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THE WKF UPDATE

Upcoming Events

12-15 May | Karate1 Premier League,
Rabat (Morocco)

09-11 June | Karate1 Premier League,
Fukuoka (Japan)

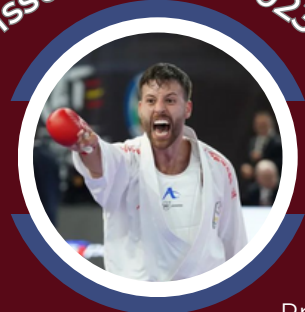
30 June | U21 & Senior Oceania
Championships,
Auckland (New Zealand)

PREMIER LEAGUE &
SERIES A EVENTS

**AUSSIES
INCLUDED!!**



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Affiliations



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World Karate Federation

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KARATE1
SERIES A



VANCOUVER

The Karate1 Series A, introduced in 2019, brings together elite athletes from around the world to compete in exclusive international tournaments and improve their rankings. The 2023 season features five events, starting in Athens (Greece) and continuing in Konya (Turkey), Richmond-Vancouver (Canada), Larnaca (Cyprus) and finishing in Matosinhos (Portugal). Registration is restricted to athletes ranked from position 33 onwards, however, each division is limited to a maximum of 96 competitors. The top 32 ranked athletes cannot compete.



The third Series A of the 2023 season was recently held in the city of Richmond-Vancouver, Canada. This marks the second time the country has hosted the league, building on the success seen in Montreal, 2019. Canada attracted 394 athletes from 51 countries, under half the number of competitors as seen in Athens and then Konya earlier this year. This low participation is to be expected given the travel distance for many European countries. The tournament was dominated in numbers by countries from the Pan-American Karate Federation with Mexico, the USA, and the host nation of Canada producing the highest numbers of participants at 25, 62, and 78, respectively.

Despite the lower division numbers, the tournament showcased a high level of karate, with local athletes rising to the occasion and impressing spectators. It was great to see many countries outside of Pan-America still making the trip with good representation from Japan, France, Germany, England, Italy, and China.



F

KATA

Japanese dominance once again in the Series A league

All four podium spots were taken by some of Japan's best kata athletes including the third place, 34-year-old veteran, Emiri Iwamoto. This is now Iwamoto's 17th Karate1 medal, however, it has been almost six years since she has claimed a gold. Yamada Nodoka is still at the heels of the leaders following her silver medal in Konya last month and now backing it up with a bronze medal here in Vancouver.

The difference between performances of kata at this level can come down to the slightest of mistakes. An overbalance in Mirisa Ohuchi's kata could have been all that was needed for Nakaji Hisami to take the gold medal in a narrow 0.1-point win. Regardless of Ohuchi's slight error, Hisami definitely showed up for her first ever WKF event with well-grounded stances and sharp execution in her performance, achieving a final score of 42.3.

It will be interesting to follow Ohuchi's upcoming movements after stamping her authority within the Series A League and now claiming fourth in the rankings. Watch out for her emergence onto the Premier League circuit!



Pictured: Yaneth Castillo of Mexico

Pictured: Sze Man Wong of Hong Kong



Pictured: Ananda Alberte of Venezuela



Nikaji Hisami (JPN)



Mirisa Ohuchi (JPN)



Nodoka Yamada (JPN)



Emiri Iwamoto (JPN)



Pictured: Ryonosuke Kikuchi of Japan

Despite taking both bronze medals, both fifth place positions and one of the seventh place positions, Japan failed to secure a finalist for the Male Kata division.

One of Japan's bronze medals was taken out by Kai Ayato and although he has stood on the podium at every Series A this year, he has yet to place first in the final round of the pool stage for a chance at the gold medal. For the other third place position, Seren Shimomura (Japan) managed to duplicate his 2019 Series A success, adding another bronze medal to his record.

Unfortunately, Ryonosuke Kikuchi (Japan; pictured) who had won back-to-back Series A gold medals, was unable to finish in the top 3 in group 1 of round 3 which resulted in an underwhelming 7th place for Japan. However, he is still a formidable opponent going into the Moroccan Premier League, having recently achieved a new rank of 15 in the standings.

M KATA



Pictured: Robert Torres of Puerto Rico

In the gold medal final, Rey Chinen from the USA had a convincing win over Dyun Kimura from Brazil. Despite this being Chinen's first Karate1 competition since 2018, the young 2019 U21 World Champion showcased his powerful and dynamic *Ohan Dai* in the final. Perhaps he will stand in the way of Japan claiming yet another Male Kata Senior World Champion later this year.

Kimura's achievement should not be overlooked. This is the first Karate1 medal for the 33-year-old, demonstrating that his best years are yet to come. He previously had not got past the second round of a Series A.



Rey Chinen (USA)



Dyun Kimura (BRA)



Kai Ayato (JPN)



Seren Shimomura (JPN)

M

+84kg

An interesting final for this relatively small heavyweight division of only 14 athletes. Athanasios Nikopoulos from Greece saw his opportunity here and after winning no more than four fights in total across his seven Karate1 events, everything seemed to click in Vancouver for him to take out the gold.

The final started off in favour of the Mexican athlete, Pablo Palomino, catching Nikopoulos with a fast anticipation *kizami zuki* (jab punch). Palomino looked to be in control until Nikopoulos fired back with an anticipation of his own in the form of a *jodan gyaku zuki* (head reverse punch). A simultaneous clash increased the score to 2:2, but Palomino was proving too much for his opponent and pulled away 4:2.

With 16 seconds left on the clock, the gold medal seemed to be going in favour of Mexico until both athletes came in close and Nikopoulos performed a swift takedown, followed up with an accurate *gyaku zuki* (reverse punch) while his opponent was on the floor. Now up 5:4, it was simple defence to take Nikopoulos over the line and bring home the gold medal for Greece.

Even with this final being a great offensive display, both athletes came into the gold medal match without conceding a point during the preliminary rounds!



Athanasios Nikopoulos (GRE)



Pablo Palomino (MEX)



RKT

Ghararizadeh Mahdi (RKT)



Oussama Zitouni (ALG)

F

+68kg

After dropping out of the top 32 from her first round loss at the Premier League in Cairo, Yuzuki Sawae (Japan) rebounded with a convincing performance in the final against Cirrus Lingl (USA). Sawae controlled the distance and timing, dominating the match with her counter attacks to come away with a solid 4:0 win. Taking out first place in Vancouver puts Sawae back into the top 32 meaning she can set her sights back on the Premier League circuit once again.

Lingl's silver medal at this Series A builds off her three wins at the 2021 Senior World Championships. She matches her sister Skylar who also placed second in the -68kg category. Must be some solid training going on at the Lingl house-hold!

There was a unique contrast between the bronze medalists of this division. Meryem Yildirim, representing Germany, finally earned her first Karate1 medal after competing in the circuit since 2013. In contrast, the 18-year-old Emma Beaudu from France has quickly burst onto the scene after winning two rounds of recharge against Canada and Switzerland to secure the bronze. Coranson was in the same position at the Kocaeli Series A last year, but was unable win the bronze medal final and take home a medal.



Yuzuki Sawae (JPN)



Cirrus Lingl (USA)



Emma Beaudu (FRA)



Meryem Yildirim (GER)

Algeria and Germany faced off in an exciting gold medal final of the Male -84kg division. Right from the beginning it was all action. Falleh Midoune (Algeria) started a little too eager and Janne Haubold (Germany) took advantage with an anticipation *ura mawashi geri* (hook kick) to go up 3:0 in the first 8 seconds. Midoune's strategy didn't change however, constantly applying pressure which paid off with a swift *kizami zuki* (jab punch), followed by an anticipation *gyaku zuki* (reverse punch) to close the gap to 3:2. However, Haubold didn't allow an easy comeback and extended the lead to 4:2 with a long *kizami zuki* (jab punch); time now sitting at 1:13. Midoune's confidence in his aggressive approach rewarded him with a patient and well timed *jodan mawashi geri* (head round-house kick) to take the lead; score now 4:5 to Mildoune. The clock running down, Haubold, desperate for one point, attempted a takedown at the very last second and was extremely unlucky not to score. The win therefore went to the 19-year-old Algerian, Midoune, winning his first medal at only his third Karate1 event.

M

-84kg



Pictured: Anour Bougrine (AKA) defeats Raybak Abdesselem (AO)

In the bronze medal finals, Anouar Bougrine from Belgium (pictured) finally claims a Karate1 bronze medal after being on the circuit since 2016. Notably, in the first round he defeated the former U21 European Champion and runner-up U21 World Champion, Raybak Abdesselem from France. The young talent continued to pour through Vancouver with the second bronze medal going to 19-year-old Alexandre Martins Nunes from France. This is his first senior event and to bring home a medal is a great start to his Karate1 career.



Pictured: Rayane Deghali (Belgium; AO) and Nijuel Herschel (USA; AKA)



Falleh Midoune (ALG)



Janne Haubold (GER)



Anouar Bougrine (BEL)



Alexandre Martin Nunes (FRA)

Clash of the Sisters!

Skylar Lingl (USA), sister of Cirrus Lingl in the +68kg division, faced off against Ayumi Yatoji (Japan), one of two Yatoji sisters fighting on Finals Sunday. Yatoji started the fight appearing very calm and casual in an effort to play mind games with Lingl and demonstrate she was unimpressed with her opponent. Eager to prove she was more than worthy, Lingl took the fight to Yatoji, advancing with a straight-line combination to the head. Unfortunately, Yatoji believed in her ability to counter and picked Lingl off as she came in, earning the *senshu* (first point) advantage. With superior defence, Yatoji was able to fend off Lingl's attacks and exploit another opening towards the end of the fight, leading to a final score of 2:0.



Pictured: Ayumi Yatoji of Japan (AO) defeats Skylar Lingl of the USA (AKA).

Coming into this tournament, Nuriya Tizimbay (Kazakhstan) had achieved five bronze medals across continental championships and Karate1 events without ever reaching a gold medal final. Destiny was determined to repeat itself as Tizimbay went down to Lingl 5:1 in the second round. Despite this disappointing loss, Tizimbay made the most of her situation and fought through repercharge to win her sixth bronze medal final 5:2 against Julia Maclean of Canada.

Lea Vukoja of Croatia had a similar second round exit against the gold medalist Yatoji and had to fight through both USA and Brazil to earn herself the bronze medal. Vukoja has won three medals at Junior European Championships in the past, she has only improved since her debut in the senior Karate1 Leagues two years ago.

F
-68kg



Ayumi Yatoji (JPN)



Skylar Lingl (USA)



Nuriya Tizimbay (KAZ)



Lea Vukoja (CRO)

It was always going to be a tough battle in the gold medal final between Oussama Zaid of Algeria and Yusei Sakiyama of Japan. On Saturday, both athletes only conceded two points during their five fights, suggesting scores were going to be hard to come by when they faced each other come Sunday.

The first two minutes contained casual aggression from Sakiyama while Zaid tried to land an anticipation technique if his opponent got over-enthusiastic. However, no score was achieved until Zaid surprised Sakiyama with a long running *gyaku zuki* (reverse punch), taking a 1:0 lead towards the end of the match. Sakiyama's concentration broke for a split second once again, and Zaid was able to take a 2:0 lead with only 27 seconds remaining. Sakiyama, desperate for a point, ramped up his aggression and caught Zaid with a heavy head punch that instead of being rewarded for it, got a penalty for excessive contact. Only 21 seconds left on the clock, Zaid used the rules to avoid an exchange, twice stepping out of bounds when Sakiyama got too close and took a 2:0 victory.

This is a rule athletes often exploit – they use their remaining penalties to avoid an exchange towards the end of the fight. However, they run the risk of receiving one too many penalties and which would result in *hansoku* (disqualification).

The two bronze medal finals could not have been more different. Abilmansur Batyrgali (Kazakhstan) made sure not to fall short again after losing the bronze medal final in Konya earlier this year. His opponent, Saadi Abbas

(Pakistan), never got an opportunity as Batyrgali cruised to a commanding 8:0 with 25 seconds still on the clock. At this point, the match was forfeited to Batyrgali as per the rule that states, if a competitor establishes a clear lead of 8 points, the match is forfeited to the winning athlete at the time of their last score.

Contrastingly, the bronze medal final between Jared Smith (USA) and Ryan Gari (France) was point for point. The fighters entered the last 15 seconds 2:2 with Smith holding the *senshu* (first point) advantage. With only 9 seconds left on the clock, Smith was given a penalty for pushing and therefore, his *senshu* advantage was taken

away leaving the final decision up to the judges. Luckily, Smith's aggression during the fight awarded him the match in the eyes of the judges. This is Smith's first medal in the Series A.



M
-75kg



Oussama Zaid (ALG)



Yusei Sakiyama (JPN)



Abilmansur Batyrgali (KAZ)



Jared Smith (USA)

Mexico goes flawless!

Coming into the final, Ericka Sanchez from Mexico had not yet conceded a point, winning 9:0, 7:0 and then 6:0 in the semifinals. The gold medal final was no different as she scored a perfectly timed anticipation *chudan mawashi geri* (body roundhouse kick) to gain an early 2:0 lead. Maryam Ajaray from Belgium kept chasing her down, however Sanchez used her ringcraft to not get cornered and Ajaray was never able to set up a scoring technique.

This was the first senior Karate1 event for Sanchez, and what a way to start your Karate1 career!

Despite a disappointing Sunday, this result for Ajaray is still a big improvement from her round 4 loss in Konya earlier this year.

F
-61kg



Pictured: Maryam Ajaray in red (AKA).

This was the first Series A podium finish for both bronze medal winners Lejla Topalovic of Austria and Selma Raad of Canada. Raad cruised to a convincing win against Julie Canete (USA) after showcasing her attacking combinations with which she scored four points as well as a *jodan mawashi geri* (head roundhouse kick) for a final score of 7:1.

Hei Chow (Hong Kong) was more of a challenge for Topalovic, however, her clear height and reach advantage allowed her to pick off Chow with three long *kizami zuki*s (jab punches) to win the fight 3:0.



Ericka Sanchez (MEX)



Maryam Ajaray (BEL)



Lejla Topalovic (AUT)



Selma Raad (CAN)

Morteza Nemati of Iran dominated the preliminary matches on Saturday, not conceding a point until the semifinal where he won 11:4. He entered the gold medal final facing Bernardo Solorzano of Mexico who was also feeling confident after winning his semifinal 3:0.

Nemati opened the match with a well-timed *kizami zuki* (jab punch) to earn himself *senshu* (first point advantage). He then followed up with a skillful combination of two *chudan mawashi geris* (body roundhouse kicks) of which he scored the second. Although Solorzano arguably should have scored a *chudan mawashi geri* of his own in the dying seconds, it was too late and Nemati took home gold for Iran, 3:0.



M

-67kg

Noah Pisino from Switzerland and Tomas Fuentes from Chile went back and forth in an exciting bronze medal final. Pisino earned himself *senshu* (first point advantage) early in the match, with an impressive combination on a retreating Fuentes.

Soon after, Fuentes returned a long *gyaku zuki* (reverse punch) which evened the score and followed this up with a strong *chudan mawashi geri* (body roundhouse kick) to increase his lead to 3:1. With only four seconds left on the clock, Pisino scored a *chudan mawashi geri* of his own which evened the score back to 3:3. Because Pisino held the *senshu* advantage, he won the match and with it, the bronze medal. Just goes to prove, the match isn't over until the timer goes off!

The 30-year-old Marvin Garin from France won eight Premier League medals including three golds between 2012 and 2018. Since then, he has been trying to return to form and after achieving third in Athens, had high hopes for the Series A here in Vancouver. After going down to Solorzano in the quarter finals 1:3, he

rebounded strong and earned himself a place in the bronze medal bout against Italy's Gianmarco Pacino. Although the match was uneventful with neither athlete managing to score, the judges decided Garin was the better fighter and awarded him the bronze medal. Perhaps we will see him return to his elite form in the near future.



Morteza Nemati (IRI)



Bernardo Solorzano (MEX)



Marvin Garin (FRA)



Noah Pisino (SWI)

Hana brings home the only gold for the host nation of Canada! Now holds rank 5!

Coming into this tournament, Hana Furumoto-Deshaies (Canada) was primed to succeed after a third place finish in Athens and a seventh place finish at the Premier League in Cairo (Egypt) where she lost to the silver medalist. Facing Gulmira Ussenova (Kazakhstan) in the gold medal final, Hana had complete faith in her ability and achieved *senshu* (first point advantage) early in the match with a well-executed attacking combination. She did not allow herself to get over-excited which enabled her to take advantage of a clinch situation and extend her lead to 3:0 with a *chudan mawashi geri* (body roundhouse kick).

Ussenova was unable to come back and walked away disappointed as she has now lost two finals chances at winning her first Series A gold medal. This still puts her into the top 32 and she will be determined to prove herself in the next Premier League tournament.



Pictured: Matilda Rosenlind (AKA) of Sweden

Akira Yatoji of Japan (sister of Ayumi Yatoji in the -68kg division) missed out on the bronze medal in Konya last month after going down 4:7 to Tsui-Ping Ku (Chinese Taipei). Here in Vancouver, despite being knocked out in the semifinals by only one point (3:4) against Hana, she re-focussed and was determined to not repeat falling short in Konya. She stuck to her strengths as an anticipator which proved too much for Georgie Lawrence of Australia. Although the score was an equal 1:1 going into the last minute, Yatoji scored two well-timed *ippons* (3-point scores) to extend her lead and win the fight 7:1.

The other bronze medal was taken by Matilda Rosenlind from Sweden who dominated her opponent, Valentyna Zolotarova (Jamaica), scoring six points in only 16 seconds! She was only one of two athletes to make the trip from Sweden and after being knocked out early in both Athens and Konya, she will be excited to bring home the bronze.



F
-55kg



Hana Furumoto-Deshaies (CAN)



Gulmira Ussenova (KAZ)



Matilda Rosenlind (SWE)



Akira Yatoji (JPN)

Watch out for Hiromu Hashimoto from Japan!

Hashimoto came into this event having won his previous Series A tournament in Athens. He continued his dominating form here in Vancouver, winning three of his four preliminary fights 8:0 and did not lose form in the gold medal match. Coming up against fellow Japanese fighter Sena Kondo, Hashimoto proved he was a level above the competition and cruised to a 6:0 victory. Nothing was stopping this man as over the last two Series A tournaments, he has maintained an astonishing record of 66:6 in points.

Pictured: Michael Dasoul (AO).



Pictured: Bogdan Gogolosi (AKA) of Romania

This is not to take away from Kondo's performance. At only 19 years of age, Kondo was challenged during the preliminary rounds by current rank 21 Michael Dasoul from Belgium (pictured), and bronze medalist,

Naim Abdesslam Rouichi from Algeria. Not only is defeating these two opponents impressive, but taking home the silver is also an improvement on his third place finish at the Series A in Jakarta at the end of last year.

M

-60kg

After losing in the semifinals to Kondo, Rouichi (Algeria) had only one fight to win to secure the bronze. Despite going down 1:0 to Joseph Tolentino (USA) in the first minute, Rouichi came back with an explosive *chudan mawashi geri* (body roundhouse kick) and held a 2:1 lead until the clock ran out. This is Rouichi's first Series A medal and at only 20-years-old, has plenty of opportunity to grow as an athlete.

The second bronze medal final was decided by *hantei* (decision) after both athletes were unable to score during an intense match. The decision was left to the four corner judges who together determined Bogdan Gogolosi (Romania) had more control over the match and a better opportunity to score. Gogolosi walked away with his first Karate1 medal in the ten

years he has been competing on the circuit.



Hiromu Hashimoto (JPN)



Sena Kondo (JPN)



Naim Rouichi (ALG)



Bogdan Gogolosi (ROU)

F

-50kg



The gold medal final of the Female -50kg Kumite featured two athletes who both wanted to bounce back strongly from their last competition. Asia Agus (Italy) was knocked out of the top 32 after being unable to earn any points at the Premier League tournament in Cairo earlier this year. Similarly, Ema Sgardelli (Croatia) had a disappointing first round exit at the Series A in Athens.

After getting past the preliminary bouts on Saturday, they both came to face each other on Finals Sunday. The match was tense throughout as both athletes took turns exchanging attacks. Nothing quite landed until Sgardelli exploded out of *wakarate* (an informal warning to separate) and scored the first point nearing the end of the match. Having the advantage, she was able to defend against Agus and take home the gold medal. Despite Agus falling short, the ranking points earned from this tournament by both athletes have put them back into the top 32 and make them eligible for upcoming Premier League events.

Pictured: Cindy Tran (AKA) of Australia



For Rinka Tahata (Japan), the third medal final was a familiar place to be after winning bronze in her last two Karate1 tournaments. Winning her first round of recharge against Canada, she faced Laura Charruf (Mexico) and had no issue securing the bronze without conceding a point. Tahata still sits outside the top 32 and will need to continue winning medals in Series A events before she can compete in the Premier League.

This Series A did not start as planned for Fernanda Vega of Chile, losing 4:8 in the first round to the gold medal winner Sgardelli. However, she was determined to make it count when given a second chance in recharge and proved she belonged on the podium. She did not concede one point during all three recharge matches and because of her perseverance, she takes home a well-deserved bronze medal.



Ema Sgardelli (CRO)



Asia Agus (ITA)



Fernanda Vega (CHI)



Rinka Tahata (JPN)

MEDAL TALLY

COUNTRY

JAPAN (JAP)

ALGERIA (ALG)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (USA)

MEXICO (MEX)

CANADA (CAN)

CROATIA (CRO)

IRAN (IRI)

GREECE (GRE)

KAZAKHSTAN (KAZ)

BELGIUM (BEL)

GERMANY (GER)

BRAZIL (BRA)

ITALY (ITA)

FRANCE (FRA)

AUSTRIA (AUT)

CHILE (CHI)

ROMANIA (ROU)

REFUGEE KARATE TEAM (RKT)

SWEDEN (SWE)

SWITZERLAND (SWI)

   TOTAL

	4	3	6	13
	2	-	2	4
	1	2	1	4
	1	2	-	3
	1	-	1	2
	1	-	1	2
	1	-	-	1
	1	-	-	1
	-	1	2	3
	-	1	1	2
	-	1	1	2
	-	1	-	1
	-	1	-	1
	-	-	3	3
	-	-	1	1
	-	-	1	1
	-	-	1	1
RKT	-	-	1	1
	-	-	1	1
	-	-	1	1

THE AUSSIES

In his first international tournament for 2023, Shaun Yuen of Australia performed strongly in the preliminary pools, scoring over 40 in the first two rounds. In his first round, his kata was ranked second only to the kata performed by Kai Ayato (bronze medallist). He then upset Ayato in the second round with a very well executed *Paiku* that scored nearly a full point (0.8) higher than Ayato's *Nijushiho*. Unfortunately Shaun failed to place in the top 3 of the semi-final pool, missing out on a medal match against a strong Japanese contingent.

Cindy competed in two international tournaments during April 2023 – the US Open and the Series A in Vancouver. She placed 5th at the US Open and performed one round at her first Series A competition in the Female Kumite -50kg event.



Pictured: Cindy Tran (AKA) of Australia



Pictured: Shaun Yuen of Australia

The standout for Australia at the tournament was an outstanding performance by Georgie Lawrence in the Female Kumite -55kg division. During the preliminary rounds, Georgie defeated Turkey and Saudi Arabia only going down to the gold medallist in Hana Furumoto-Deshaies of Canada. This gave her a second chance to medal if she could get past Ruby Cintron (USA) – she did so flawlessly. This gave her the opportunity to face Akira Yatoji in the bronze medal final on Sunday. Although the final did not go her way, Georgie said, "It was super great to get out there again and great to get a taste of it (competing in a medal final). Hopefully many more in the future".



Pictured: Georgie Lawrence of Australia