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THE WKF UPDATE

PREMIER LEAGUE & SERIES A EVENTS

Upcoming Events

25 August | KA National Championships
Perth (Western Australia)

25 September | Premier League
Dublin (Ireland)

29 September | Series A
Lanarca (Cyprus)

AUSSIES INCLUDED!!



Issue 4, August 2023



Affiliations



Keep an eye out on YouTube:
World Karate Federation

Presented by





RABAT



The Karate1 Premier League, launched in 2011, is the 'Best of the Best' in the world of karate comprising of four prestigious 3-day tournaments that take place globally.

The 2023 season will kick off in Cairo (Egypt), followed by Rabat (Morocco), Fukuoka (Japan), and concluding in Dublin (Ireland). Only the top 32 ranked karate athletes from around the world will be eligible to participate, having earned their spots through their performance in Continental Championships and Series A tournaments.

The tournaments consist of a pool stage, where athletes engage in round-robin style matches, and a final elimination stage to determine the gold medal winner.

This is the second consecutive year Rabat has been selected as one of the four cities to host the Premier League. Last year, the country of Morocco welcomed 238 athletes from 48 nations to its capital. Following what must have been a successful event, 344 athletes from 53 nations participated this year, and reports of the seamless organisation and grand execution of the tournament reflected the larger turnout.

The host nation had a solid representation during the tournament of 14 athletes (5th most), reflecting how driven Morocco is to develop the sport of karate within the country and how much its athletes are benefiting from it.



Is the original Queen of Kata reclaiming her throne?



Pictured: Kiyou Shimizu

Since the retirement of back-to-back world champion, Sandra Sanchez of Spain, the top spot has been up for grabs amongst the big three in Hikaru Ono (Japan), Grace Lau (Hong Kong) and Kiyou Shimizu (Japan).

The last time these three faced off was earlier this year during the Premier League in Cairo where Shimizu managed to defeat both Hikaru in the semifinals and Lau in the gold medal final by 0.3 and 0.5 points respectively. This time around, history was destined to repeat itself as the 29-year-old, Shimizu, once again bested her two rivals in the same manner and by almost the same margin!



Pictured: Grace Lau

Gold Medalist

Between 2014 and 2017, Shimizu won gold at every major tournament she entered including the 2014 and 2016 WKF World Senior Championships. Perhaps she is indeed back to reclaim the throne after Sanchez stole it from her in 2018.

Bronze Medalists

After her semifinal loss to Shimizu, Hikaru went on to defeat teammate Ono Maho for her second bronze medal this year.

Hikaru was joined by another of her teammates, Emiri Iwamoto, after she had a convincing win over Jasmin Juettner of Germany by a 2.1 margin. The podium was truly stacked with Japanese karate-ka.

F

KATA



Pictured: Emiri Iwamoto



Pictured: Hikaru Ono



Kiyou Shimizu (JAP)



Grace Lau (HKG)



Emiri Iwamoto (JAP)



Hikaru Ono (JAP)

With Damien Quintero of Spain absent, winner of the most recent Premier League in Cairo, Japanese kata athletes dominated the male kata division to secure three of the four podium positions.

Only Ali Sofuoglu of Turkey could compete against the Japanese squad, successfully defeating Ryuji Moto, Sakichi Abe and Aoi Funada. In the end however, even he was to fall short against Kakeru Nishiyama in the gold medal final.

We cannot wait to see Sofuoglu at the World Championships this year in Hungary. Throughout his competitive career, he has won seventeen premier league medals and two bronze medals at the Senior World Championships in an era dominated by Japan - maybe this will be his year.

M KATA



Pictured: Ali Sofuoglu

A Japanese athlete in every Elimination match!



Pictured: Kakeru Nishiyama

Gold Medalist

After falling short to Quintero in Cairo, Nishiyama dominated this division winning his every match by an average of 2.58 points! The current continental champion will likely be the representative for Japan in Hungary this year. He has big shoes to fill after his retired predecessor, Ryo Kiyuna, has brought home the gold for Japan in each of the last four World Championships!

Bronze Medalists

The 22-year-old Funada brought home his first Premier League medal with a 0.8 point win over teammate Sakichi Abe in the first of the bronze medal finals. Joining him on the podium was veteran Kazumasa Moto of Japan, who edged out Italian Mattia Busato in an all-shotokan showdown.



Pictured: Aoi Funada (AKA) & Sakichi Abe (AO)



Pictured: Kazumasa Moto



Kakeru Nishiyama (JAP)



Ali Sofuoglu (TUR)



Aoi Funada (JAP)



Kazumasa Moto (JAP)

M

-60kg

Clash of the continental champions!

Introducing Angelo Crescenzo (Italy) representing Europe and Abdulla Shaaban (Kuwait) representing Asia; the clash of these two current continental champions was always going to be a showcase.



Pictured: Abdulla Shaaban

Succeeding with a *chudan mawashi geri* (body roundhouse kick) halfway through the match, Crescenzo attempted another, but the technique missed its target. Because of the inaccuracy, he lost his balance giving the opportunity for a desperate Shaaban to chase the falling Crescenzo with a punch that made contact with the Italian's head!

At this exact moment, the referee called *yame* (stop), which meant the technique was too late to score - some would say a controversial stoppage.

After picking off a desperate opponent twice during the last 15 seconds of the match, Crescenzo, the 2018 World Champion, closed out the fight 4-0 to claim his 15th gold medal across Premier League events.



Pictured: Angelo Crescenzo



Pictured: Stefanos Xenos

There was no shortage of talent in the bronze medal finals of this division. Luciano Carmine (Italy) made the step to the premier league from his win at the Series A in Konya but was defeated by Stefanos Xenos of Greece who claimed the bronze in a thrilling 4-3 final.

The other bronze was taken out by the winner of Rabat last year and host nation (Morocco) representative, Ali Jina Abdel. Abdel put on a show in his 9-4 victory against Abdallah Hammad of Jordan.



Angelo Crescenzo (ITA)



Abdulla Shaaban (KUW)



Ali Abdel (MAR)



Stefanos Xenos (GRE)

Revenge for Salazar!



Roll the tape back to the first round at the 2021 World Championships hosted in Dubai, and you will find, just as in this gold medal final, Moldir Zhangbyrbay of Kazakhstan face off against Yorgelis Salazar of Venezuela. At the most important event on the WKF calendar, Zhangbyrbay was able to defeat Salazar, 5-5 and knock her out of medal contention for the rest of the day. It is easy to assume that this time around, Salazar was after revenge.

Pictured: Yorgelis Salazar

F

-50kg



However, the match did not start well for her after being caught too close by a well timed *mawashi geri* (round-house kick) from Zhangbyrbay; giving the Kazakhstani an early 3-0 lead. Salazar sat in close distance attempting to bait her opponent, however, she got too close and Zhangbyrbay was able increase her lead to 4-0 with a long *kizami* (jab).

Not deterred, Salazar kept pressuring and the moment she found her counter distance, Zhangbyrbay was left not knowing what to do and the points started rolling for the Venezuelan. First countering a fast *chudan mawashi* (body roundhouse) with a takedown and punch, then countering a *kizami* (jab) with a perfectly timed *ura mawashi geri* (hook kick) - in the blink of an eye the score became 6-4 in favour of Salazar.

Pictured: Moldir Zhangbyrbay



Pictured: Chaimae Elhayti



Pictured: Yee Ting Tsang



Yorgelis Salazar (VEN)



Moldir Zhangbyrbay (KAZ)



Yee Ting Tsang (HKG)



Chaimae Elhayti (MAR)

M

-67kg

The stage was set!



During the bouts before the gold medal final, Gianluca De Vivo of Italy had only conceded a single point whilst scoring 19 against his opponents.

Similarly, Rahman Almasatfa Abdel of Jordan finished all three of his pool fights early by a margin of 8, and only conceded two points during the elimination bouts. After each fighter dominated their side of the division, nobody could predict who was going to come out on top.

Pictured: Gianluca De Vivo (AKA) & Rahman Almasatfa Abdel (AO)

Throughout the match, Abdel, a very aggressive fighter, pressed his opponent using his front leg as a threat to close distance. De Vivo was ready for the pressure and was able to counter Abdel and gain the *senshu* advantage.

Despite this being early in the match, the Jordanian persisted with his aggression earning himself three straight *yukos* (single points) from attacking combinations to take a 3-1 victory.

This was the first gold medal for the 27-year-old after eight years on the circuit! His dominance throughout the event has cemented his position within the top 10 of the division and he will definitely be an athlete to look out for in the coming Premier League competitions.

Japan had three athletes across the two bronze medal finals. Nakano Soichiro took the medal off of teammate Yugo Kozaki, whilst Didar Amirali of Kazakhstan stood in the way of there being two Japanese bronze medalists with his win over Hiroki Nakano.



Pictured: Didar Amirali



Pictured: Soichiro Nakano



Rahman Almasatfa Abdel (JOR)



Gianluca De Vivo (ITA)



Didar Amirali (KAZ)



Soichiro Nakano (JAP)

Anzhelika tells us who's best!

Going into her 19th gold medal final at a Premier League event and feeling on fire after not conceding a point during the preliminary bouts, Anzhelika Terliuga from Ukraine was primed for gold. Standing in her way was the runner up of the last World Championships in Dubai, Trinity Allen (USA).

Pictured: Anzhelika Terliuga



Although Allen was clearly confident with her kicks and Terliuga returned numerous kicks of her own, only punches were scored during this match. This shows that going for the highest scoring techniques isn't always the best strategy.

Pictured: Valentina Toro Meneses



This gold gives Terliuga the crazy statistic of reaching the final in each of her last six Premier League events of which she has walked away with the gold four of those times. This makes her the most consistent female fighter across all weight categories - make sure to watch out for her in any and all future international tournaments!

Bronze medals were given to Valentina Toro Meneses from Chile and Tsui-Ping Ku from Chinese Taipei who rounded off the podium with wins against Italy and Japan respectively. Meneses, current Pan-American Champion, brought home the only medal for Chile out of the twelve athletes that made the cross-continental trip to Rabat. Similarly, Chinese Taipei sent over only seven athletes and Ku was the only one to medal on the day.

F

-55kg



Pictured: Tsui-Ping Ku



Anzhelika Terliuga (UKR)



Trinity Allen (USA)



Valentina Toro Meneses (CHI)



Tsui-Ping Ku (TPE)



Anything can happen at a Premier League!

The gold medal final of the -75kg division was so close, VR (video replay) was to decide the outcome.

Down 2-0 from a break-away *chudan mawashi geri* (body roundhouse kick) from Alzahrani, Mahauden clipped his opponent with a *jodan geri* (head kick), but not one flag was raised.

Pictured: Sultan Alzahrani



After the Belgian coach committed his protest, the panel of judges with aid from VR, determined that it was indeed a scoring *ippon* (3-point technique). This sent Mahauden to a 3-2 victory to claim his first Premier League gold of what is sure to be a very long and successful career for the 22-year-old.

M

-75kg

During the pool stages of the -75kg division however, it didn't look likely that either finalist would make it through to even the elimination rounds.

Alzahrani lost one of his pool matches to Mohamed Mahmoud of Egypt - a mistake that more than often eliminates competitors from progressing out of their pool.

In his first fight of the day, Mahauden was 1-0 down against Italy with only five seconds on the clock!

Lorenzo Pietromarchi (Italy) had just been given his final warning and as the referee called *hajime* (start), Pietromarchi attacked Mahauden and caught him with a stray arm that was deemed excessive contact and resulted in disqualification. If Italy had won this bout, he would have been the one to progress to the elimination stage of the event and potentially fight for gold!

Pictured: Enes Bulut



Pictured: Quentin Mahauden



Quentin Mahauden (BEL)



Sultan Alzahrani (KSA)



Mitchell Durham (AUS)



Enes Bulut (TUR)

Making History for Tunisia!

In the Female -61kg Kumite division at Rabat this year, Mahjoub Wafa claimed the first gold for Tunisia at a Karate1 event in 14 years. The last gold came from Mohamed Amine Hasnaoui at the 2011 Karate1 event in Salzburg in the Male -67kg Kumite.

Even Assel Kanay (Kazakhstan), who scored 20-3 on her opponents during the leadup to the gold medal final, could not stop the Tunisian.

F
-61kg

Despite Kanay achieving the *senshu* advantage in the first 20 seconds of the bout, Wafa earned back a 2-1 lead with the help of her coach submitting a successful VR (video replay) request, before the clock ticked over two minutes left. From there it was her superior counter and anticipation skills that led her to a decisive 7-3 victory and her first Premier League gold medal at only 22-years of age.



Pictured: Wafa Mahjoub (AO) & Assel Kanay (AKA)

After a narrow 3-2 loss to the gold medal winner in Wafa, Fatima-Zahra Chajai of host nation Morocco took home her fifth consecutive bronze medal from major international tournaments with a 2-0 win over Italy. We have no doubt she will persist and earn a well-deserved place in the finals - perhaps at the World Championships later this year.

Taking out the other bronze medal was Kujuro Yuki of Japan. Yuki made her return to the Premier League level at this tournament after participating in the Series A league for her last five tournaments. This medal will fill her with confidence knowing she is competitive amongst the top 32.



Pictured: Fatima-Zahra Chajai



Wafa Mahjoub (TUN)



Assel Kanay (KAZ)



Yuki Kujuro (JAP)



Fatima-Zahra Chajai (MAR)

M

Italy put two on the podium!

-84kg

Pictured: Michele Martina



Pictured: Mohammad Aljafari (AO)

Both Michele Martina and Matteo Fiore are top representatives for Italy in the -84kg division and they did not disappoint in Rabat. Despite their spirit on the day however, Mohammad Aljafari of Jordan proved too much for both these athletes on the day. Firstly he defeated Martina in the semifinals by referee's decision 3-2! Then Fiore in the gold medal final 4-3.

This marks the first of what we are sure to be many gold medals at Premier League events for the 19-year-old Jordanian. Notably, he is also the current Asian Champion for the -84 division - a feat in itself without considering his young age!



Michele Martina went on to beat 2018 World Champion, Ivan Kvesic, 1-0 to win the bronze medal. Despite winning his second European Championship this year, the 26-year-old has yet to top the podium at a Premier League event.



Pictured: Mohamed Ramadan (AKA)

On the other side of the recharge bracket, Mohamed Ramadan (Egypt) took a 4-1 win over Alnashri Faraj (Saudi Arabia) to take home Egypt's only medal on the day. Amazingly, when watching the fight, in the first minute Faraj seemed to score the take-down of the tournament only for no flags to go up, no VR protest from the coach and no warning given by the referee.

We encourage you to go have a watch on the WKF youtube channel (QR code on cover of this issue).



Mohammad Aljafari (JOR)

Matteo Fiore (ITA)

Mohamed Ramadan (EGY)

Michele Martina (ITA)

F

Battle of the Juggernauts!

-68kg

This was the fourth consecutive rematch for Iryna Zaretska (Azerbaijan) and Elena Quirici (Switzerland) at international tournaments. Going into this gold medal final, the score between them was 2-1 in wins to Quirici. It was clear Zaretska was looking to even up the score given she claimed the gold at last year's Premier League in Rabat.

Pictured: Iryna Zaretska (AO)



Pictured: Elena Quirici (AKA)

Although Quirici was catching Zaretska with good timing in her attacks, she could not capitalise on the moments she created with any scoring techniques. Zaretska on the other hand, was able to counter these missed opportunities, firstly with a *gyaku zuki* (reverse punch), then with a perfectly executed one-armed takedown - both scores came out of the clinch. These gave her a 4-0 victory and evened up the win score 2-2 between these two veterans of the -68kg division.

Pictured: Elina Sieliemienieva (AKA)



Pictured: Nisrine Brouk



Despite falling short against the two outright champions of this division, Brouk Nisrine of Morocco and Elina Sieliemienieva of Ukraine both took home bronze medals. Sieliemienieva is a particularly exciting competitor having taken gold at the last two Youth leagues and the last two European Championships in the U21 division.



Iryna Zaretska (AZE)



Elena Quirici (SWI)



Nisrine Brouk (MAR)



Elina Sieliemienieva (UKR)

This was the first gold medal match at a Premier League event for both young finalists, Sufyani Sanad (Saudi Arabia - 20-years-old) and Avanzini Matteo (Italy - 19-years-old). Coming off a gold at the Series A in Konya only two months prior, the U21 World Champion in Sanad would have been feeling more comfortable in such a high stakes fight compared to the younger Matteo who has had no such luck at Karate1 events this year.

Throughout the match, both athletes took turns being the aggressor, but only Sanad was to be rewarded after closing distance with his footwork and simultaneously launching a long *kizami zuki* (jab punch) to take the *senshu* advantage. Holding the Italian off until the final 15 seconds, Sanad felt comfortable launching another long *kizami* that had previously rewarded him. Only this time, Matteo caught the cheek of the incoming Saudi with a front-leg *mawashi geri* (roundhouse kick) to take the lead 3-1 and ultimately the gold medal.



Regardless of the result, it is clear that both of these young athletes have a bright future on the Premier League circuit.

Italy takes yet another gold!

M

+84kg

Both bronzes were awarded to first-time Premier League medalists in Sen Fatih of Turkey and Toltay Abylay of Kazakhstan.

Fatih took a convincing 5-0 win over Croatia whilst Toltay overcame his own teammate, Nurniyaz Yeldashov, 1-0.

Pictured: Abylay Toltay (AO)



Pictured: Fatih Sen



Matteo Avanzini (ITA)



Sanad Sufyani (KSA)



Fatih Sen (TUR)



Abylay Toltay (KAZ)

Heartbreak for the Underdog!

Sofya Berultseva of Kazakhstan has come up short against Ayumi Uekusa of Japan in the last two major tournament gold medal matches. Firstly in the 2022 Asian Championships, the Japanese veteran of 31 bested Berultseva 3-0 to take the gold. Then earlier this year in Cairo, dominated the Kazakhstani 7-1. The young 22-year-old had something to prove going into this final - and she did just that.



After a solid minute of testing each other out, Berultseva was awarded the *senshu* advantage for her *kizami zuki* (jab punch) in the chaos of the clinch - score 1-0. Another minute goes by, she bolstered her lead with an anticipation *kizami zuki* on an aggressive Uekusa and things were going to plan - score 2-0. She successfully holds off Uekusa until there are only fifteen seconds left on the clock and this late in the match, Uekusa knows she needs an *ippon* (3-point score) to win the match.

Pictured: Nikolina Golombos (AO)

F

+68kg



In the heat of the fight, Berultseva attacks with an over-the-top combination and falls right into the trap of a perfectly timed and executed hip throw that leaves her turned around on the floor, not knowing where her opponent is.

Uekusa takes the simple score on her disorientated opponent and is able to defend until the clock runs out to take her 13th Premier League gold and third consecutive win over the young gun from Kazakhstan.



Ayumi Uekusa (JAP)



Sofya Berultseva (KAZ)



Nikolina Golombos (CRO)



Ingrid Creemers (NED)

MEDAL TALLY

COUNTRY

JAPAN (JAP)

ITALY (ITA)

JORDAN (JOR)

AZERBAIJAN (AZE)

BELGIUM (BEL)

TUNISIA (TUN)

UKRAINE (UKR)

VENEZUELA (VEN)

KAZAKHSTAN (KAZ)

SAUDI ARABIA (KSA)

TURKEY (TUR)

HONG KONG (HKG)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (USA)

KUWAIT (KUW)

SWITZERLAND (SWI)

MOROCCO (MAR)

AUSTRALIA (AUS)

CHILE (CHI)

CROATIA (CRO)







EGYPT (EGY)

GREECE (GRE)

NETHERLANDS (NED)

CHINESE TAIPEI (TPE)

   TOTAL

	3	-	6	9
	2	2	1	5
	2	-	-	0
	1	-	-	1
	1	-	-	1
	1	-	-	1
	1	-	-	1
	1	-	-	1
	-	3	2	5
	-	2	-	2
	-	1	2	3
	-	1	1	2
	-	1	1	2
	-	1	-	1
	-	1	-	1
	-	-	4	4
	-	-	1	1
	-	-	1	1
	-	-	1	1
	-	-	1	1
	-	-	1	1
	-	-	1	1
	-	-	1	1

THE AUSSIES

Pictured: Mitchell Durham



This Premier League tournament marks a monumental step in the competitive career of Aussie athlete Mitchell Durham and Australian karate as a whole. In his pool, Mitchell firstly defeated an experienced Austrian 7-4 to then face current rank 2, Nurkanat Azhikanov of Kazakhstan. Despite many who would have labeled Azhikanov the favourite in this matchup, Mitchell overcame the Kazakhstani 3-1 to progress to the elimination stage of the event. Going down to an explosive Saudi who ended up making the final, Mitchell had to settle his nerves and face a talented Moroccan in the bronze medal final. In a fight that kept spectators on the edge of their seats, Mitchell edged his way to a 4-3 victory and his first Premier League medal!



Putting Mitchell's individual achievement to the side for a moment, this is the first time Australia has achieved an individual medal in a Premier League tournament since 2015. This result speaks volumes to the positive projection of Australian karate despite the nature of the country's restricting isolation.

Hannah Sullivan was the other Aussie representative in Rabat and despite not making it through the pool stage, she fought extremely well for only her second Premier League event. Hannah took a convincing win against Switzerland and Egypt, using height and reach to her advantage. However, coming up against a taller Croatian Premier League gold medalist, this advantage was taken away from her. Hannah unfortunately needed to win all 3 fights to proceed, but as the year goes on and she continues to compete at the highest level, she should reflect on this performance as a success.

Pictured: Hannah Sullivan

