

The Official Magazine of

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# USA KARATE

Volume 19 • Fall 2021



**TOM  
SCOTT**



**ARIEL  
TORRES**

## SPECIAL ISSUE TOKYO 2020

A DREAM COME TRUE



**SAKURA  
KOKUMAI**



**BRIAN  
IRR**



**SPECIAL  
OLYMPIC  
ISSUE**

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# EDITORIAL

## USA KARATE USA NATIONAL KARATE-DO FEDERATION, Inc.

### National Headquarters

1631 Mesa Ave. Ste. A1  
Colorado Springs, CO 80906

### Chief Executive Officer

Phil Hampel

### National Office Staff

Brody Burns - Director of Events

Elizabeth Sottile - Member and Event Services Manager

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**Technical – Katsutaka Tanaka**



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### Mailing Address

USA KARATE MAGAZINE  
P.O. Box 491788  
Los Angeles, CA 90049 (USA)

### Editor-in-Chief

Jose M. Fraguas

### Contributors

Akira Fukuda • Fariba Madani

Teruyuki Okazaki • Rey Chinen • Jeff Kohn

### Art Department

Creative Design

MMR Design Solutions

Production Manager

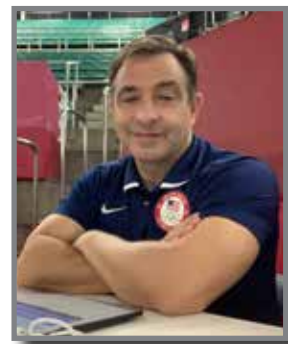
Mario M. Rodriguez

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The only thing we truly own in this life are “moments in time”. Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games was one of these moments in time for those of us who were there and those moments will never be erased. The memories of Tokyo 2020 will always be “our time” because we lived and were part of that moment that now is engraved in the history of karate for generations. Everything else in life, the cars, the watches, the houses, all that will go, but those moments, will stay forever.



This last August, the sport of Karate accomplished what the World Karate Federation fought for many decades, to be part of the Olympic Games. Tokyo 2020 gave us that opportunity. Tokyo gave us the chance to show the world what a well-organized and attractive sport is on the Olympic stage.

This “Tokyo 2020 Special Issue” brings to the readers the inside track of the USA Karate Olympic Team adaptation time in Koga City, the thoughts and feelings of the athletes, the coaches, the staff and many curiosities that were part of this amazing experience...of a great “moment in time”. These “moments in time” really matter...because once they are gone, they are gone forever

Unfortunately, the sport of Karate won't be in Paris 2024 Olympic Games. But that, is another story.

The truth is that you can't drive your car looking into the rearview mirror. If you keep driving your car looking back, you are going to crash...and burn. There is a reason why the rearview mirror is smaller than the windshield. The real reason for that is because all what the rearview mirror does is allow you to see what you have passed and left behind. This helps you to not repeat mistakes you did, learn from the experiences and focus on the positive to improve your future. The windshield is your future. And that is exactly what the world of Karate has to do now, keep looking forward.

Nobody knows what the future holds for karate at the Olympic Stage, too many variables and many of them, impossible to control. But one thing is certain, in Tokyo, history was made. We all are grateful for the great opportunity of writing our names forever in the history book of karate. We took with us every single fan and we felt their support every step of the way. And for that, we are deeply grateful as well.

Until the next time we meet in the Olympic Arena, enjoy this Special Issue of Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, where we had the opportunity to show the world what the sport of Karate is really about. **USANKF.**

Jose M. Fraguas  
Editor-in-Chief



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By Phil Hampel

From The  
CEO'S DESK

# It Takes a Village

**A**s I look back on this journey of 6+ years it's been an insane ride. Who would have thought we would go from a Pan American Only Sport to a full blown Olympic Sport with 4 fully funded athletes? And all 4 of those athletes would make the very selective cut to be the first Olympians in Karate. I am so proud and so happy for each of you. We had some amazing successes with Ariel Torres earning a Bronze Medal in Men's Kata and Sakura Kokumai competing in the Female Kata Bronze Medal Match. The excitement in both of the kumite divisions and Tom Scott just missing getting into the -75kg Kumite Semi-finals. You should all be proud of what you accomplished. And our very own Fariba Madani doing an amazing job as a technical official at the Games so proud of her in the referee corps. You all represented our sport and our country extremely well and left everything you had on the field of play

CONGRATULATIONS!!! Remember this from here forward you will always be recognized as Olympians! How amazing is that!

36 countries and 81 athletes competed in these Olympic Games. We finished in 10th place as a country on medal count and 15th when they weighted the medals. Pretty impressive given all that our Olympians had to overcome to get here.

I have heard from several people within the USOPC who are very excited for what you all have accomplished and wish you all congratulations.

It takes a village to pull this off and I want to especially thank the coaches, Brian Mertel, Javier Mantilla and Brody Burns, for all you did to help support our athletes through the biggest event of their athletic careers. I know that the credentials were frustrating, but the switching made it possible for each of you to be there for the athletes. Thank you for being a part of this amazing journey. And thanks to our national coaches who traveled to K1 events and helped prepare our athletes for the Games. Your dedication to the sport and our athletes is amazing and appreciated.

Thanks to Nicole Clinton and Dr Bartley – Nicole has been with our team since the Pan Am Games and has worked tirelessly to get our athletes treatments when they needed them and help to make sure everyone was at their best and ready for competition. We could not have done this without Nicole. Thank you, Nicole, for keeping everyone healthy and always being there for our athletes. Dr Bartley has been here for the whole ride, and I am so happy that she has been a part of this family working towards this event. We had her on video calls as our athletes traveled to Karate 1 events making herself available at all kinds of odd hours always with a smile. I was happy for Dr Bartley when she was named as the Director of Mental Health for the USOPC. Despite that new work load she continued to be available to all our athletes. When I found out that the USOPC was bringing mental health professionals and Dr Bartley wasn't one of them because the decision was made a year before she joined, I was a quite surprised. So, USA Karate helped TeamUSA, we had always planned to have Dr Bartley in Tokyo and I worked out a way to get her credentialed into the village to support other TeamUSA athletes when our athletes did not need her time. It worked wonderfully and I'm sure Dr Bartley was exhausted and many athletes from TeamUSA were appreciative. Thanks, Jess, for all your support.

Maile Chinen did such an amazing job to work all the details out with Koga City and to make sure we had an amazing camp experience. It was no small task. We spent a lot of time on the phone and video calls with city officials and Jon Omori who is a special advisor to the USOPC. Maile made it all come to life and I can't thank her enough for filling in for me with the Host City. Without Jon Omori there would have been no Host City. Thank you, Jon, for all the work you put into make sure we were on a path to success and the guidance you provided Maile and I on how to make the Host City experience amazing.

Can't leave off our Press Officer. Jose Fraguas joined us in Tokyo and has been working the media contacts and interviews in the mix zone. Writing content for TeamUSA and for Cara Fasciani our communications person who was also up in the middle of the night supporting getting all our social media posted. Thank you, Cara, for all your support and bringing your insight and knowledge from Judo and the 2016 Games. Thanks to Mark Jones for his help in making sure we had a communication plan and wisdom on how we could bring all the pieces together.

We are so lucky to be a part of Team V Sport Performance at the USOPC. I can't even begin to acknowledge all the great wisdom and support we received from Ron Brant, Sarah Crowell, Meredith Miller and Jennifer Geisheker. They helped shape this path for us. We also got amazing support along the way from Kelly Skinner, Kacie Wallace, Nuwanee Kirihennedige, Mason Walthers and a host of other amazing people at the USOPC who work so hard for all the right reasons to make this an amazing experience for the athletes.

Thanks to the USA-NKF Board for all their support and especially to Roger Jarrett, Tokey Hill and John DiPasquale for years of pursuing the Olympic Dream and helping to bring it to reality.

And last but surely not the least thank you Elizabeth Sottile Poloni. You have one of the most difficult roles for this team. Mostly problem solving and all the things that must happen to keep the team moving forward that no one else wants to do. We are a small staff and I know when Elizabeth wasn't taking your spit to get tested or reminding you to update your apps, she was also answering calls and emails about the nationals. I'm so proud of the support we have been able to provide the delegation. I'm so proud of Elizabeth for all her hard work and willingness to do whatever it takes to get things done. You all don't make it easy on trips and everyone is under a ton of pressure so when we all give each other a little grace awesome things happen. Thank you, Elizabeth, for making this all work. It a bit like being a cat wrangler.

I am so very proud of all of you and what we have accomplished together. This is an experience that we may never have again, but the memories will last forever. It took a village and I'm happy we were in it together. **USANKF**

*Thanks!*  
*Phil Hampel*  
*Chief Executive Officer*  
*USA National Karate-do Federation*

# FEMALE KATA

**GOLD MEDALLIST**   
*Congratulations Sandra Sanchez!* 



**#KarateSpirit** 



**SILVER MEDALLIST**   
*Congratulations Kiyon Shimizu!* 



**#KarateSpirit** 



**BRONZE MEDALLIST**   
*Congratulations Viriana Bottaro!* 



**#KarateSpirit** 



**BRONZE MEDALLIST**   
*Congratulations Mo Sheun Grace Lau!* 



**#KarateSpirit** 



# **MALE KATA**

**GOLD MEDALLIST**   
*Congratulations Ryo Kiyuna!* TOKYO 2020



 **#KarateSpirit** 



**SILVER MEDALLIST**   
*Congratulations Damian Quintero!* TOKYO 2020



 **#KarateSpirit** 



**BRONZE MEDALLIST**   
*Congratulations Ariel Torres!* TOKYO 2020



 **#KarateSpirit** 



**BRONZE MEDALLIST**   
*Congratulations Ali Sofuoglu!* TOKYO 2020



 **#KarateSpirit** 



# FEMALE KUMITE

- 55Kg

- 61Kg



+61Kg



# MALE KUMITE

- 67Kg

- 75Kg

<b>GOLD MEDALLIST</b> <i>Congratulations Steven Dacosta!</i>  #KarateSpirit	<b>SILVER MEDALLIST</b> <i>Congratulations Eray Samdal!</i>  #KarateSpirit
<b>BRONZE MEDALLIST</b> <i>Congratulations Darkhan Assadilov!</i>  #KarateSpirit	<b>BRONZE MEDALLIST</b> <i>Congratulations Abdel Raman Almazafza!</i>  #KarateSpirit

<b>GOLD MEDALLIST</b> <i>Congratulations Luigi Busa!</i>  #KarateSpirit	<b>SILVER MEDALLIST</b> <i>Congratulations Rafael Aghajev!</i>  #KarateSpirit
<b>BRONZE MEDALLIST</b> <i>Congratulations Stanislav Horvath!</i>  #KarateSpirit	<b>BRONZE MEDALLIST</b> <i>Congratulations Gabor Haszapati!</i>  #KarateSpirit

+75Kg

<b>GOLD MEDALLIST</b> <i>Congratulations Sajad Ganjzadeh!</i>  #KarateSpirit	<b>SILVER MEDALLIST</b> <i>Congratulations Tareq Hamed!</i>  #KarateSpirit
<b>BRONZE MEDALLIST</b> <i>Congratulations Ugur Altas!</i>  #KarateSpirit	<b>BRONZE MEDALLIST</b> <i>Congratulations Ryojuro Araga!</i>  #KarateSpirit



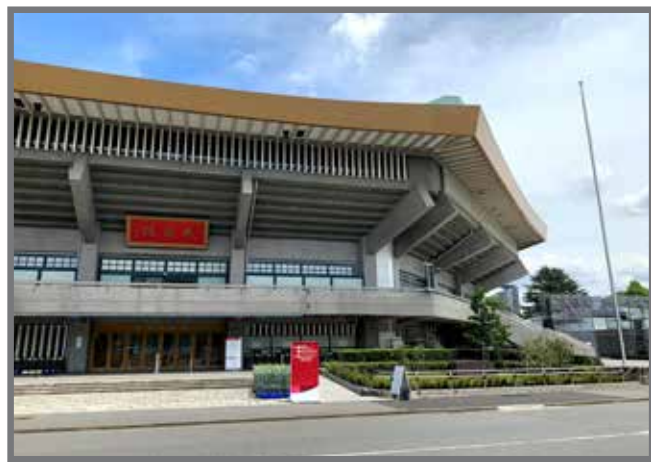
# THE BUDOKAN

## MARTIAL ARTS HALL

**N**ippon Budokan (日本武道館), often shortened to simply Budokan, is an iconic building in Kitanomaru Koen in Chiyoda, Tokyo, Japan. Originally built for the inaugural Olympic judo competition in the Tokyo 1964 Summer Olympics, its name translates as Martial Arts Hall in English. While its primary purpose is to host martial arts contests, the arena has gained additional fame as one of the world's most iconic musical performance venues. The Budokan is modeled on the octagonal Yumedono (Hall of Visions or Hall of Dreams) in Horyuji Temple in Nara.

---





The main purpose of the 14,000 capacity Budokan (lit. "Japan martial arts hall") is staging national martial arts competitions of all kinds including aikido, judo, karate, kendo, kyudo (Japanese archery), naginata and shorinji kempo. Professional wrestling and kick boxing events are also held at this legendary venue. Indeed back in 1976 boxer Muhammad Ali fought a bout with Japanese pro-wrestling legend Antonio Inoki at the Budokan. However, due to declining audiences following the death of Mitsuharu Misawa and the retirement of Kenta Kobashi, professional wrestling ceased running regular shows in the Budokan.

The Budokan held the first World Karate Championships in 1970.

The Beatles were the first rock group to perform at Budokan in a series of five shows held between June 30 and July 2, 1966. Their appearances were met with opposition from those who felt the appearance of a western pop group would defile the martial arts arena.

The venue is popular for recording live albums because it has good acoustics, is relatively large and Japanese audiences are known for being highly appreciative when appropriate

**岡崎 恩章**



- 1 福岡県
- 2 1911 年
- 3 松浦藩
- 4 アメリカ合衆国、カナダ
- 5 1963 年〜
- 6 日本の空手が世界に展開することを期願致します。

**石黒 保成**



- 1 兵庫県
- 2 1943 年
- 3 兵庫県
- 4 1967 年〜
- 5 1967 年〜
- 6 1967 年〜

**出村 文男**



- 1 神奈川県
- 2 1940 年
- 3 新東洋武術会
- 4 アメリカ合衆国
- 5 1965 年〜
- 6 東京に用いられ、日本武道アカデミーでは、新東洋武術会から引退した後も、1970年代後半まで、東京オリンピックの国際空手道連盟の指導者として活躍。

**三上 幸之**



- 1 東京都
- 2 1911 年
- 3 日本空手連盟、礼法連
- 4 アメリカ合衆国
- 5 1961 年〜
- 6 空手道普及を通して世界的な展開の機会を創出することを期す。

**大城 利弘**



- 1 兵庫県
- 2 1949 年
- 3 神道武術連
- 4 アメリカ合衆国
- 5 1979 年〜
- 6 空手道の発展に貢献し、空手道イベントである。

**村山 邦夫**



- 1 北海道
- 2 1941 年
- 3 北海道
- 4 アメリカ合衆国
- 5 1967 年〜

**矢口 重**



- 1 広島県
- 2 1912 年
- 3 松浦藩
- 4 アメリカ合衆国、カナダ
- 5 1965 年〜
- 6 オリンピックの成功を期す。

**山口 繁宏**



- 1 鹿児島県
- 2 1909 年
- 3 鹿児島
- 4 1963-1987 年
- 5 1963-1987 年
- 6 1963-1987 年

**阿部 利高明**



- 1 兵庫県
- 2 1913 年
- 3 兵庫県
- 4 アメリカ合衆国
- 5 1965 年〜
- 6 オリンピックを期して、日本空手が世界に展開することを期す。

空手を世界に広めた海外指導者たち  
 Leaders who spread Karate to the world

空手は世界に広まるにつれて、指導者の役割はますます重要になります。そして、空手は世界に広まるにつれて、指導者の役割はますます重要になります。

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*“The Budokan is modeled on the octagonal Yumedono (Hall of Visions or Hall of Dreams) in Horyuji Temple in Nara.”*



but quiet during performances. Numerous acts have recorded live albums at Budokan, including Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, Duran Duran, Kiss, Ozzy Osbourne, Judas Priest, Journey and Deep Purple.

The Budokan is also the venue for a number of annual events including The National Memorial Service for War Dead held each year on August 15, the day of Japan’s surrender in World War II. The Emperor and the Empress of Japan and the Prime Minister attend.

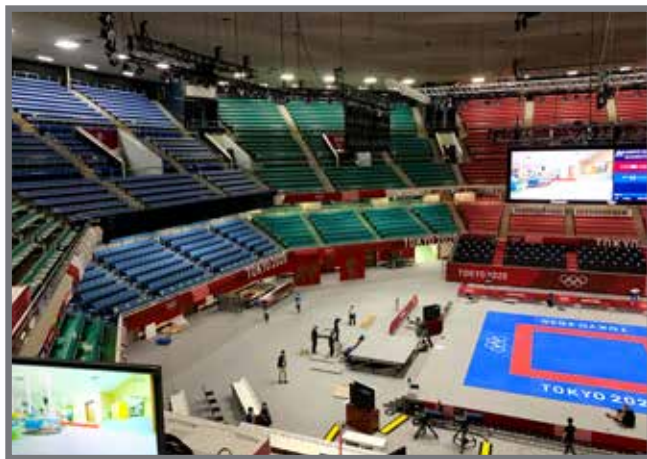
In the month of November, the Budokan hosts a 2-day military music festival by the Japan Self-Defense Forces (air, sea and land) along with the U.S. Army Japan Band.

As well as martial arts and music concerts, national school calligraphy competitions are held at the Budokan.

The Budokan also has a publishing arm specializing in martial arts books to help perpetuate the traditions and teaching of the classical arts of budo.

In Tokyo 2020 Olympics, the Budokan held the first Karate competition in the Olympic Games making history in the history of the art and sport of the “empty hand”. **USANKF**





*“The Budokan primary purpose is to host martial arts contests, the arena has gained additional fame as one of the world’s most iconic musical performance venues.”*



*“The Budokan is also the venue for a number of annual events including The National Memorial Service for War Dead held each year on August 15, the day of Japan’s surrender in World War II.”*

# KOGA CITY

## THE BEGINNING OF UNFORGETTABLE JOURNEY

### INTERVIEW WITH COACH MAILE CHINEN KOGA CITY USA TEAM COORDINATOR

*By Jose M. Fraguas*



Coach Maile Chinen

**You were the person in charge of organizing everything for the USA Team in Koga City. How was the experience?**

First and foremost, I would like to thank Mr. Phil Hampel and the USA Karate Federation for trusting and giving me the opportunity to help organize our team's pre-games camp in Koga City, Ibaraki Prefecture. The experience? It was GREAT! I am truly honored and forever grateful that I got to play a part. Karate being in the Olympics has been a dream of many and for it to finally come around has been a long time coming.

Once we arrived into Japan, we had to go through multiple stations of screening, take a Covid test and clear customs and immigrations to finally meet our host city staff who greeted us with big smiles, waving mini U.S.A. flags and welcome banners. They were very friendly and very accommodating from the start. Flying into Japan, our team was able to acclimate, adjust and prepare for seven days before heading out to the Tokyo Village.

With the rules put in place for the safety of our team, an outsider may think how boring it must have been for our team not being able to leave our hotel or training venue. YES, it would have been great to go exploring; however, our host city staff made sure that this trip was memorable. Walking into our training venue, it was decorated with big banners welcoming USA Karate. The lobby was lined with flagstaff banners that were created and designed by the local middle school children of Koga City. They were so creative, our athletes wanted to take them home. Originally it was to go back to the school but they were kind enough to give it to our athletes in exchange for their autographs. Some of you may have seen one of the banners on Tom Scott's instagram story. As we walk upstairs to where Sakura and Ariel's training rooms are the hallways are lined with rows and rows of posters from the grade school children. The posters were all Olympic themed and each athlete was given a prize ribbon with their name on it to select which one was their favorite. The athletes walked back

and forth down the hall to choose their favorite but it was so difficult to choose just one. Many of them, if not all, were great! All four athletes discussed which was their top poster and finally came to their decision. They each picked one and placed their ribbon on the corner of the poster. After we left Koga, they would take back the posters to the children and show the ones that our athletes picked. I'm sure the kids were so happy to see that their poster got chosen by an Olympian and would have loved to meet them. We hope that one of these days, in the near future, we will be able to return to Koga to visit the young children and the people of Koga. Our lounge rooms were always filled with origami creations, and extra origami paper for our team to try and fold and make. Our team was able to taste locally made sweets from Koga, gifted Coca-cola and Toyota sponsored Olympic towels, received Hirota towel & apparel and other karate merchandise. Our athletes were featured in many of the local newspaper, welcomed by the city Mayor, Vice-Mayor and other important personnel. They even got to teach them a little karate and do a photo op. At the culinary school, we were treated with yummy desserts, and I was able to surprise the team with my childhood favorite - waffle sandwich ice cream - which the team loved! We were also honored by meeting the Chairman of the Koyo Gakuen Culinary School, Mr. Yukinobu Saito, who also holds a rank of shodan in karate. He was full of energy and good vibes and so happy to meet our team, he wanted to demonstrate for us NAIHAN-CHI SHODAN. The staff also taught some of our team members how to make an origami cube, and also shared and gifted us Japanese stationary.

Ibaraki prefecture, which Koga City is in, is a famous region natto. What is natto? It is fermented soybeans. During breakfast at our hotel, natto was served. I love natto and the only other person that I know likes it is Sakura. Natto is sticky and slimy in texture and has an acquired taste due to its powerful smell and strong flavor. I wanted our team to try and to my surprise a few of them were up for it. Mixing the natto continuously created this stringy, sticky mess and the look on their faces had a look of doubt. But after explaining that it was a superfood they went for it. "Not bad," was some of their response and I was happy that they were willing to give it a shot!

We all stayed busy, whether it was together or alone, doing something or nothing. Most importantly, we all had a great time, creating memories and an experience that will last a lifetime.



USA Team in front of our hotel - ROUTE INN KOGA EKIMAE HOTEL



Athletes with Koga City staff gifting the team Japanese stationary



Athletes getting to sample locally made sweets of Koga and picking their favorite



These two helped me get what i envisioned and brought into reality. To the right of me, Mr. Hieda Kenji, to the left, & Mr. Masahiko Ueno. They fulfilled my requests for the team and went above and beyond. Mr.Ueno and his staff was with our team from the early morning 730am to driving us back safely to our hotel after dinner around 830-900pm

**When you connected with the City of Koga, how did the officials of the city responded to the USA Team request? Please explain the process to set it up.**

Prior to connecting with Koga City, there were many zoom meetings that Mr. Hampel sat through to make it happen. After the many zoom calls, messages, phone calls and video chats, we were able to secure Koga City as our host town with the help from Mr. Jon Omori, USOPC Special Advisor. We were supposed to travel to Japan for a site check but was unable to due to the pandemic and instead did a virtual one. We communicated through email but as the months and days got closer and the final details came into place, I had to make sure that both Japan and USA were on the same page and I would often call to confirm our requests.

Mr. Omori played a big part in helping me to plan our camp with Koga City. His experience with other NGB and the Olympics itself has made our process in preparing our camp smoother. His advice helped me tremendously when dealing with the host city.

I would have to say that Koga City and its staff were very patient and accommodating to each and every one of our request. At times it was a little difficult to explain my vision in an email. They would not understand and I would call them so that I can explain in Japanese over the phone. Sometimes, I would have to draw out or send them sample pictures of what I was talking about. Our requests often came back with a response stating, “we will do our best to accommodate you.” While other times, they would tell me that my request was not possible. With persistence and persuasion the impossible became possible. From bringing in a washer and dryer, providing a blender, microwave, buying Costco items, ordering goods on amazon Japan, making custom meals, buying specific snacks, sending pictures of the layout of the entire gymnasium and equipment in the gym and having access to all facilities - weight room, swimming pool & track and field, Koga City did it all. They made sure that USA Karate had a great experience!

I can’t thank Mr. Hieda & Mr. Ueno and their staff enough for their hard work, long days, and love for our team and karate. They truly wanted the best for our team and we could definitely feel and see it!

Arigatogozaimasu for helping turn a vision into an amazing reality that the team is forever grateful for.

**What it was the first thing you had to “tackle” when you start to organize things for the Team?**

Being a former athlete and a current national coach, I was trying to put myself in their shoes and come up with a plan that met their wants and needs. Not having a previous Olympic pre-games camp experience to go off by, I had to start with a blank slate. With the Olympic Games already started, I often caught myself looking on social media, and online to see what other teams were doing during their camp and get ideas on how to plan ours.

I knew training space and food was some important factors. I



Local Koga City Karate Renmeikai gifting our athletes with Phiten shirts, Hirota towels and karate-gis.

wanted to give each athlete their own training room with a full size ring so that they can train how they want, when they want, blasting their own music, without worrying about other teammate's feelings. Sakura and Ariel were on the 2nd floor, each with their own room, with mirrors, while Tom and Brian shared the 1st floor main gym. Daily menu options were set, and a refuel station was necessary so that the team could grab & go snacks, fruits, sweets, and drinks at their own leisure. If you know Japan, they are known to have an array of drinks. They have vending machine after vending machines of drinks. From all sorts of coffee, teas, soft drinks, juices, water, sports drinks and energy drinks, we made sure to keep our team hydrated with the refrigerators full and drink stations set up throughout the gymnasium. Some of the favorites were the Pocari Sweat, Aquarius, Georgia coffee cafe latte and green tea.

I also wanted to provide the team with a rest and relaxation area where they could play video games, watch TV, nap, or just relax and recover. Lounge chairs, ottomans and tables were set up to provide to do just that! This area was also often used to do virtual interviews, and chat with family and friends back home.

**How did the safety measures for COVID-19 affect the logistics of the USA Karate Team's stay in Koga City?**

I'm not going to lie...leaving to Japan for the Olympics, I was both nervous and excited. Nervous because it was my first trip in 18 months but excited because this was history in the making - Karate into the Olympics!



There was a long hallway filled with art from the local school kids. Each athlete got a special award ribbon with their name on it and chose their favorite art picture. Once they chose their favorite, they placed the award ribbon on that student's art

There were many procedures put into place for the safety and health of TeamUSA Karate. We all had to have two negative tests prior to leaving to Japan and upon arrival, take another test and have a negative result before leaving the airport. Once we were cleared, we were able to head to Koga City on a private bus.

In our hotel in Koga City, we had our own entrance to the 2nd floor of the hotel which was exclusive to USA Karate. Amenities, bath towels, drinks, etc. were all laid out on a table so to minimize the contact with people outside of our team. Elevators could not stop on our floor and only USA Karate and the host city staff had access to our floor.



Sample of one of our daily lunch options that I got to create made specially by the amazing chefs at the Koyo Gakuen Culinary School.



Sweets in our break room with origami (Japanese paper folding) creations made by the Koga City staff.

Every morning at 8:00AM our entire team completed a PCR testing. At 9:00AM we headed down to the lobby for breakfast. A barricade was set up from our hotel annex to the main lobby. Prior to entering the breakfast room, temperatures were taken, plastic gloves were provided to grab our food from the breakfast buffet. Our breakfast was reserved in a private room for USA Karate only. After breakfast, we went back to our rooms and rested for a bit. At 10:00AM we left the hotel, which we would not come back to till after dinner. We arrived at the Hanamomo Gymnasium, which was our home for majority of each day. This gymnasium was like a local recreation center that had a weight room, track and field, swimming pool, and multiple gym rooms. The gymnasium was reserved for only USA Karate. Once we settled in, each athlete had their own specific training schedule. Each athlete went to their designated private room and had their technical training. Their supplemental training and use of the weight room, track and field and swimming pool was usually reserved between 4:30-7:00PM. The chefs from the Koyo Gakuen Culinary School would come about 12 noon to prepare the rice, miso soup, etc. on site and serve our pre-packed lunches at 1:00PM. We all ate in the lounge room, which was our daily 'huddling' spot. In the afternoon, some athletes had a 2nd training. During our down time, our team did laundry, learned how to make origami, played video games, did interviews, work, or just rested. As 6:00pm started rolling around, we started to clean up and prepared to leave. Usually around 6:30PM we headed out to the Koyo Gakuen Culinary School on our private bus to have dinner. We ate in a dining hall reserved for USA Karate where the master chefs and their students prepared our pre-selected dinners. Each member's dinner was served separately on trays and they would usually call our names when our dinner was ready. Everything was made fresh and on the spot! Once dinner was completed, I met with the master chef to adjust the next day's menu for each person. Some decided to change their option, while others adjusted their portions. With a full stomach we were ready to head back to the hotel, take a shower and get ready for the next day.

A couple days during our stay in Koga, the athletes had some time to do interviews and photo sessions with the local newspa-

per and news station. We also had a welcome reception by the local Mayor, Vice-Mayor, Chairman of Education, local karate Renmeikai staff and other important personnel. Interviews and receptions were all socially distanced and during the interviews athletes and the media were also separated by a clear partition.

This was our daily schedule and then we headed out to Tokyo on August 1st, 2021. As many of our facilities were reserved for our team only, we felt very safe.

**What it was the most difficult thing to deal with: meals, safety measures, transportation,... ?**

I would have to say the most difficult thing I had to deal with would be the meals. Japan’s food is so amazing but I knew that we wouldn’t be able to eat out at restaurants, stop at the convenience stores, order take out or anything of that sort due to the strict rules and restrictions. Mr. Jon Omori, USOPC Special Advisor, who has experience with other NGBs advised that I be as specific as possible to our team’s meals. When I say specific, I mean to the amount of rice or meat in GRAMS! I was a little overwhelmed at first thinking “gosh, I’ll have to get gram portions of every single meal for every person on our team? There’s no way!”

All our daily meals had to be decided in advance and sent in before leaving to Japan. Our lunch and dinner meals were to be prepared by the master chefs and staff at the Koyo Gakuen Culinary School and our breakfast buffet by the hotel. “What if it is not enough food? What if they don’t like the food?” were some of the questions running through my head. I knew that strolling down the streets to decide which restaurant we wanted to eat, or stopping by the convenience store to grab a quick snack was ruled out. So, I decided to ask our athletes what they specifically wanted to eat during our stay in Koga. Grilled chicken, fish, tsukemono/sunomono (pickled vegetables), ume (pickled plum), ramen, spaghetti, Japanese pastries, bacon, yogurt and Pocari Sweat/Aquarius (sports drink similar to Gatorade/Powerade) were some of the requests made. With that in mind, I started preparing a daily menu for our breakfast, lunch and dinners.

Our team made their selection in advance from about nine different meal options for both lunch and dinner. Each meal also had drinks to select from and for dinner included a dessert option. I knew I had to include some of my favorite food such as curry rice, okonomiyaki (japanese savory pancakes), sukiyaki (simmered pot of meat and vegetables), oyakodon (chicken egg bowl), gyudon (beef bowl) & hiyashichuka (chilled ramen noodles) for the team to choose from. Rather than measuring each person’s portion by the grams, I asked if they can prepare our meals and adjust accordingly after our first day in Koga. The worries in my head that I had was all gone after our first meal from the culinary school. Everything was so delicious and the team were all so very happy with the food. It was more than enough.

During each meal, I would often hear our team asking each other what they chose or took a peak to see what they were eating. Many times, they persuaded the other to try it and the culinary school chefs were kind enough and accommodating for us to



USA Team Leader Elizabeth Poloni getting ready to taste a typical Japanese soup at the Koga City facilities.



Coach Chinen getting ready to enjoy the dinner!



USA Team at the Koga Gakuen with the Chairman, Mr. Yukinobu Saito.



Local sweets of Koga City.

make adjustments and change our team's menu selections. After our first day in Koga, we were basically able to customize each person's menu for the next day after dinner.

When it came to breakfast, which most people say is the most important meal of the day, the hotel did not disappoint. I requested our normal scrambled eggs, omelette, bacon, yogurt, oatmeal, juices and coffee. The hotel went over and beyond and served fish, braised short ribs, croquette, calamari, hamburger steak, lamb chops, tempura, spaghetti, mapo tofu, steak, and teriyaki chicken to name a few and many, many more on top of my request. YES, the team started the day off like a champ!

Growing up in Japan, I had my favorite sweets and snacks and I wanted to make sure that our team was able to try them. Thankful to our host city staff, they were able to help me get some of them and I was able to share my childhood favorites.

We all know what happens when you get hungry.....we get HANGRY! Well, I'm glad that the culinary school was accommodating to our team's requests, and the hotel provided for more than what was expected. Our tummies were definitely full and happy!

**Looking in retrospective, anything that could have been done better or do you feel satisfied on how things went for the Team? Did you get any feedback from the Athletes and Coaches?**

Looking back, I am happy with how everything turned out. With uncertainties at our hands throughout the entire process, I am pleased that the camp was everything that I hoped for and more. My main goal was for our athletes to be happy, feel supported and comfortable prior to heading out to Tokyo. Since our team



Brian Irr's artwork choice!



Brian Irr journey to origami mastery.



Athlete Ariel Torres enjoy Koga artwork.



USA Team amenity bar to avoid having to contact Hotel staff.



Daily PCR testing!

was restricted to only our hotel, training venue, and dining cafeteria, I really wanted to make sure that they could get the best experience with what we had to work with. They were very happy and grateful with the experience in Koga.

**Anything you would like to say to all the USA TEAM supporters after this Tokyo 2020 experience?**

It definitely takes a village to be successful and without their support, karate in the Olympics would not have happened. So, to all the supporters from the past and current, WE DID IT! This was for you!!! From the USOPC, USA Karate, board members, Senseis, Coaches, teammates, former athletes, students, medical staff, fans, sponsors, and most importantly family and friends, you all played a part in helping achieve what was once a dream become a reality - KARATE INTO THE OLYMPICS. Lastly, we cannot forget our Olympians - Sakura Kikumai, Ariel Torres, Brian Irr, and Tom Scott...thank you for your many years of dedication, sacrifice and hard work and for representing the USA and karate with honor and dignity. We are all very proud of you! Continue to inspire and make an impact to those around you and to our future generation of champions!. **USANKF**



Coach Chinen Natto Power!



1) USA Team posing in front of the Hotel in Koga City. 2) Amazing support from the city of Koga to the USA Karate Olympic Delegation. 3) Athletes receiving gifts. 4) Sakura Kokumai enjoying one of the meals. 5) Sakura Training in the Koga City facilities. 6) USA Team “Four Samurai” dressed for the occasion! 7) Tom Scott and Brian Iir during a practice session. 8) Sakura Kokumai.... is done!



1) The four USA Karate athletes posing for the camera! 2) Coach Maile Chinen taking over the “We are the Team USA” couch! 3) Tom Scott and Ariel Torres “posing” in the traditional Japanese “white” tatami. 4) Sakura Kokumai welcoming the new day and ready for early morning practice. 5-6 & 7) Ariel Torres, Tom Scott and Brian Irr getting ready for “meal time”! 8) Bronze medalist Ariel Torres showing his balance in the “one leg greeting” pose.



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# ARIEL TORRES

## Male Kata

**Ariel, you were the only one to directly qualify in Paris by getting a Gold medal in Kata. You got your ticket to Tokyo Games with an impressive performance defeating your opponents by more than one point. What was your feeling in Paris?**

After getting a ticket to Tokyo I felt like all the sacrifices my parents made, all the things that my sensei Robert Young did for me finally paid off. That this dream we had foru (plus one) years ago finally came true. And that I'll be able to keep training towards Tokyo 2020. Karate is a journey of self discovery. And you'll encounter people that will pave the path of this journey for you. Without my support village I would not have been able to earn the path to the Olympics.

**Did anything change inside of you when you knew that your name was going to be in the Karate history books like one of the USA Athletes?**

It's hard to say. On one hand I'm happy that I made my family proud and that I get to keep fighting for my dream. On the other hand, I have another vision. Win my country, family, sensei and coach an Olympic medal. I never thought about history. I just wanted to make them proud. So I kept working hard.

**First stop was the host city, Koga. How was the adaptation week in Koga and the training with Coach Mantilla? Did you keep in touch with your Sensei Mr. Robert Young?**

Training in Koga City went well. Coach Matilda made sure my mentality was always in the right place. Not too focused or too relaxed. He knew when to make me laugh and when to fire me up. I would train with my sensei Robert Young everyday Via FaceTime. Sensei Young would focus on refining the details in all my kata reminding me of minor adjustments in order to be more explosive and smooth. Sensei Young and Coach Mantilla would always elaborate with one another to make sure we all see the same picture.





## **Were you worried about what was waiting for you – pressure wise - in Tokyo?**

No worries at all. I was living my dream and fighting for another. I knew that I was exactly where I need to be. I trained for this and I felt great. I always told myself “if I perform how I trained I can bring our country a medal”. All I had to do was adjust my mentality every time a curveball was sent my way. Focus on the things I can control and let go of the situations I have no control over. This would help me manage my head and enjoy every moment a lot more. This way, I could perform a lot better on game day.

## **How were you training and practicing during your days in Koga City?**

I made myself a training program for Koga City. I did one three hours session everyday. The focus of these sessions was simple. Get used to my environment, listen to my body, maintain explosiveness, increase power at the end of technique and try to improve 1% that day.

## **Once in Tokyo and when you checked the venue during the athlete’s tour, what came to you mind?**

I decided not to take the athlete tour of the venue. I didn’t want anything to interrupt my training session. And after my training session I like to rest. Rest in my room and do nothing! Rest is crucial. I didn’t want my eyes seeing so many new things again, I didn’t want my mind to start thinking of competition to early.

## **How did you feel in the morning of your competition day?**

I was a little too excited. So excited I would forget to breath. I was talking to my mom on the phone and she told me to stop and breath for a few minutes. Once I did that and kept the thought of “stop and breath” in my mind I was READY!

## **You had a great performance in your all your kata rounds during the qualifying phase, then in the ranking match, you made it to the Bronze medal rounds against one of the legendary Kata athletes of all time, the great Antonio Diaz. What was going through your mind?**

It’s always been an honor to share the tatami with Antonio Diaz. Someone I’ve looked up to for over half of my life. But, when I compete, I compete against myself. My goal, to execute my Kata the way I trained it. Mind, body and spirit. Enjoy every moment on the Olympic tatami.

# ARIEL TORRES

## Male Kata



*“I decided not to take the athlete tour of the venue. I didn’t want my eyes seeing so many new things. I didn’t want my mind to think of competition to early.”*

# USA KARATE OLYMPIC ATHLETES



Then the referee raises his left hand and Ariel Torres not only wins Bronze medal at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics but becomes the first USA Karate athlete in history to win an Olympic medal. Your name engraved in the history books. What did you feel at that very moment? Did you realize what you had just accomplished?

YESSS! Mom, Dad are you watching ? WE DID IT!

**Karate won't be in Paris 2024 but we showed in Tokyo that we deserve a permanent place at the Olympic Games. What are your feelings about it and what about Los Angeles 2028?**

I'm devastated. I believe karate has shown to the world that it deserves to stay in the Olympics. We saw the most incredible matches in history. We don't know what will happen for Los Angeles 2028. But, I will do my best. I will keep pushing. Fighting for that 1% improvement. Travel the world, attend all the premier league events and earn better results. Hopefully this can catch their attention and put us on for LA2028. I will do my best and fight for us to have karate in LA2028.

**Anything you would like to say to all the fans and people who supported you throughout all these years?**

For everyone that sent me positive energy and prayers, I thank you. This Olympic medal is ours! And it's hope for our future! It's possible. Just never give up, and keep pushing forward. Thank you for the support and let's make Los Angeles 2028 HAPPEN!! **USANKF**



# ARIEL TORRES

## Male Kata





# SAKURA KOKUMAI

## Female Kata

**Sakura, you were the first American Karate athlete to qualify for Tokyo. You were on the top spots of the Olympic Ranking and you knew you were going although with the Pandemic it took a while to be officially confirmed by the W.K.F. Please tell us what was going through your mind during the Pandemic knowing that Tokyo was waiting for you.**

Ever since the Olympic qualifier started in 2018, I knew I wanted to qualify with Olympic ranking, that was the plan from the very beginning.

Like you stated, yes, I knew I was going to the Olympics during the pandemic, but it was not “official”. Actually, there has been an official announcement beginning of the pandemic, but after a couple months the world started to change again. So, from “officially” being qualified, and celebrating, it slowly turned into something that was not “official”. There were so many things going on in the world and I know that “sports” is the least thing to worry about. But this was all I knew and this was the world to me. Although it was hard at the beginning of the pandemic, I still knew I needed to keep training because whether we knew the Olympics will happen next year or not.

I am just very thankful for those who have helped and supported me along the way during this time. Coach Anta from Toronto, and many friends from there have supported me through online trainings almost every day. They reminded me why it was so important to keep training and keep moving forward, even when things were uncertain. Yes, we were in different countries, and it was online training. But that mental support is what I needed the most during this time and they have been there with me since this all started. I cannot thank them enough.



# USA KARATE OLYMPIC ATHLETES



**How did you feel when you knew you were going to the Tokyo Olympic Games? Your family is Japanese and you have strong ties with the country but you were going to go representing the USA.**

When I got a call from the federation in 2020 April, I was excited but also relieved at the same time.

Those travels and competition from 2018 were very intense. Every competition, we had to treat it like it was the World Championships. Every win mattered; every point mattered. In Salzburg premier league March of 2020 after finishing the competition with a Silver medal, I remember an Italian coach came up to me and said “congratulations”. I was confused at first, but I soon realized that I had enough points after that event to qualify for the Olympics.

The Italian coach took out a piece of paper and her phone, and calculated the points for me... not just once but three times to make sure I had all the points I needed. It was actually then when I realized that I was really in. I have sacrificed so much for this moment; I was relieved when I found out that all those hard work had paid off.

This Olympics were so personal to me because it was hosted in Japan as well. To be able to represent my country, in a place where I grew up meant the world. Performing there was my way of thanking people of Japan and the US for all the support they have given me throughout those years.

**You selected - as your personal Coach, Mr. Brian Mertel who has always been involved with Kumite and not Kata. First stop was the host city, Koga. How was the adaptation week in Koga and the training with Coach Mertel?**

To choose Coach Mertel at the Olympics was very easy decision for me. I knew that I needed someone who I feel most comfortable with, someone I can trust and rely on. I also knew that once I got to Japan it was all a mental game. Of course training is important, but I knew what I needed to do in terms of kata training. I just needed to trust myself.

Coach Mertel constantly reminded me of that, and we both made sure we were on the same page before we flew out to Japan and also while we were there. In Koga city, he helped me recreate competition scenarios so I can rehearse my katas, just like I would in actual competition. Everything was exactly how it needed to be. When I left Koga city I was ready more than ever.

# SAKURA KOKUMAI

## Female Kata



*“It’s truly an honor knowing that I made history. To be the first and only female from the US means a lot to me.”*



**Were you concern/worried about what was waiting for you – pressure wise - in Tokyo?**

No. I knew what I was walking into. I know the city, I know the people, I know the venue. If anything, it was relaxing, knowing that I was going to a place I was so familiar with.

**How were you training and practice schedules in Koga?**

Practicing in Koga city was great. We actually spent a full day at the training facility so I brought everything I could to make myself comfortable; soccer ball, blanket, balloon bed, books, foam roller etc. I made sure I listened to my body during training and was focusing on tuning in mentally and physically.

**Once in Tokyo and when you checked the venue, what came to you mind?**

We were only allowed to check the venue the day before my competition, so I ended up not going. I have competed there many times as a college student, so I knew what it was going to be like. So instead, I asked my coach to send photos and videos of the venue for me. When I saw the photo, it was exactly how I thought it would be. I did some imagery training after seeing the photo and I was good to go.

**How did you feel in the morning of your competition day?**

I was in a good place. I was not nervous or anxious, just felt like everything was just ... “right”.

**You had a great performance in your all your kata rounds but you lost in the bronze medal match against Viviana Bottaro from Italy. How did you feel about that match? Many people thought you had it.**

I was disappointed. Who wouldn't be? We all train to win and I have been dreaming of bringing back a medal ever since this Olympic race started. After my performance I was very confident. But this is part of the game. I have zero regrets about my performance and to be able to walk out of the ring, knowing I gave it my all is the biggest win.

**If you could rewind the tape and change anything in that bronze medal performance, what that would be?**

I wouldn't change a thing.

**With your participation in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics you wrote your name in the history of karate and the Karate in the USA. What are your feelings about it?**

It's truly an honor knowing that I made history. To be the first and only female from the US means a lot to me. I just hope to use this platform to help inspire the next generation and contribute to making this sport bigger.

# SAKURA KOKUMAI

## Female Kata

**Karate won't be in Paris 2020 but we showed in Tokyo that we deserve a permanent place at the Olympic Games. What about Los Angeles 2028?**

I truly believe Karate belongs in the Olympics. I hope we return in the games in 2028 and I hope to contribute to make that happen.

**Anything you would like to say to all the fans and supporters throughout all these years?**

I just want to say thank you to those who have supported me along the way. Without your love and support I would not be here today doing what I love. I hope I was able to bring little bit of joy through this journey and I hope to inspire and continue to do more in the future. **USANKF**



# **BRIAN IRR**

## **KUMITE +75Kg**

**Brian, in Paris, you couldn't make it to qualify for Tokyo, then you were on top position in the Continental spot and you were at the Tokyo Olympics in the +75Kg division. What was going through your mind during these times?**

I knew the Paris Qualification tournament was going to be challenging because for most of the athletes in attendance, it was their final opportunity to qualify to compete in Tokyo. I knew going into the Paris competition that I also had the potential to qualify via continental selection, but I did not want to rely on that. I paid close attention to other athletes in other categories who were also vying for Continental Qualification spots and was quite confident that I would get the +75kg selection. I was still excited to compete and my goal was to try put on a good showing in Paris so that I would have some good momentum built up leading into the Games in Tokyo regardless of whether I qualified via the qualification tournament or via continental selection.

**How did you feel when you knew you were going to Tokyo Olympic Games?**

After the Paris Qualification Tournament I analyzed the Olympic Standings and double checked the Continental Selection process. I was quite confident that I would be selected to represent Team USA for +75kg kumite but there





# USA KARATE OLYMPIC ATHLETES

was still that lingering fear of “what if I miscalculated something?”. Continental Selection wasn’t announced until a couple days after the Paris Qualifier concluded. During those couple of days, countless people kept contacting me asking if I’m going to Tokyo but I didn’t have an answer for them yet. It was a very stressful and difficult couple of days waiting to hear the official news. Once I finally received confirmation that I was officially selected to compete in Tokyo, I felt a huge relief of stress and a sudden wave of excitement for the opportunity to compete at the Tokyo Games.

## **You had your personal Coach, Mr. Brody Burns and your teammate Tom Scott on the plane to Tokyo...but you had to go to the host city, Koga. How was the adaptation week in Koga?**

Koga was amazing. The host city staff that was there with us was unbelievably friendly and accommodating. They did a fabulous job of exposing us to the local culture from food to artwork created by local primary school students.

## **Were you concerned or worried about what was waiting in Tokyo?**

I didn’t have any worries about the Tokyo portion of the trip. I was looking forward to the athlete village, team USA high performance center, and competition venue experiences. Before we arrived at the athlete village we were unsure of how restrictive it was going to be to get around due to Covid-19 precautions, but there ended up not being any issues while we were there.

## **How did you feel during your training and practice in Koga.**

Training in Koga was great. As kumite athletes, we had our own private tatami in a massive gymnasium all to ourselves. The 2 kata athletes each had their own private training room and tatami upstairs. We had access to a fitness gym and swimming pool for workouts. Lunches were catered for us by a local culinary school. Our practice schedules were customizable to our own preference each day. It was as if we had full access to our own private Olympic training center. The Koga staff was so helpful they made us feel like royalty.

## **Once in Tokyo and when you checked the venue – the legendary Budokan, what came to you mind?**

It was exciting visiting the Budokan during our site visit before competition. Seeing the Olympic rings on the tatami for the first time was very special. While interacting with other athletes, coaches, and staff during the site visit, the vibe that I felt was that of celebration. Everyone was proud not just for themselves and their teams to have qualified for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, but also that karate as a sport was being included in the Olympics for the first time and we all got to be a part of this historical moment.

## **You were scheduled for the afternoon of the third day of competition, how did you feel in the morning?**

I felt ready. We had prepared all this time leading up to the games. There was nothing more that I could have asked for while I was in Japan to help me be as prepared as possible on competition day. I had competed in the Budokan before. I had competed in the spotlight at Pan Am Games events and on the finals stage before. The competition atmosphere was very familiar and comfortable. To me, the competition itself was just another tournament competing against many of the same opponents that I have faced several times in the past 3 years or so leading up to the Olympics.



# BRIAN IRR

## KUMITE +75Kg



## **How did you feel about your matches and your opponents in the qualification phase?**

I saw my draw two days before I competed so I knew who I was going to be facing during pool play and had a game plan prepared for each opponent. All of my opponents were going to be difficult to beat, but I knew I was capable of winning against each of them.

## **With your participation in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics you have written your name in the history of karate and the Karate in the USA. How do you feel about it feeling about it?**

I'm honored to have had the opportunity to take part in such a historical moment in history. The first ever pandemic Olympics, the first time karate has ever been included in the Olympics, and the last time karate will be included in the Olympics at least for now. These last 3 years will forever be a treasured time in my life. God has shown me time and time again throughout this Olympic journey the peace that comes by trusting his plans for my life rather than my own plan.

## **Karate won't be in Paris 2024 but we showed in Tokyo that we deserve a permanent place at the Olympic Games. What about Los Angeles 2028?**

For the sake of the next generation of karate athletes, I'm hopeful that karate will be re-introduced to the Olympic schedule for Los Angeles 2028. I think the WKF has learned a lot about the Olympic process during these past 4 years. I believe as a sport we can adapt and make necessary changes to ensure our inclusion in future Olympics.

## **Anything you would like to say to all the fans and supporters throughout all these years?**

I would like to give a special thanks to: My parents for signing me up for karate lessons in the first place, driving me to the dojo up to 6 days a week all year round, and paying for my lessons and travel expenses while I was growing up; Eric Hill, my first ever Sensei and coach for sacrificing everything to train me, teaching me what it means to be committed to my goals, and pushing me to be the best athlete I could be for the first 18 years of my karate career; Sensei Burns and the rest of the Academy of Classical Karate for welcoming me into the dojo family with open arms and making me feel at home these past 4 years here in Texas. Thank you to everyone who supported me in any capacity throughout my 25 years karate career leading up to Tokyo 2020. It was so amazing receiving messages of encouragement from so many people from every aspect of my life during the final weeks leading up to the Olympics. The excitement that everyone else had for me, definitely helped fuel me in Tokyo. It blew my mind to see so many people who I've never even met before encouraging me and cheering me on. How could all of these people who don't even know me, be so excited and supportive of me? As I reflected on this I came to realize that this was a beautiful analogy to our relationship to God as humans. In Jeremiah 1:5 the Lord tells Jeremiah that "he knew him and that he was set apart before he was even born". God doesn't wait for us to "figure it out" before he accepts us. God loves us before we even know him and is waiting with open arms for us to turn to him.. **USANKF**

# BRIAN IRR

KUMITE +75Kg



*“To me, the competition itself was just another tournament competing against many of the same opponents that I have faced several times in the past 3 years or so leading up to the Olympics.”*

# **TOM SCOTT**

## **KUMITE -75Kg**

**Tom, you had a roller coaster to make it to Tokyo 2020. In Paris, you couldn't make it, then you were on good position in the Continental spot but all spots were taken, then you were going to help your teammate Brian Irr's preparation and all of a sudden, the top Iranian fighter tested positive a couple of weeks before and you were in the -75Kg division in Tokyo. Please tell us what was going through your mind during all these times.**

I was certainly disappointed I couldn't qualify for Tokyo. However, I had spent the entire year of the pandemic learning to appreciate my sport, my efforts, and my faith. After Paris, I was not going to feel bad for myself and I was eager to help Brian Irr even though it would be tough being there without competing. I knew that something strange was happening the way that it all went down. Suddenly qualifying for the Olympics was certainly amazing and for a reason. It may not have been for a medal there but I know it is for something and I am eagerly awaiting my answers for being there.

**How did you feel when you knew you were going to Tokyo Olympic Games? Did you sleep that night?**

Like a baby! I finally slept well once I knew I was in. There were rumors for a week before it was real and those nights were difficult.





**You had your personal Coach, Mr. Brody Burns and your teammate on the plane to Tokyo...just how you wanted from the beginning. First stop was the host city, Koga. How was the adaptation week in Koga?**

Koga was amazing! I thought we were going there to basically quarantine and did not realize the effort that was put into organizing this training camp with the city so that we could be at our best. I loved my time in Koga and really feel it positioned me to be at my best. Thank you to Maile Chinen-Koncal for her efforts in organizing and making sure we had everything we needed! I really enjoyed the week anticipating the Olympics with Sensei Burns. Every time we realized where we were it would almost bring us to tears. I will never forget the both of us realizing long time dreams of ours together.

**Were you concerned about what was waiting in Tokyo?**

I had no concerns or worries the entire trip. I promised myself that because the entire experience was truly a gift from God that I wouldn't be nervous and I wouldn't worry about things that didn't matter. The trip felt like a celebration of athleticism and karate and it truly was what the Olympics should feel like.

**How were you training and practice schedules in Koga?**

Training was great. Each athlete had their own personal training spaces. The food was amazing. We were surrounded by banners and paintings from the children of Koga for our motivation. There was no time to dwell on distractions.

**Once in Tokyo and when you checked the venue, what came to your mind?**

I was so happy to be a part of something so historic. I still can't believe that I achieved a dream that was impossible for my 10 years old self. But I dreamed those dreams then and all the way up to that moment. It was really an honor to represent not only myself but all of the great athletes who deserved their shot in times before but never got it. I hope they know I took them with me.

**You were scheduled for the afternoon of the second day of competition, how did you feel in the morning?**

Great! I slept like a baby, ate well, did my studies. It was awesome to be there early and watch Ariel do his thing. I was glad my division followed him and the energy he left on the tatami for the USA.

**You had a great performance in your all your matches but you couldn't make it to the finals. How did you feel about your matches and your opponents?**

I was in a great space. I felt ready. I was fighting well. I made mistakes vs Japan out of the gate but was glad to see myself regroup as well as I did. I didn't like my first match but felt on fire for my final three. Good wins on Hungary and Egypt and I was doing well with Ukraine but I will give him credit for a good comeback. We were so close to qualifying for the semi-finals. One punch or three seconds would have done it for me. I do have a lot to be proud of and I won't let being that close to a medal discourage me, but inspire me. This was an incredible event, but at the same time just another tournament that I can learn from and push forward from. I am not retiring and still have goals to achieve in my sport so I will make sure I learn from this one too.

**If you could rewind the tape and change anything, what that would be?**

Nothing. I like to remind myself that this life doesn't work that way. I do believe I am at the best I have been and I know I am facing the greatest in the

# TOM SCOTT

## KUMITE -75Kg



world and some of the greatest of all time. Yes I will continue to work on the mistakes that I make and try to get closer to my best self. That is the only thing I can do and also the reason behind my doing this at all. I can beat these guys, and I can do it soon.

**With your participation in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics you wrote your name in the history of karate and the Karate in the USA. What are your feelings about it?**

It is an honor. I love my sport, and I love my organization that helped me get there. There are so many people to recognize who don't get what they deserve. CEO Phil Hampel wrote the three year script for how the organization would get their top performing athletes to Tokyo despite the Americas' disadvantage and I am forever thankful. Elizabeth Sottile navigated USA Karate's first time through the Olympic red tapes and logistics and I am so glad that she did. And of course my Sensei who not only helped me make it but Brian Irr as well. I do think that having two athletes in the Games from the same school is an incredible feat.

**Karate won't be in Paris 2020 but we showed in Tokyo that we deserve a permanent place at the Olympic Games. What about Los Angeles 2028?**

I am really looking forward to being a part of the campaign for our sport's return to the Olympics in LA. Our sport does have a lot to offer and we will all need to be eager to demonstrate what we preach. I believe that what makes karate unique is not only the respect and humility but also the vast reasons we all became involved ourselves; confidence, discipline, self-defense. Other sports can't always stay that. Karate captures the Olympic spirit of what sport is about.

**Anything you would like to say to all the fans and supporters throughout all these years?**

I would just like to say how thankful I am for everyone's thoughts and prayers. This may have been one of the most prayed for moments in my life and I won't forget it. I want to remind everyone that I dreamed of the Olympics back when I knew it would never happen.... Everything is possible and I am proof to our juniors to keep the flame alive. Be eager to step up every day and earn what awaits you.. **USANKF**

*“I am really looking forward to being a part of the campaign for our sport's return to the Olympics in LA. Our sport does have a lot to offer and we will all need to be eager to demonstrate what we preach.”*

# TOM SCOTT

## KUMITE -75Kg



# **COACH BRODY BURNS**

**Kumite Athletes: Tom Scott (-75Kg.)  
& Brian Irr (+75Kg)**

**Brody, in Paris, your two main athletes did not qualify for Tokyo, but then for different circumstances, both Tom Scott and Brian Irr ended up being in the Olympic Games. What was going through your mind after Paris and after you knew that Irr and Scott were on their way to Tokyo 2020?**

Going into the Olympic Qualifier, I knew the likelihood of Brian Irr qualifying via the Continental Draw process were very high. I had done the various draw scenarios and knew the -75kg would likely be full by the time PKF was up in the draw thus blocking Tom Scott from getting in and allowing Brian Irr in as the second highest ranked PKF athlete with a Pan Am Games gold medal. By the time the Olympic Qualifier was completed in Paris, we left knowing Brian was qualified but were unsure of when it would be announced.

It was a bitter sweet trip home from Paris because Tom, Brian and I knew that Brian was going to the Olympics and at that time Tom was not. It was still undecided if I were going but the likely was high. So we wanted to be excited but it still just didn't feel right with Tom not making it with us.

When news first started circulating that Tom Scott might have an avenue in due to doping from a qualified athletes, it was hard to contain, but I didn't want to get my hopes up or Tom's only to have it not work out. I also wanted Brian to have his time as the only US kumite athlete going.

But when it was confirmed that Tom and Brian were both going, I couldn't contain myself. I think I walked around with a smile on face for 10 days straight. I was as happy as I have ever been and often overcome with joy for the two of them. I have seen just how much

this "Olympic run" has worn them out and how much they have missed at home to try and get there, so when it finally happened, it was such a great feeling. I am not sure how to describe it.

**How did you change or adapt their preparation for the Olympic Games once you knew they were in?**

Well the Olympics was basically 4 weeks from the time we were confirmed as going. There really wasn't much we could change in that period of time. We started strong opposition research on the athletes we knew would be in their categories. Each day they were suppose to "study" videos of either themselves or opponents and each day they were suppose to get their feet on the mats whether we had a full practice or not.





# USA KARATE OLYMPIC COACHES

We are lucky to have a good group of athletes here for them to train with and everyday they were able to work with high-level training partners to stay sharp.

## **What was their mental state during these preparation times in Dallas?**

The first week or two was still in a fog and celebration. There was a lot of media and distractions in the first two weeks, so they were trying to focus but also trying to manage all of the excitement. I wanted them to enjoy it. I didn't want to be hard on them and tell them they had to focus all the time. I think we played it right and they were able to enjoy the excitement of going to the Olympics, and then get down to business in training as we got closer to leaving.

## **Once you arrived to the host city of Koga, how did you approach the training and practice sessions?**

Once we were in Koga it was very focused training. The reality is you aren't going to learn a new skill or develop a new strategy that you can throw out on the tatami against a high level opponent, in just one week. So the time is primarily spent, keeping the mind sharp, keeping the technique polished and trying to keep the athlete feeling confident and ready to perform.

We spent the first few days getting sweaty and working hard, then we tapered to just drills or tactics they wanted to keep fresh.

Our strength and conditioning sessions continued and were more focused on keeping a routine and keeping them in peak performance mode. Our strength and condition coach, Chris Stratis, video conferenced in each day and made sure they were following the plan and staying on task with the right effort and exercises.

Tom and Brian were also wired up using tools to track their heartrate, sleep, workouts and recovery. So Chris and I were able to see how much the excitement of being at the Olympics was impacting them and exactly how recovered they were each day. We were able to base the skills sessions and strength and conditioning sessions on the data we were getting each day.

## **Were you concern or worried about what was waiting in Tokyo?**

I was not worried about the competition we were going to face in Tokyo. These guys are the best in world. We have studied each guy and in many cases known them since they were juniors. I knew it was going to be amazing competition and I wasn't concerned about that.

Both Tom and Brian are great guys and very appreciative of the opportunity to represent the USA in the Olympics. I was excited for them to get to do that. Don't miss understand me, I wasn't thinking this was going to be easy competition. I knew we had to be on our best to get a shot at those podiums, but I knew it was going to be great no matter what happened.

I was concerned about the logistics in Tokyo. I knew the excitement of the Olympic Village and seeing the other countries and all of the safety protocols were going to take their toll on the team, myself included.



# COACH BRODY BURNS

**Kumite Athletes: Tom Scott (-75Kg.) and Brian Irr (+75Kg)**

## **How did you see the athletes during the training and practice days in Koga?**

I thought they were looking good. We had a great first day, a little bit of a rough second day and third day, but by day four and five we were good. You know you think everything will be perfect because you are at the Olympics, but that isn't reality. Things will still pop up and injuries will still hurt and all of the things that effect you at home will still effect you at the Olympics. I think once we accepted that at this point, it was just another event we had to stay ready for and that even though they are Olympians, they are still just Tom and Brian, things got back on track.

Again, I am lucky. Tom and Brian are great guys and very self-aware. They want to have a good time and to enjoy every step of the way because they know it is something to appreciate.

## **Once in Tokyo and when you checked the venue – the legendary Budokan, what came to you mind?**

I think one of the most inspiring days was when we had the coaches meeting at the Budokan and we were able to see the tatami with the Olympic Rings on it. When WKF leaders from across the world were talking about what a historic event this was going to be and how excited they were for our sport. It was hard not to feel everyone's happiness. Every coach there was smiling ear to ear. Everyone we saw from the WKF was smiling that day. It was very emotional and just pure happiness from everyone there. Everyone knew we were a part of history at that point.

## **You were scheduled for the second day with Tom Scott, what was going on your mind in the morning of that day?**

I felt great going into the day with Tom. The day before, the three of us spent the day at the Team USA High Performance Center watching Sakura and -67kg while training and hanging out the superstars from Team USA Track and Field. The -67kg was exciting and I think it put Tom in a good mindset.

We got to the venue with about three hours to spare, so Tom took a nap in the athlete rooms, warmed up with our team trainer, Nicole, and then spent about an hour in the practice space working with Brian before we were called to competition. Once competition started for the category it was a pretty quick turn around between bouts.

I felt good about our draw. I liked the pool we were in. I knew Japan was tough and I worried about him, but Tom has good record against Ukraine and Hungary so I felt good there. We had a fresh loss against Egypt earlier in the year, but I knew Tom felt confident against him so I did too. I knew there wasn't anyone in our pool Tom couldn't beat on any given day.

## **How did you feel about Tom Scott's matches and his opponents?**

All in all, I'm happy with the performance and effort given. We played too cautious against Japan and gave Ken too much credit, but that is a lesson learned and I know Tom will play him differently in the future.



# USA KARATE OLYMPIC COACHES

The match against Ukraine is a tough one. I like Horuna and Tom and him get along well. He is a good fighter, and I know he respects Tom. I thought Tom was going to have him that day, but it wasn't the case. Then he played very smart taking Hungary to a draw when he could have beaten him, effectively blocking Tom from advancing out of the pool. So that is a rough match to think about right now. Tom was 3 seconds from advancing to semi-finals and having at the least an Olympic bronze. I'll save that video analysis for another day.

Tom fought really well against Hungary and Egypt as expected and ended up scoring more points than anyone else in his pool and the second most points in the category. So I think he went out there and fought. He pulled off some big moves and strategy. I am proud of him.

Brian had a rough day. He simply could not get anything going. He had a good warm-up, but something just wasn't quite right. He has a great track record against Canada and when that match ended in a tie, I think both Brian and I knew he needed to fire up to get past the next few fighters and get out of the pool. He was saying all of the right things between matches and knew what to do and when he got into the ring, it just wasn't coming together. I think every athlete has had a day where he couldn't make it happen for whatever reason. It was tough because I know Brian and I know what he is capable of and what he wanted to do. In the final match his nose gets broken by a hook kick from Croatia. The break was pretty bad and required surgery once we made it back to Texas, but Brian took it well. I am proud of the man Brian is and work and sacrifices he made to get to the Olympics.

## **If you could rewind the tape and change anything, what would that be?**

That's a tough question, because I know a lot of these things happen for a reason and will lead to things down the road, so I would likely not change anything. But, if we are talking hypothetically, I would probably have pushed for Tom to take Ukraine to a tie rather than the win. I don't know for sure it would have changed anything because I haven't thought it all the way out yet, but my initial reaction is that would have been a good play. But when you are up with 3 seconds...like I said, I'll save that analysis for another day.

## **With your participation in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics you have written your name in the history of karate and the Karate in the USA as an Olympic Coach. How do you feel about it?**

I am proud of this accomplishment. I am not a former elite kumite athlete who has medals and titles to stand on. I had to study and learn how to coach. I have studied great coaches and been mentored by some of the best in our sport and others. I have watched endless hours of kumite and burned every vacation day, holiday and then some for the past five years to get better at this job. I didn't think about coaching in the Olympics in the beginning, I just wanted to see the athletes succeed on the tatami.

I fully recognize there were many great coaches in our sport ahead of me who paved the way for athletes and coaches to be in the Olympics and represent the USA. I am appreciative of the efforts of the previous generations of athletes and coaches and I know we did our best to carry them with us when we were in Tokyo. I also recognize the contribution



# COACH BRODY BURNS

**Kumite Athletes: Tom Scott (-75Kg.) and Brian Irr (+75Kg)**

the entire USA National Coaching Staff made to make this happen. I was able to reach out to my fellow National Coaches in preparation of Tokyo and even while in Tokyo, to provide insight and information.

I am honored and proud to be the coach who went to the Olympics for our kumite athletes. On a personal note, it was truly special to be there for Tom and Brian since I have a personal relationship with them and coach them at home.

## **Karate won't be in Paris 2024 but we showed in Tokyo that we deserve a permanent place at the Olympic Games. What about Los Angeles 2028?**

I think it is such a travesty to our sport that we not including in 2024 before we even had a chance to show what the sport offered. I know there are some things that need to change at the WKF level that will help our chances in 2028. I am hoping we, as an IF, have learned from 2024 and will make those corrections to be more appealing in 2028.

I think the athletes did their jobs in this respect. The athletes put on a great show and fought with such spirit and excitement. I was sitting with Team USA athletes who were watching Karate for the first time, during the -67kg kumite category and they were loving it. I heard from several volunteers working the venue that Karate was their favorite combat sport.

## **Anything you would like to say to all the fans and USA TEAM supporters?**

Thank you. Thank you for your support of these athletes and of this team. Thank you for outpouring of messages of love and hope when Tom didn't make it in and then for the messages of support and excitement when Brian and Tom were both in. I could not believe the massive amount of messages from across the world these guys received and trust me they read them all. Your support of the Team and our athletes truly helped them and absolutely added to the experience and memory for them.

I would also like to say, be proud of your sport. Karate stepped up for The Games and it looked pretty cool. Sure there is controversy on the last match of +75 and there is the conversation of Karate not being in the Olympics again, but at least people all around the world are talking about it. If we meant nothing or were boring no one would care. It's an exciting time for our sport with the Youth League, Series A and Karate 1 Premier Leagues all in effect, athletes can play their sport internationally now more than ever.

Stay fans and supporters of your sport! The best is yet to come!. **USANKF**



# **COACH JAVIER MANTILLA**

**Male Kata Athlete: Ariel Torres (Bronze Medal)**

**In Paris, the athlete you were coaching, Ariel Torres directly qualified for the Tokyo 2020 Games with a very impressive performance getting the Gold medal. What was going through your mind in Paris and after confirming that Torres was on his way to Tokyo 2020?**

We had a great preparation for Paris, “teamwork” is the best word to define what happened in Paris. The pandemic year helped Ariel’s process a lot, he didn’t stop training and we built a group of individuals around him with a lot of commitment to make the dream come true. We planned together, starting from his family, Sensei Robert Young, Val Ramos physical conditioning trainer, his training partner Grace and myself as a competition coach.

We had the best team for his growth and started this year with a plan with very clear objectives, first was Istanbul WKF 1, then Portugal WKF 1, last 2 qualifying events for the Tokyo standings, our goal was to fight for the two podiums and leave a good image before Paris . He got Bronze in Istanbul, and the 5th place in Portugal made him one of the favorites for Paris . When we arrived for





# USA KARATE OLYMPIC COACHES

the Qualifier we knew very well the athletes and our projection according to the last results and being the number one seed gave us confidence to get one of the three spots for Tokyo.

After the first and second round in Paris we knew that we were close, and without an excess of confidence, we pushed Ariel to give more and he finished dominating his division stronger than ever and sending a clear message in his division for Tokyo, from a qualified athlete he became a top medal contender for the Games.

## **You worked closely with Torres' sensei Mr. Robert Young, how did you change or adapt their preparation for the Olympic Games once you knew Torres was in?**

Knowing all the athletes qualified for Tokyo we discussed what katas were the best to face the Games and we agreed to use his top four, taking in consideration his scores in the last three events. After this, our focus was on to improve small details in these Katas, to make them better for the evaluation and be sure to increase the technical and physical scores.

## **What was his mental state during these preparation days before Tokyo?**

Once we decided as a Team our Kata strategy for Tokyo, Ariel's mindset was ready, he trusted the plan and showed a very professional dedication in every single training session as well as in his daily life routine.

## **Once you arrived to the host city of Koga, how did you approach the training and practice sessions there with the athlete?**

I just continued the same way as he was training before, we had only one long training session per day with high quality drills for each kata. Only one per day, with an intensive review of specific details to get those very clean .

## **Were you worried about what the kind of competition was waiting for in Tokyo?**

Not at all, after Paris we knew our opponents very well. In the last three matches in Paris, we were officiated by the Tokyo Olympic Judges, this was very important because we had the chance to be under their evaluation and the image that Ariel left in Paris was excellent. We were ready, knowing the environment we knew...and how Tokyo would look for us.

## **How did you see the athlete during the training and practice days in Koga?**

To be honest from the first practice he was on fire, his body, his mindset was clear, he didn't show jet lag effects, his first training was very impressive, I remember I told him after that training I can see very clear that you are ready for this, you are very hungry and you are giving everything you have in every single technique . Days passed in Koga and he got better and better, keeping his goal: standing on the podium.



# COACH JAVIER MANTILLA

## Male Kata Athlete: Ariel Torres (Bronze Medal)

**Once in Tokyo and when you checked the venue – the legendary Budokan, what came to you mind?**

After we arrived in Tokyo, the unique energy of this legendary martial arts “mecca” made us start thinking a lot, the historical moment for Karate, for us to be there, made it very special. The dream wasn’t anymore a dream, it was real and it was showtime. We were ready...really ready!

**You were scheduled for the second day of competition, what was going on your mind in the morning of that day?**

“The big moment is here!” I just talked to Ariel on our way to the Budokan as usual our conversation started from our roots , from our life experience and all the sacrifice, hard work and adversity to get there, just a quick review of the process to enjoy the journey, to finalize with one sentence... “let’s make it happen!”

**How did you feel about early qualification rounds and then the Ranking round to fight for the Bronze medal?**

Qualification round one was very important, first to break the ice and second to see how the evaluation and score was. The second round we did minor adjustments, and we were in a good position to face the semifinals.

Already there we did a great performance but we got short to make the finals. We felt strong to face the Bronze medal match

**If you could rewind the tape and change anything, what that would be?**

Nothing, we had a great process and amazing teamwork and we knew that the podium was the main goal; we knew the level of our opponents very well, we cut the distance in the last year and we also knew that Ariel was growing every day. He has a brilliant future and he has become the new Kata legend in the Americas.

**With your participation in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics you have written your name in the history of karate and the Karate in the USA how an Olympic Coach. How do you feel about it?**

I feel so proud and thankful to be part of the karate history. But representing Team USA was more important, being part of USA Olympic Team sports legacy made this moment unique. Tokyo is going to be in my heart and my memories forever!

**Karate won’t be in Paris 2024 but we showed in Tokyo that we deserve a permanent place at the Olympic Games. What about Los Angeles 2028?**

Totally agree! We deserve to be part of the Olympic Program, unfortunately we won’t be in Paris. Anyway, we did the first step, I think we have to keep working together and fight to be back, we need to start with a good marketing campaign to make a presentation to make us eligible to be in LA 2028.

**Anything you would like to say to all the fans and USA TEAM supporters?**

Thanks for all their continued support, we need all of you to continue showing the world the benefits of Karate, let’s make our sport stronger...let’s work together to achieve our goals! **USANKF**



# **COACH BRIAN MERTEL**

## **Female Kata Athlete: Sakura Kokumai**

**Brian, you went to the Toyo 2020 Olympic Games as Coach for athlete Sakura Kokumai. You are mainly a Kumite Coach. Can you tell us a little bit about how this came to you?**

Sakura and I were formerly teammates and have always had a good relationship. While my years on the Sr. National Team were always as a kumite athlete, I did compete in kata at the Jr. Pan Ams a couple times and once at the Jr. World Championships. I have also trained kata athletes that have competed in various Jr. and Sr. international competitions. I recognize of course that coaching kata in the Olympics is a whole different level, but coaching any discipline is largely about helping an athlete arrive at the event in the right frame of mind. Sakura competes at most events without a coach so along with sitting in the chair, she asked if I would help to mitigate the various stresses that would come along with such a major event.





## **How was your first impression once you knew that you were selected by Sakura to be in the chair?**

My first impression was excitement at the opportunity to be part of Sakura's Olympic journey and of course the opportunity to represent USA Karate as a coach in the Olympics!

## **Did you work with her remotely before traveling to Japan?**

Sakura and I spent a lot of time on FaceTime calls discussing how her training had been progressing and at times I was a sounding board for her travel and living plans during the pandemic. I was also another person that she could vent her frustrations with the various difficulties that come along with preparing for the Olympics while the entire world is locked down. My role as her coach for Tokyo was never about critiquing her technical skills, so I focused on trying to help her to maintain the best mindset so she could then focus on her technical training.

## **Once you arrived to the host city of Koga, how did you approach the training and practice sessions with her?**

When we arrived in Koga City Sakura eased in to her training for the first couple days. We then discussed running "mock draws/competition" to add intensity to the practices. We ran those for a couple of days with different draws written out. Sakura's katas were confident and powerful as we prepared to head to Tokyo.

## **Were you worried about what the amount of pressure that was waiting in Tokyo?**

No, concern and worry are not the words I would use. I was confident that Sakura had prepared well and I'm confident in my ability to manage situations that might add unneeded stress. There are of course nerves that accompany a competition like this but we've spent our whole lives learning how to channel that energy.

## **How did you see the athlete during the training and practice days in Koga?**

Sakura was clearly comfortable in Koga. She told me stories about her childhood karate practice in Japan and how she would spend hours after school in recreation centers just like the training facility that we were in.

## **Once in Tokyo and when you checked the venue – the legendary Budokan, what came to you mind?**

When we first arrived at the Budokan for our site visit I felt like I was in a dream. The Budokan itself is incredible and the setup inside was everything you could hope for in a karate competition. All of the athletes, coaches and officials had the same smile on their face. It was unforgettable!

## **You were scheduled for the first day of competition, what was going on your mind in the morning of that day?**

When the morning of the competition arrived it was business as usual for a tournament. The focus was eating and getting to the venue with plenty of time for Sakura to prepare as she normally would to compete. It's important to maintain the warm up routine that she is comfortable with regardless of which competition it is.

# COACH BRIAN MERTEL

## Female Kata Athlete: Sakura Kokumai

### How did you feel about Sakura's qualifying rounds and Ranking round to the bronze medal round?

I believe Sakura worked through the nerves in her first kata and her next two katas were more natural, they were intense and powerful but relaxed at the appropriate times. Sakura was carrying a lot of confidence into the bronze medal match.

### Although she did a great performance in the Bronze medal match, she couldn't get the "hardware" like she likes to call it. What was the sensation you guys had after not getting the Bronze medal?

I was very surprised by the scores in the bronze medal round. I really believe Sakura's kata in that round was better than the Italian's. To see her get that close and leave without the medal was really tough, and the look on her face when she saw the scores was pretty heartbreaking.

### With your participation in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics you have written your name in the history of karate and the Karate in the USA how an Olympic Coach. How do you feel about it?

I don't really know how to feel about the historical aspect. It's amazing to have been part of it but I believe it would have been the same unbelievable experience if this was the tenth time karate was in the Olympics rather than the first.

### Karate won't be in Paris 2024 but we showed in Tokyo that we deserve a permanent place at the Olympic Games. What about Los Angeles 2028?

I was blown away by karate being excluded from the Paris Games in 2024. Karate absolutely deserves to remain an Olympic sport and it would be amazing if it happened again in the USA. That being said, it's important that we remember that karate is amazing even if it is not in the Olympics, and as many athletes around the world retire it's a great time for USA to make a move to be a world leader in karate.

### Anything you would like to say to all the fans and USA TEAM supporters?

There were no fans in the stands but the support from back home was greatly appreciated. The athletes discussed the support with smiles on their face on many occasions and it clearly helped to keep their spirits high when it mattered most.. **USANKF**



## DR. JESSICA D. BARTLEY



**You traveled to Koga City and Tokyo with the USA Karate Team. How was the experience?**

I had an incredible experience supporting the athletes around sport psychology and mental health during Koga City and Tokyo. Traveling with USA Karate provided me with the opportunity to understand what these athletes need physically and mentally.

**How did you see the USA athletes during their time in the host city of Koga? Did they show nervousness, anxiety, etc... knowing the relevance of the competition ahead?**

As a whole, I think the athletes were unbelievably excited. I also noticed a lot of gratitude. The accommodations in Koga City were outstanding and the facilities were incredible. I also wanted to add that the food was exceptional!

**Sport Psychology has become a very important aspect of elite competition in all sports today. Why do you think is that and how relevant is this aspect in the athlete's performance?**

To be competing at the Olympic level, the physical needs to be as strong as the mental. The wrong mindset can greatly influence an athlete's performance.

**What process do you follow to assess an athlete psychological state?**

When working with athletes on the mental game, I start by asking athletes what their 'zone' is and if they know how to get into the zone. Do they need to be calm? Or do they need to be energized? Do they know how they can get into their zone? If not, I work to try to get them there!

**What is the most relevant mental aspect an athlete should control before any event?**

How they get into their zone or how they can achieve peak performance. This is different for every athlete and it is important to do what puts you in the best mindset to perform at your best!

**What methods do you follow to make sure the communications channels are always open and accurate with the athlete you are working on?**

I ask athletes a lot of questions. I think I am constantly trying to revisit goals and understand what an athlete might need to be at their best. It's always changing and I want to make sure that I ask questions to know what they might need from me.

**What advice – in general - would you give to those athletes who were successful (got a medal) and to those who didn't as far as coping with the results of the competition?**



I think it is important to set a number of goals during every competition and even for every training session. If your only goal was medaling, you will often be disappointed. You should have a number of different process, performance, and outcome goals because your worth should not be solely determined by medals.

**Anything you would like to say to all USA TEAM supporters?**

Thank you for supporting our incredible karatekas in the Olympic debut! My hope is that karate returns to the Olympics very soon! **USANKF**



**Jessica D. Bartley PsyD, MSSW**  
 Licensed Psychologist (LP)  
 Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW)  
 Certified Mental Performance Consultant (CMPC)  
 Clinical Associate Professor, Sport and Performance Psychology, Graduate School of Professional Psychology  
 Director, Center for Performance Excellence (CPEX)  
 University of Denver  
 Director, Mental Health Services  
 United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC)

# FARIBA MADANI



**You were selected to be part of the group of Karate Referees for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. How was that selection made considering the large number of referees around the world?**

As you know the pandemic held back our life for one year and shortly after New Year with the vaccine and slowly learning how to control spreading the germs, Turkey hosted the first WKF event in March 2021. That was our first referee trial to be selected for the Olympics. Basically all WKF AA license who were present at that event had the privilege to go through this qualification by a panel of 3 Continental Chairman. The qualification continued to Lisbon PL and based on the grades giving to each official, the WKF executive committee selected the officials.

**What is the first thing that came to your mind when you knew?**

As excited as I got when I got the news from WKF, I was worried about cancellation of the games. It was right at the time that Japanese people were doing lots of protest against government willing to host the games and also starting the new Delta variant wave that increased the number of infected people around the world.

**Was there any kind of preparation that group of Referees had to do for the Olympic Games?**

Paris Qualification was a trial for all 15 qualified officials. As you perhaps noticed only 15 Olympic referees did all final rounds. From our hand gesture to holding the flags, our calls, to application of the rules, everything was observed by the president, WKF executive committee, WKF sport committee and our chairman. We also had one extra day of workshop after the event to wrap up everything and polish all that we needed to revise before Tokyo. We also had a long meeting with president who set a standard for us and made us aware of his and the world expectations from us!

**Once in Tokyo and when you checked the venue – the legendary Budokan, what came to you mind?**

I visited the Budokan on several other occasions in the past but this time even entering to the venue was totally different. We had to go through a restricted security checkpoint starting with checking our temperature and then the whole security check. Once entering the venue from the upper floor looking down, all of my colleagues took their phone out and start taking pictures. I just stood there for some time and told myself “It is happening and I am here”. What an honor!

**What was the main thing that the group of Referees had in mind to make sure everything was going to be under control during the matches?**

All officials were required to arrive no later than 3 days prior starting the competition. First to make sure that we are all healthy and virus free, and then to have a chance to do many rehearsals prior to the competition.

**With only one tatami and the Video Review on the big screen, a lot of responsibility was put on the shoulder of the Referees. Did you guys have a conversation about how to address issues that could come up during the competition?**

We had a daily practice with Japanese competitors with two main purposes. First priority was to time every single match for television timing purpose and also for the referee calls and presences in the full action. Follow up each practice, we had a meeting with our chairman to discuss and review our actions. In addition, we also had a meeting with WKF president, sport commission and organizing committee to review all responsibilities and the impact of our action that can change Karate as Olympic sport in the future.

**All referees took part in both Kata and Kumite or was there a previous selection of who would referee what?**

Absolutely not! The judging panel selection was done only by computer and most specifically by Omega system. This was based on each referee conflict interest in no particular order.

**How do you see the overall referees' performance in Tokyo 2020?**

I believe we did a good job. Our calls were based on the rules and accurate. At least that was the feedback that we had.

**If you could rewind the tape and change anything, what that would be?**

Nothing when it comes to the competition or how the referees did. I only wish we could have the whole Bodukan filled with parents of the athletes and many more who wanted to be there.

**With your participation in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics you have written your name in the history of karate and the Karate in the USA how an Olympic Referee. How do you feel about it?**

Honored and privileged to have this opportunity but still will enjoy officiating a 5 years old beginner as much as judging in the Olympics.

**Karate won't be in Paris 2024 but we showed in Tokyo the sport deserves a permanent place at the Olympic Games. What about Los Angeles 2028?**

I think a common goal and wish for any karate-ka around the world is to see Olympic as a permanent Olympic sport. We really deserve it especially with such a spectacular performance in 2020 Games. I trust those in charge to make it happen as they made it happen for Tokyo.

**Anything you would like to say to all the referees around the world and USA TEAM supporters?**

Thank you for all the support and messages that I received. I am humbled and thankful. It sure is a long journey with lot of sacrifices that me - or any referee - goes through to become a good one. Just remember that we are all human, not robots and mistakes can happen especially when we are under pressure. But most important thing is not to let the mistake happen twice.! **USANKF**



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## AT-A-GLANCE

### 2022 MINOR ATHLETE ABUSE PREVENTION POLICIES



In September 2020, the U.S. Center for SafeSport (the Center) published the Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies (MAAPP) with Mandatory Components that NGBs, PSOs, and the USOPC were required to adopt. USA National Karate-do Federation adopted its USA-NKF Minor Athlete and Official Abuse Prevention Policies Version 2.2 on March 5, 2021.

This document is based on the minimum mandatory components of the Center's Model MAAPP. Every Organization may choose to go beyond these minimum requirements and set standards that are stricter. Additionally, Adult Participants must be familiar with their respective Organization's policies and be aware of all requirements.

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## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

### REMEMBER:

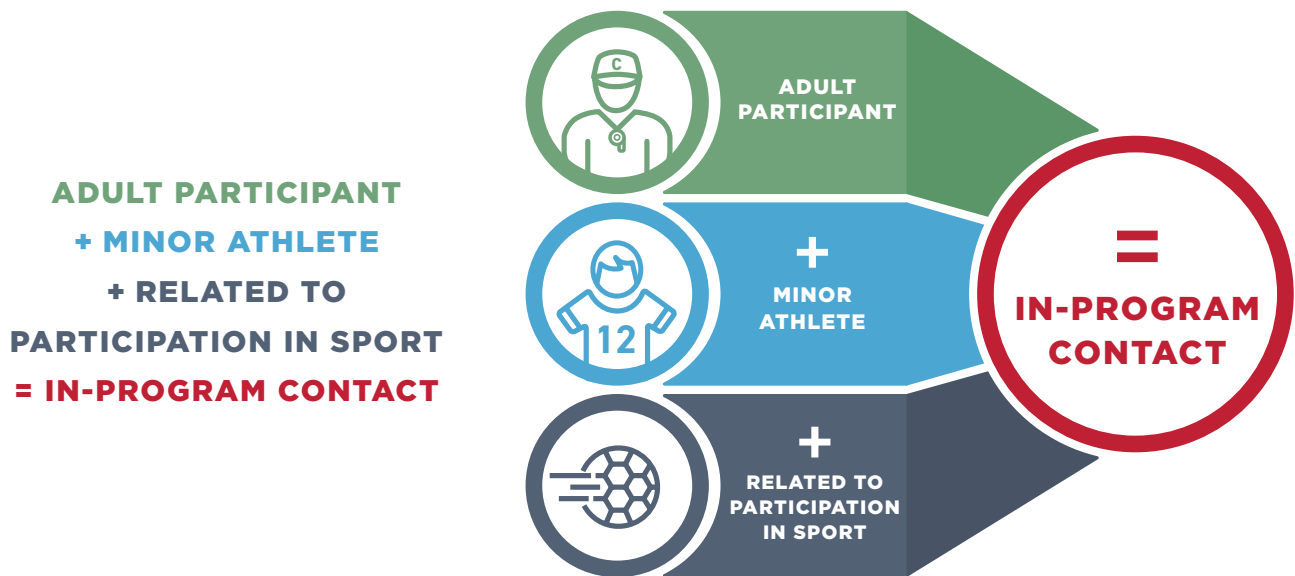
- If you have Regular Contact with or Authority over a Minor Athlete, or if you are an employee or board member of an NGB, PSO, LAO or the USOPC, you are required to complete the *SafeSport Trained Core* and subsequent Refresher Courses.
- Adult Participants who also are medical providers obligated to complete training can take the Health Professionals Course in lieu of the *SafeSport Trained Core*.
- Adult Participants must complete training:
  - » Before Regular Contact with a Minor Athlete begins; and
  - » Within the first 45 days of initial membership or upon beginning a new role subjecting the adult to this policy

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## IN-PROGRAM CONTACT

As the equation illustrates, all three components (Adult Participant, Minor Athlete, and Related to Participation in Sport) must be present for the MAAPP to apply. If one component is absent, then the interaction or activity would NOT be considered In-Program and thus not covered by the MAAPP.



**1 | ADULT PARTICIPANT:** Any adult (18 years of age or older) who is:

- A** A member or license holder of an NGB, PSO, LAO, or USOPC;
- B** An employee or board member of an NGB, PSO, LAO, or USOPC;
- C** Within the governance or disciplinary jurisdiction of an NGB, PSO, LAO, or USOPC;
- D** Authorized, approved, or appointed by an NGB, PSO, LAO, or USOPC to have Regular Contact with or Authority over Minor Athletes.

**2 | MINOR ATHLETE:** An amateur athlete under 18 years of age who participates in, or participated within the previous 12 months in, an event, program, activity, or competition that is part of, or partially or fully under the jurisdiction of, an NGB, PSO, USOPC, or LAO.

Common examples of activities **Related to Participation in Sport:**



## REGULAR CONTACT

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Ongoing interactions during a 12-month period wherein an Adult Participant is in a role of direct and active engagement with any Minor Athlete(s). Some examples of NGB/PSO/USOPC/LAO members who MAY have Regular Contact with Minor Athletes include:

- Coaches
- Adult Athletes on teams with Minor Athletes
- Volunteers in positions of Regular Contact (e.g., locker room monitors, parent chaperones)
- Athletic Trainers
- Health Professionals
- Officials

**\*\*REMEMBER:** NGB/LAO/PSO/USOPC Staff and Board Members are required to complete the *SafeSport Trained Core/Health Professionals Course* and subsequent Refreshers regardless of whether they have Regular Contact with or Authority over Minor Athletes.

## AUTHORITY

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When one person's position over another person is such that, based on the totality of the circumstances, they have the power or right to direct, control, give orders to, or make decisions for that person.

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# REQUIRED PREVENTION POLICIES



In addition to the above three exceptions there is an overarching Emergency Exception that applies in all areas of the MAAPP.

## MAAPP EXCEPTIONS:

In the MAAPP, there are multiple areas where exceptions have been built into the Required Prevention Policies to address common relationships and situations that occur throughout the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Movement. If an exception applies to a specific policy, it will be listed as a possible exception, along with any additional requirements. The exceptions found in the MAAPP are:

### 1 | AN EMERGENCY.

2 | **CLOSE-IN-AGE:** When an Adult Participant does not have Authority over the Minor Athlete and is no more than four years older than the Minor Athlete.

3 | **PERSONAL CARE ASSISTANT (PCA):** When an Adult Participant is a Personal Care Assistant and has met the following requirements:

- The Minor Athlete's parent/guardian must provide written consent to the Organization for the PCA to provide care/work with their Minor Athlete.
- The PCA must complete the required training as defined in the Education & Training Policy.
- The PCA must meet all screening requirements of the Organization.

4 | **DUAL RELATIONSHIPS:** When an Adult Participant has a relationship with a Minor Athlete that is outside of the sport program. A parent/guardian must provide written consent to the Organization on an annual basis for this exception to be granted.

## ONE-ON-ONE INTERACTIONS POLICY

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- Policy Jurisdiction: All In-Program Contact.
- All one-on-one interactions between an Adult Participant and Minor Athlete **MUST** be:
  - » Observable
  - » Interruptible
- Exceptions to the One-on-One Interactions Policy:
  - » Emergency Circumstances
  - » Dual Relationships
  - » Close-In-Age
  - » Personal Care Assistant who meets the requirements

## MEETING AND TRAINING SESSIONS

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- Must follow One-on-One Interactions Policy when Minor Athletes are present.
- Individual Training Sessions.
  - » Policy Jurisdiction: All In-Program Contact.
  - » Consent required from parent/guardian annually. Can be withdrawn at any time.
  - » Parents/Guardians must be allowed to observe.
- One-on-One Interactions Policy Exceptions are allowed for In-Program meetings and individual training sessions.
- Meetings with licensed mental health care professionals and health care providers.
  - » Policy Jurisdiction: At facilities that are partially or fully under the jurisdiction of the Organization.
  - » Meetings do not need to be observable and interruptible if the following requirements are met:
    - a. Door is unlocked.
    - b. Another adult is present in the facility and is aware of the meeting.
    - c. Organization is aware of the meeting.
    - d. The provider obtains appropriate consent as required by law and ethical standards.

## ATHLETIC TRAINING MODALITIES, MASSAGES, AND RUBDOWNS

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- Must follow One-on-One Interactions Policy.
- Must **ALWAYS** have a second **Adult Participant** in the room during treatment.
- Required consent from parent/guardian that needs to be documented at least annually.
- During treatment Minor Athlete's breast, buttocks, groin, and genitals **MUST** always be covered.
- Parents/Guardians **must** be allowed to attend treatment unless in a restricted area.
- **No** policy exceptions.

## LOCKER ROOMS AND CHANGING AREAS

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- Must follow One-on-One Interactions Policy.
- The photographic or recording capabilities of any device (cell phones, cameras, tablets) cannot be used by any Participant in locker rooms or changing areas during In-Program activities.
- Adult Participants **MUST NOT** change clothes or behave in a way that exposes their breast, buttocks, groin, or genitals to a Minor Athlete.
- Adult Participants **CANNOT** shower with a Minor Athlete unless:
  - » The Adult Participant is an athlete with no Authority over the Minor Athlete and there is no more than four years age difference (Close-in-Age Exception).
  - » The Adult Participant and Minor Athlete are wearing swimwear and the shower is part of a pre- or post-activity rinse.
- Media and Championship Celebration recordings are allowed if they meet specific requirements.
- Monitoring must occur for all locker rooms and changing areas at sanctioned events and facilities partially or fully under Organization's jurisdiction.
- A semi-private or private area to change must be provided to all Minor Athletes at sanctioned events and facilities partially or fully under the Organization's jurisdiction.

## ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

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- Must be Open and Transparent, meaning that:
  - » Communication between an Adult Participant and a Minor Athlete must include a parent/guardian, another adult family member of the Minor Athlete, or another Adult Participant.
  - » This includes all communication started by a Minor Athlete.
- Only electronic platforms that can be Open and Transparent should be used.
- All team communication or communications with multiple Minor Athletes from an Adult Participant must copy or include another Adult Participant, or all the Minor Athletes' parents/guardians.
- All communication must be professional in nature.
- Organizations must honor a parent/guardian's request to discontinue communication with their Minor Athlete unless there is an emergency.
- One-one-One exceptions are allowed.





## TRANSPORTATION

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- Must follow One-on-One Interactions Policy, unless an exception exists or appropriate consent is obtained.
- In-Program transportation requirements are met if the Adult Participant is accompanied by another Adult Participant or at least two minors.
- One-on-One In-Program travel is permitted between an Adult Participant and a Minor Athlete when advance written consent is obtained from a parent/guardian on an annual basis. Can be withdrawn at any time.
- Written consent must be obtained from a parent/guardian annually for all transportation sanctioned by the Organization.
- One-on-One Exceptions are allowed.

## LODGING

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- Must follow One-on-One Interactions Policy.
- An Adult Participant **CANNOT** share a hotel room or otherwise sleep in the same room with a Minor Athlete during In-Program lodging except:
  - » When there is a Dual Relationship and written consent is provided by a parent/guardian prior to the lodging arrangement.
  - » When there is a Close-In-Age Exception and written consent is provided by a parent/guardian prior to the lodging arrangement.
  - » When there is a Personal Care Assistant Exception, all PCA requirements have been met, and written consent is provided by a parent/guardian prior to the lodging arrangement.
- Written consent is required for all In-Program lodging at least annually.
- Adult Participants traveling with an Organization overnight:
  - » Must agree to and sign the Organization's lodging policy annually.
  - » Are assumed to have "Authority" and must comply with the Center's Education & Training Policy.

# RECOMMENDED POLICIES FOR KEEPING YOUNG ATHLETES SAFE

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## OUT-OF-PROGRAM CONTACT

- Adult Participants should not have Out-of-Program Contact with Minor Athletes, unless an exception exists, or appropriate consent has been obtained.
- Out-of-Program Contact should be avoided even if the contact is not one-on-one.

## GIFTING

- Adult Participants should not give personal gifts to Minor Athletes unless an applicable exception exists (Close-in-Age or Dual Relationship).
- Gifts are permitted if distributed equally for all athletes.
- Gifts that serve a motivational or educational purpose are permitted.

## PHOTOGRAPHY/VIDEO

- Photographs or videos of athletes should only be taken in public view.
- Must observe generally accepted standards of decency.
- Adult Participants should not share or post photos or videos of Minor Athletes unless proper consent has been obtained from the Minor Athlete and the Minor Athlete's parent/guardian.



# USA KARATE'S

**T**he USA Karate Safe Sport Program will consist of online SafeSport® Training, background screening and a collection of policies to protect our members. SafeSport® Training and background screening must be completed for each USA Karate Official, Coach, Adult National Team Member, Committee Member, Staff and Board Member. Compliance is required to participate as a Referee, Judge, Credentialed Coach, Event Staff, Club Press Pass holders and Medical Staff at Signature Events. Athletes 18 years and over are required to complete SafeSport® Training. Volunteers and Vendors are required to have reviewed the Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies At-A-Glance and the Reporting At-A-Glance. Those who have not completed the program requirements or who are on the banned list will not be allowed to participate in any capacity at any USA Karate Signature Event

## **Background Check**

To be completed every 2 years. National Center for Safety Initiatives (NCSI) is our vendor and will recheck each applicant annually. The cost of the background screening is approximately \$30 depending on your state. To complete the background check, you will simply need to do the following:

- 1) Go to the membership platform [usankf.sport80.com](https://usankf.sport80.com) and log in to your account
- 2) Select the Background Screening
- 3) The system will display your status
- 4) If lapsed, you be able to renew your training or if it is the first screen you will add a background screen

## **Online Training Session**

SafeSport® training must be completed every year for participants 18 years of age and older

To complete the free SafeSport® Training, you will simply need to do the following:

- 1) Go to the membership platform [usankf.sport80.com](https://usankf.sport80.com) and log in to your account
- 2) Select the US Center for SafeSport Training
- 3) The system will display your status
- 4) If lapsed or missing you will be able to access training

# SAFESPORT PROGRAM

The collection of all SafeSport Policies and procedures for your review are found in the Participant Safety Handbook and the Minor Athlete and Official Abuse Prevention Policies. **The latest version can be found on our website at [safesport.usankf.org](https://safesport.usankf.org).**

## Reporting

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

### Sexual Misconduct involving a minor

- U.S. Center for SafeSport – [uscenterforsafesport.org/report-a-concern](https://uscenterforsafesport.org/report-a-concern) or 833-587-7233
- USA Karate Ethics website [usakarateethics.com](https://usakarateethics.com) or 844-598-1865
- You should also report Sexual misconduct involving a minor to local law enforcement

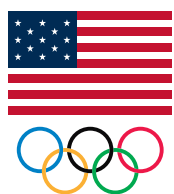
### All other violations

- USA Karate Ethics website [usakarateethics.com](https://usakarateethics.com) or 844-598-1865
- Report via an incident report form emailed to the CEO or Ethics Committee Chairperson
- Contacting the **CEO** or **Ethics Committee Chairperson** directly  
CEO: Phil Hampel [phampel@usankf.org](mailto:phampel@usankf.org) • 719-309-6030  
Ethics Committee Chairperson: Chris Hodgin – [chodgin@usankf.org](mailto:chodgin@usankf.org)

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact the National Office for additional assistance. We look forward to partnering with each of you as we work together to ensure a Safe Sport!

# USA KARATE

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Where Olympic Journeys Begin