

To AJKA-International  
AJKA-I of PA  
Instructor Trainee's Report #24

Subject: **“Judging Karate Contests”**

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Besides karate being a martial art it is also an exciting sport. Like other sports, there are competitions, or tournaments, in which karate-kas compete for medals and/or trophies by demonstrating their ability and skills. On any given weekend there can be numerous karate competitions in your area to test your skills. Beside local tournaments there are also national and international events.

In any karate tournament there are two main events -- kata and kumite. These two main events are often broken into other events such as: team kata, team kumite and kobudo. The competitor can compete in all or a few of these events.

Having just held my first tournament in May 2015 I learned that a karate competition is a show. It is your job as the host to put on the best show possible for both the spectators and the competitors. The competitors are the entertainment and the family, friends and other spectators are the audience.

Besides the location and the medals/trophies, the most important aspect of a successful tournament are good judges and referees. The competitors and the spectators must believe that the rules are known and followed by each Referee and Judge. As such, it is critical that the Referees and Judges look and act professional at all times and they must know the rules. Our tournaments utilize a modified version of the International Karate Union rules.

All Referees and Judges must look professional. The Referee and Judge uniform is composed of:

- Navy blue blazer bearing two silver buttons
- White button down shirt
- Red Tie (preferably with AJKA-I logo)
- Light grey pants
- Black socks
- Black shoes
- AJKA logo for Blazer

The Referee organizes, coordinates and supervises the whole activity at the match area. He has the ultimate responsibility of judgment. He is responsible for ensuring that matches are conducted according to the rules and guidelines of the tournament.

The Referee has the ability to stop the match to ask the Judges questions, revise an error or any decision against the rules. The Referee is responsible to explain the grounds on which a decision is made, announce fouls and issue warnings. Essentially, the Referee has all of the power during the matches

The Judges sit in the corners of the match area. It is the main job of the Judges to assist the Referee in evaluating the performance of the contestants to determine a winner of the match. A Judge may only call what they see in their line of vision.

Both Kata and Kumite are held within a match area. It is customary that the match area is between 6x6 to a maximum of 8x8 meters depending on the space of the competition floor. While national and international competitions are held on tatami mats most local events are held on wood floors.

All competitors must wear a clean white karate-gi. The sleeves of the gi-jacket must reach half way down the forearm and must not be longer than the bend of the wrist – sleeves cannot be rolled up. The gi-pants must not reach the floor and cannot be rolled up.

In kumite matches, competitors (children) must wear head gear, hand gear, leg gear, mouth piece, and groin protectors. In adults matches the competitor needs to wear hand gear, mouth piece and groin protector. All of the other equipment is optional. All females need wear their hair back.

Kata competition is judged either by using flags (Red and White or Red and Blue) or utilizing score cards (0-9 whole numbers with decimals 0-9). While there is always a Center Referee who sits in the center chair the amount of corner Judges can vary between 2 and maximum of 4.

If the flag system is used then the Referee and Judges each have two flags (red and white or Red and Blue) then the two competitors will enter the match area at the same time. One competitor will be designated aka (red) and the other will be shiro (white). They will stand on either the aka or shiro line. Each competitor will then announce the kata that they are performing. The Center Referee will repeat the kata announced so there is no confusion. The center Referee will then announce Hajime to begin the match and both competitors will perform their kata. When both competitors complete their kata the Center Referee will announce Yame to end the competition. The center Referee will then blow his whistle and immediately and simultaneously the Center Referee and the corner Judges shall raise their flags as to who won the match aka or shiro. The majority of the flags determine the winner.

In the adult advance or black belt division the competitors will enter the match area separately and perform their kata. The reason for this is that some of the advance kata take up larger amount of space. Once both competitors have performed their kata separately the Center Referee will call both competitors into the match area. The competitors will stand on their designated area (aka or shiro) and then the center Referee will blow his whistle for the judges to make a decision regarding the winner.

If the card system is used then the Referee and Judges will have a set of score cards with whole numbers 0-9 and with decimals 0-9. The Center Referee will then call one contestant into the ring at a time. The contestant will announce the kata that they are performing. The Center Referee will repeat the kata. The Center Referee will then announce Hajime for the competitor to begin his kata and yame when the kata is completed. The center Referee will call Hantei for the Corner Judges decisions. Immediately and simultaneously the Center Referee and the corner Judges will raise their score boards with their decisions. Out of three (3) or five (5) scores received the highest and the lowest shall be removed and the remaining one (1) or three (3) scores will be totaled. If there are any ties the individuals that tied will have their highest and lowest scores added back to break the tie.

Depending on the rules of tournament children and adults may be required to perform a different kata during each round of competition.

In kata competition the Referee and Judges are looking for the following:

- Sequence
- Control and power
- Speed and rhythm
- Tension and contraction
- Direction of movement
- Coordination
- Concentration
- Understanding of the kata techniques
- Stability and balance
- Breathing
- Spirit - kiais
- Feet are flat
- No rocking

Kumite matches are similar to Kata in that there is a Center Referee and Corner Judges and that the competition occurs within the match area. However, the Center Referee is not seated. The center Referee is standing and conducting the match while the corner Judges are seated.

All child matches are Shobu Sanbon continuous 2 minutes and adult black belt division is Shobu Ippon, except for the final round when it will be Shobu Sanbon.

The Kumite match is decided by a scoring system: Ippon, Wazari or hantei. An Ippon is awarded when an exact and powerful technique is delivered to the recognized scoring areas under the following conditions:

- good form (technique, synchronization, position and balance)
- strong vigour (kime)
- good attitude
- zanshin
- proper timing
- correct distancing

Ippon is awarded

- When an attack is delivered with perfect timing and the opponent started to move towards the attacker
- When an attack is delivered immediately as the opponent was unbalanced by the attacker.
- When a combination of successive and effective attacks are used.
- For the combined use of tsuki and kerri techniques.
- When the opponent has lost their fighting spirit and turned their back to the attacker.

- Effective attacks delivered on the undefended parts of the opponent.
- For valid Jodan Geri techniques

A Waza-ari is awarded for a technique almost comparable to that needed to score Ippon. The refereeing panel must look for Ippon in the first instance and only award a Wazaari in the second instance.

Victory will be awarded by obtaining the higher score after two (2) minutes of the kumite match or by reaching Ippon (two wazari) or Sanbon (six wazari) score. Victory can also be awarded by Hantei, defeat due to foul or disqualification (hansoku), or forfeit.

During the kumite match the Center Referee and Judges are also watching for forbidden actions or techniques by the competitors. They are categorized in the following manner:

- **Atenai**
  - Uncontrolled attacks
  - Techniques which make excessive contact
  - Attacks to the upper and lower limbs, hip joint, knee joints, the insteps and the shins
  - Attacks to the groin
  - Open hand techniques to the face, throat, and neck
  - Jumping techniques like Tobi Yokogeri or Uraken Uchi
  - Grabbing (unless immediately followed up by a technique)
  - Time-wasting. This includes refusing to fight, running away from the opponent
  - Dangerous leg sweeping techniques
  - Dangerous throws
  - Unsporting behavior
  - Any behavior likely to bring Karate into disrepute
  - - **The possible penalties are:**
    - Private warning: Atenai
    - Official warning: Atenai Chui
    - Disqualification: Atenai Hansoku
- **Mubobi** - Lack of regard for the contestant's own safety or integrity. The following situation will be punished with Mubobi:
  - Attacks with an unguarded head in front
  - Turning away after an attack (as a tactical or theatrical move) to draw the Referee's attention to the technique. The contestant is defenseless and their back may be exposed.
    - The possible penalties are:
    - Private warning: Mubobi
    - Official warning: Mubobi Chui
    - Disqualification: Mubobi Hansoku

- **Jogai** - Leaving the match area with any part of the body
  - It isn't Jogai if the contestant is pushed outside the match area by the opponent.
  - It is Jogai if the contestant goes out deliberately or to avoid an opponent's technique.
  - The point at which "Yame" is called is helpful in determining if Jogai has occurred.
  - Any escape from the match area will be penalized in the following manner:
    - For Sanbon Kumite:**
      - a) First escape - a Warning: Jogai
      - b) Second escape - a Private warning: Jogai
      - c) Third escape - Official warning: Jogai Chui
      - d) Fourth escape - Disqualification: Jogai Hansoku
    - For Ippon Kumite:**
      - a) First escape - a Warning: Jogai
      - b) Second escape - a Private warning: Jogai Chui
      - c) Third escape - Official warning: Jogai Hansoku

As stated in the beginning, karate is a very exciting sport. The participation in competition is often essential to the growth and understanding of the art. However, the Officials are very important as they maintain the integrity of the tournament. That is why it is so important that all of the Referees and Judges are trained on the Rules and Judging Seminars are so important.

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