the most recent Panamerican championships, every one of our athletes made it to the semifinal round. Based upon these results, it is evident that we are the best nation in the Panamericans and one of the top 5 nations in the world for kata.

What are the most important qualities for a kata competitor to become proficient in the elite of kata in the world?

Well, each individual is different with various cultural, physical, and mental attributes. Given this, it is safe to say that karate is an acquired skill set that needs to follow the simple principles of skill acquisition. Having the proper resources to aid the kata competitor to reach the world level is somewhat a process versus a goal.

I’ve seen many talented athletes throughout the world, especially in dominant Kata countries such as Peru, Venezuela, France, Spain, Japan, Italy and more. What we the public see on the world stage is not always the best kata competitor from those countries. But instead is the most experienced athlete that can perform under a high-pressure situation.

Thus, answering your question in a simple fashion, high level competitions. It is safe to say that the common denominator that falls under all categories, ranging
from physical aspects to mental skill to skill acquisition, will be competition at the international levels.

**What can be done to improve the US level in kata competition?**

We can say what an athlete and coach must do as individuals, but we should start with the growth of our National Federation. If our federation increases in participants, then it can provide greater resources and support for the athletes.

**How is the current situation of the kata division in the USA Karate Federation?**

This is an exciting time for USA Karate, I’ve seen the world’s best kata athletes in our team trials. We have been making a statement in the international stage since the 80s until now.

**How important is kata competition and competition in general in the evolution of a karate practitioner?**

I’ve heard from others that kata is the equivalent to grammar in language. In judo, kata is considered to be historical in value and fluent in practice. As for Karate, kata can be used to help refine one’s technique to autonomy and with time, to mastery.

The main mistakes that I can observe is the transcendence from martial arts to sport. There seems to be a non-transparent viewpoint of what a “Sensei” and “Coach” is.
What advice would you give to students on the question of supplementary training for kata competition?

I would advise students and athletes to educate themselves in the realms of fitness as well as sport performance. There is a lot of information and material readily available, and the student/athlete should educate themselves in the direction of their event.

What advice would you give to an instructor who is struggling with his or her own development in kata?

From what I see in the United States, there are a flurry of seminars and resources of information that are readily available. I would recommend coaches to educate themselves in the current WKF rules, attend referee seminars, training camps, and take advantage of continuing education resources such as internet videos and training DVDs.
How do you like to train yourself?

I am very scientific about my training. I believe in the principles of periodization and also apply both physics and biomechanics to my training. I am always aware of what my body is doing, and I am very meticulous about my mental skills training. My training has changed over the years, and I am no longer training just for my competition. Rather, I am now training for longevity, health, and a continuous improvement of my own skills and abilities.

Shotokan, Shito Ryu, Goju, Ryu etc…How do you think the different branches/styles affect the art of Karate in kata competition?

Based upon the rules and guidelines of the WKF, all Japanese (and Okinawan) traditional styles are welcomed. Thus, the different branches of styles have no effect of the art of Karate-do in kata competition.

Do you think that Olympics will be positive for the art of karate-do?

Yes, most definitely. It has been a dream for karate to be in the Olympics. I had always wanted to attend the Olympics as an athlete, fortunately I was able to attend the Pan American Games, which was my Olympic moment. I strongly support the Olympic movement’s promotion of fair play in sport, which strongly correlates the Budo philosophy of karate. It’s a perfect fit. Let’s keep the finger crossed for 2020!

Finally, what advise would you like to give to all Karate practitioners, regardless of style?

Train, train, and train! USANKF
The late Nakayama Sensei was a man of great presence and few words…but I will always remember him telling us, “More kicking techniques! You must practice more kicking techniques!”

In truth, keri-waza, or kicking techniques, comprise about one half of the weaponry of the arsenal in karate. Perhaps of more importance, being that the legs are so tremendously superior to the arms in both strength and reach, neglecting the proper development of kicking can only result in partial development of the art, and thus in obvious ultimate defeat.

Conversely, proper use of kicking opens up a full array of possibilities in both offensive and defensive maneuvers. Only through continued and repetitive practice is one able to make his/her own discoveries and gain deeper and lasting insight that transcends words. Best said, in the words of Yamaoka Tesshu, the great nineteenth century swordsman, calligrapher, poet and Zen Master, “DAMATTE KEIKO!” which translates roughly to “SHUT UP AND PRACTICE!”

In the issues to follow, we’ll examine in detail the four kicks considered to be the foundation of all kicking techniques in the art of karate do: mae-geri, mawashi-geri, yoko-geri, and ushiro-geri. We begin with mae-geri, or front kick.

When properly executed, mae-geri is perhaps the most effective of all the kicking techniques. A well-delivered front kick has devastating power and speed, can be delivered at various angles and heights, and is nearly impossible to stop when executed correctly. Let’s look at the proper mechanics of execution, offensive and defensive maneuvers, and some combinations that may be useful to you in your training.

**MAE-GERI**

Mae-geri is perhaps the most widely used of all kicking techniques. Though relatively easy to understand, proper execution produces a devastating technique that, when highly refined, is very difficult to stop. Additionally, the kick can be delivered from a variety of angles and distances, and can be used in combination with many other techniques, or to set up many other techniques.

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Part 1

KARATE KICKING

BY MICHAEL BERGER

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From the initial instant, it is important to drive the knee upward very quickly and strongly. This can be accomplished by starting with “kicking” off the floor with the heel of the foot that is executing the kick. Simultaneously, squeeze the inner thigh muscles...
of both legs and compress the stomach while exhaling to bring the knee up sharply and decisively, as if to deliver hiza-geri (knee attack). At this point, the level of the body should not have changed, the kicking foot should be held tight to the buttocks and parallel to the floor, and the bent position of the supporting leg should be at least the same angle as it was when it began while in zenkutsu-dachi. (See photos to illustrate these points.) From here, continue using the momentum and acceleration that has been generated to continue the delivery of the kick by thrusting your entire bodyweight forward through translation of the hips.

Here, the supporting leg becomes very important, as it drives the body forward and the kicking leg begins to extend toward the target. It is important not to lean back during the kick, yet to allow the hips to tilt to obtain maximum reach and power. As the kick travels in a slightly upward arcing trajectory and reaches the target, kime the back leg while extending the foot as shown, then quickly recoil the leg while compressing the stomach and cutting the breath for a brief instant. The speed of the recoil of the kick should exceed that of the extension. Lastly, as quickly as possible, return the foot to the ground to minimize the amount of time that you are on one leg.
Common Mistakes

Figure 1. In this instance, the course of the kick is incorrect, as the knee rises upward improperly and late, rather than driving on a linear path to the target. Note that the heel of the kicking foot does not begin in a position tight to the buttocks. Both errors will result in a net loss of power.

Figure 2 shows the position of the kicking foot with the toes pointing downward as the ankle is extended, interrupting the correct course of the kick on its linear path, and preventing the kick from being delivered at a close distance. The only instance in which this foot position would be advantageous would be when delivering the front kick to the groin (kin-geri), on an upward course (keri-age).

Figure 3 shows the support leg straightening as the kick is chambered, which prevents driving off of the support leg to increase the power of the kick. Energy also is lost upward in this case.

Figure 4 shows the shoulder dropping as the kick is initiated, exposing the intention to kick to the opponent, disrupting the balance, and leaving the kicker further open to counter.

Mae-Geri Training Exercise

(1) Begin by facing a partner and raising the knee as quickly as possible, attacking his hands as shown. Then, return the kicking leg to the ground quickly as if performing fumikomi.
Mae-Geri as a Counter Attack

Facing your opponent (1). Counter your opponent's kizami tsuki by shifting to the side while simultaneously blocking the punch (2). Then, execute a kizami mae-geri to the floating ribs (3-4).

Mae-Geri as a Direct Attack

Facing your opponent (1). Step in with the rear leg to reach the optimal distance (tsurikomi ashi) (2), and deliver the kick with the front leg (kizami-geri) (3-4).

KARATE KICKING
MASTERING THE BIG 4!

(2) A partner presses down slightly on the knee, as shown, for a count of ten seconds per repetition, to strengthen the proper muscles (thigh flexors) and to understand the role of the compression of the stomach.

(3) As your partner holds the heel of your kicking leg with both hands, explode decisively to bring the knee up quickly to deliver the kick. Repeat 30 times with each leg.

(4) Interlace your fingers under your upper thigh, as shown, and slowly extend the leg fully without dropping the knee.
Mae-Geri as a Direct Attack

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Mae-Geri as a Counter Attack

Facing your opponent (1). Counter your opponent's kizami tsuki by shifting to the side while simultaneously blocking the punch (2). Then, execute a kizami mae-geri to the floating ribs (3-4).
With the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro less than 60 days away, the USA Karate Team embarked on one of the most important international Karate events, the Pan American Karate Federation Championships (PKF), which encompassed some of the world’s best in the sport of Karate. Two categories Kata (forms) and Kumite (fighting) were going to determine who was the reigning Pan American Champion before the 2016 World Karate Federation (WKF) World Championships taking place this October in the city of Linz, Austria. Current and former World champions and Pan American Games medalist all fought for a chance to represent their National flag before the WKF World Championship.

Athletes and Coaching staff flew from all over the U.S. to the cities of Dallas, Miami and Atlanta to catch the connecting flight with the final destination: Rio de Janeiro. The country of soccer and Samba was holding for 4 days the most important karate competi-
tion in the American continent. The competition took place at the Ginásio do Centro de Educaçã Física Almirante Adalberto Nunes.

Notable athletes competing included Douglas Brose from Brazil (WKF World Champion, Pan American Gold Medalist, PKF Champion) Antonio Diaz from Venezuela (2 time WKF World champion, Pan American games Gold Medalist, 14 time PKF Champion) and former PKF Champion Maria Dimitrova from Dominican Republic. Among these names yields USA Team members Tom Scott (#1 ranked WKF fighter in the World, Karate K1 Paris Open champion, Pan American Games Gold Medalist) and Sakura Kokumai (WKF World Bronze medalist, 4 time PKF Champion, bronze medalist Paris Open and Dutch Open).

The athletes came to the city of Rio from lands far away and arrived in droves of armies representing their countries in the 2016 PKF Championships. The arena was filled with great energy and we had the opportunity to see epic battles between some of the best competitors from the continent.

Leading up to this competition, USA Karate held a training Camp solely dedicated towards the preparation of 2016 USA Karate National team. Once in Brazil, the training sessions in Rio de Janeiro were designed to sharpen up the athletes’ mental acuity, and get all competitors ready for the competition. A common mistake is to have great training sessions and competitive experience burnout on the tatami. In order to prevent this, visualization, simulation match play, and pre/post competition planning was implemented during the days before the actual event.

The arena was filled with great energy and we had the opportunity to see epic battles between some of the best competitors from the continent.
The Kata pack was comprised of 2 Female Kata competitors (Sakura Kokumai and Mina Yamazaki), 2 Male Kata competitors (Joseph Martinez and Gakuji Tozaki), Female team Kata (Jordan Valle, Tanya Baeza, Mina Yamazaki) and Male team Kata (Diego DiGiovanni, Charles Watson, Andrew Watson).

The training process is something that we can control, therefore controlling the controllable is something to focus on. Having a great performance is not measured in outcome results, but how much one has improved.

Our athletes looked very good and since we were able to select our members earlier in the year, the USA Coaching Staff had a chance to work on the development of each and every athlete. Team dynamics, team cohesion, and process goals are some of the things that we, as a Coaching staff, can work on. The challenge in the past was only being able to work with the National team athlete at events. Now, since the selection process is done earlier we have a chance to work with the athlete throughout the year, and we can hit benchmarks and display a steady rate of growth. The whole idea is to think of Team USA as team not an individual.

Sakura Kokumai, a great competitor who really sets her precedence on the mat, took and gold medal in female Kata bringing the challenge to former PKF Champion Maria Dimitrova from Dominican Republic. Her performance was followed was Mina Yamazaki, a former Silver and Bronze medalist at the PKF, who fought hard for the bronze medal only to fall short to Mexico, a 5th place finisher 2014 World championships in Germany.

Joseph Martinez had an amazing performance capturing his first Bronze medal by defeating a strong competitor from Dominican Republic. Gakuji Tozaki, a former 2 time bronze medalist at the PKF and FISU University World Championships. He was dominant in the preliminary rounds only to fall short by one flag to Kenneth Lee from Canada. Martinez was nearly flawless in performance, but the judges awarded the win to his opponent.

Male Team Kata came up short against Costa Rica for the bronze medal. Fe -

This is a testament of our current program and we can’t wait for the future to come. Amazing things lies ahead for TEAM USA Karate.
1) Cleve Baxter posing for the camera. 2) WKF President, Mr. Antonio Espinos and PKF President, Jose García Mañón, during the general meeting. 3) USA Karate Mr. John DiPasquale exchanging ideas during the general meeting. 4) Jose García Mañón, William Millerson from Curacao and John DiPasquale, posing for the camera. 5) Jose García Mañón, PKF President and John DiPasquale, PKF Vice-President. 6) WKF President, Mr. Antonio Espinos being interviewed for Brazilian TV. 7) Mr. Javier Mantilla, President of the Referee Council and Hector Arenas. 8) Mr. Juan Carlos Landaburu, Chairman of the PKF Technical Commission and US Karate legend, Mr. Tokey Hill.
Although there were only 18 countries participating in the Senior Pan American Championships in Brazil, it was highly contested with the best competitors that the PKF had to offer. This Senior USA Team developed a strong bond during the training camps in Colorado and Texas as well as the week leading up to the PKF. It was nice to see the true support that each athlete showed for one another during the championships in Brazil. The team trainings leading up to the event were highly spirited and really energized with each athlete to perform at their best. We have some great veteran leadership that are helping guide this young team on what it takes to be successful on the world stage. I really liked seeing how each of these athletes handled the ups and downs of the competition and know that any setbacks from this competition will only fuel their desire to work harder and be more successful the next time out. The competition continues to grow stronger each and every year and with our sports potential inclusion into the 2020 Olympic Games, it will only get tougher.

As Coaches, we need to push these athletes to be the best and work together on a more consistent basis which will bring out elite competitiveness within each athlete. I feel that athletes need to leave their comfort zone and learn how to deal with being uncomfortable whether it is in training or competing. The more variety experiences that these athletes gain will only help make them more well rounded competitors therefore resulting in more consistent success. The coaching staff really worked diligently together to ensure that each athlete was cared for and given the best chance of success. A strong team is only as good as its strong leadership and this team had both.

1) Cesar Colunga “testing the distance” with Adrian Galvan. 2) USA Team during one of the training sessions in Rio de Janeiro. 3) Coach Shannon Nishi testing Sakura’s stance. 4) Brian Hilliard in action. 5) Coach Akira Fukuda “stretching” the Kata team members.
The facility provided by the organization for practice sessions, was smaller than what was anticipated. Coach Tommy Hood didn’t seem to be bothered by this fact: “It is not the first time that we run into something like this. Therefore, I have designed different training routines based on the actual training space that we’ll be dealing with. Small, medium or big training facilities won’t impact our practice. It is all set and ready and, as soon as I see the space available for us, I know the routine that we’ll be working on.”

The Team’s energy level in Rio during the previous days to the Championship was at the top of the charts. Everybody was focused, excited and willing to represent the USA in one of the most important international events in the world of karate.

The 2016 Pan American Federation Championships received the visit of WKF President Mr. Antonio Espinos. Mr. Espinos, during the meeting with the Presidents of all Pan American Federations, expressed his happiness about the closer-than-ever position the sport of Karate had to be part of Tokyo 2020.
The WKF President also commented about the need for all the Presidents to work together in order to help in the final stages of this long overdue acceptance by the IOC.

PKF President, Mr. Jose Garcia Maañon, assisted Mr. Espinos during the official Pan Am meeting and clearly expressed himself the necessity of unity in the direction the WKF is trying to take karate. “We need to understand that although Karate may be in Tokyo 2020, right after that, we’ll have to fight again to stay in 2024. The final acceptance for 2020 is not the end, but the beginning of a bigger challenge, a challenge that needs the best efforts from all of us,” President Maañon said.

Special seminars and clinics were held for all PKF Referees. The Referee Council ran 3 days of clinics and events under the guidance of Mr. Javier Mantilla, President; Celso Rodriguez from Brazil, Secretary, Mr. Cleve Baxter from USA, Zvonki Celebija from Canada and Hector Arena from Argentina, in order to update and bring up to speed all the PKF referees in the latest kata and kumite changes and updates according to the WKF rules and regulations.

**PKF SENIOR CHAMPIONSHIPS**

**USA TEAM RESULTS**

**Female Kata**
1st – Sakura Kokumai (Gold Medal)
5th – Minako Yamazaki

**Female Kumite -50kg**
7th – Jenna Brown

**Female Kumite -55kg**
3rd – Brandi Robinson (Bronze Medal)

**Female Kumite -61kg**
7th – Megan Cicchetti

**Female Team Kata**
5th – United States of America

**Male Kata**
3rd – Joseph Martinez (Bronze Medal)

**Male Kumite -75kg**
3rd – Tom Scott (Bronze Medal)

**Male Kumite +84kg**
7th – Armando Paz

1) Sakura Kokumai snapping a “yoko geri kekomi” during the performance of kata “Kururunfa”. 2 & 4) Ashley Hill using her kicks to keep the opponent away. 3) Ashley Davis scoring a “chudan tsuki”. 5) Tom Scott “taking over” his opponent.
The Senior Pan American Championships in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil was a great opportunity for the team to compete and test our abilities. Competition for the athletes, no matter the venue, no matter the location, and no matter the tournament is a constant battle of karate skill and mental fortitude. Competition affords us the opportunity to have a growth mindset as we continuously train to improve, compete, reflect, and then repeat the process. This tournament forced the team to dig deep, be gritty, and to persevere. The results were not what many of our athletes wanted, and knowing that success intrinsic, we have to ask ourselves, what can we do to get the results we need in the future? The months to come will test the character of our team. We have to have a relentless pursuit of excellence on a daily basis and put the work in when nobody is watching to ultimately elevate our game to bring home the GOLD!

As a former athlete and current coach my expectations are extremely high. No matter what the results are, I will always expect more and will seek to continuously improve myself and our athletes mentally, physically, and technically. Therefore, it is time to get back to the grind and do work! Let’s together except the challenge, do work, and be the best we can be....

Shout out to our medalist in Brazil we were all extremely happy and proud. Remember, this is just the beginning... Shout out to USA Coaches and Staff--always a pleasure and always grateful to be part of this process.

1) & 4) Armando Paz in action. 2) Jenna Brown throwing a roundhouse kick to her opponent. 3) Gold medallist, Sakura Kokumai performing.
In preparation for the 2016 Pan American Championships, Team USA did train hard. In addition to individual training, the team had two special training camps (Colorado and Texas) where they demonstrated their strong will to win. The first camp started with individuals working on their own performance and by the end of the second camp is when the athletes came together as a true team.

The team came together again in Brazil like they had not missed a beat. We were ready for competition from the moment we gathered in Brazil for the Pan American Championships. All of the trainings in Brazil leading into the tournament were relaxed and the team was working well together. They pushed each other in each practice to get better and better, and challenged each other in preparation for job they came to do.

The team camaraderie was at such a high level that, for the first time in many years they looked like a true TEAM. We all ate every meal together and traveled in a pack. The entire coaching staff and support staff did a great job working together as a unified group for the good of the athletes. It was a pleasure to work with such a great group of individuals.

The Pan American Championships has become a very competitive tournament where as in past years, just a few countries dominated the event. Every single competitor at the event, regardless of country, was a serious match, a serious opponent. The team supported each other from warm up room to the ring. It was a pleasure to see the athletes take initiative and work hard for one another. The high energy ringside was great to pull the best out of each competitor.

The athletes fought hard, they fought consistently. It was the first brick in growing and developing a strong, competitive team for the future. We will get stronger and start to hold each other accountable for our performance. As always, I am proud to be part of the USA Team regardless of the outcome.
The main goal of USA Karate for the immediate future is to bring the team together and grow a cohesive national program. The collective efforts of the National Federation, the Coaching Staff, and great athletes equal a solid recipe for success. It is evident that a new culture emerges which fosters both individual and team growth.

1) Mina Yamazaki analyzing her opponent 2) USA Kumite Team with Brandi, Ashley and Maya, ready for action! 3) Maya attacking her opponent! 4) Joseph Martinez performing his kata. 5) Tanya and Jordan holding the American flag with pride and happiness! 6) Tom Scott playing “hard to catch” with his opponent in the bronze medal match. 7) Calogero Torretta scoring a “gyaku tsuki”.

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