

2025 AAU Karate Handbook – General Rules

SECTION 1. AAU/USA KARATE RULES FOR COMPETITION

ARTICLE 1.1 GENERAL GUIDELINE

- A. The rules of competition for all tournaments, matches, and competitions licensed by AAU/USA KARATE shall be as stated herein. These rules shall be used in all licensed competitions, without modification or amendment for events which qualify athletes for further competition.
- B. These rules are based upon the rules adopted by the different International Federations (IF) for competition. These rules, or any part thereof, may be modified or amended by AAU/USA KARATE National Executive Committee at any time. Whenever a specific rule is in conflict with a more general rule, the specific rule shall take precedence.
- C. International Federation rules without modification shall be used in team selection procedure. Modifications without AAU/USA Karate Committee approval may not be made for any competition to select competitors for the AAU/USA National Karate Team.
- D. Under special circumstances exceptions to these rules may be made with the prior approval of the National Executive Committee, with consultation with the Referee Council.
- E. All exceptions to these rules, National competition or International Team selection, in whole or part must be approved by the AAU/USA Karate Executive Committee.

ARTICLE 1.2 COMPETITION AREA

- A. The competition area must be flat and devoid of hazard. The area shall be a matted square of suitable size. Where mats are not used, the competition area may be defined by marking the boundaries with colored tape of appropriate thickness. The area may be elevated to a height of up to one meter above floor level. The elevated platform should be of suitable size to allow safe competition without restriction.
- B. The competition area in principle must be a matted square in all AAU/USA National Championships and AAU/USA Team Trials. The mats used at any AAU/USA National Championships or Team Trials competition must be substantially similar to those mats used at international competitions, and should be non-slip where they contact the floor proper, but have a low coefficient of friction on the upper surface.

ARTICLE 1.3 OFFICIAL ATTIRE

- A. All officials, contestants and coaches must wear the official uniform as prescribed. The National Referee Council, Referee Panel may disbar any coach or competitor who does not comply with this regulation. In cases of a minor deviation from the official uniform, the National Referee Council (National events) or Chief Referee (Regional and District events) may allow participation of the official, coach or competitor.

Referee, Judges and Officials - Referees and Judges must wear the official uniform designated by the Referee Committee. This uniform must be worn at and during all tournaments and courses.

The official uniform for Referees and judges shall be as follows:

- A. A single breasted navy blue blazer, bearing two silver buttons.
- B. A white shirt with long or short sleeves.

- C. The official AAU tie is worn without a tie pin.
- D. Plain light gray trousers without cuffs.
- E. An official badge.
- F. Un-patterned dark blue or black socks.
- G. Black shoes for use in the match area.
- H. A whistle attached to a white chord.
- I. Referees and Judges may wear a clip or elastic to secure long hair.
- J. All officials must present their license credentials to the Chief Referee or Council of Referees prior to the commencement of the opening ceremonies.
- K. Jewelry of any kind is not allowed, including watches, wedding rings and stud earrings.
- L. Modification may be made to referee attire to accommodate religious beliefs. All modifications must be approved by the executive committee. The following modifications are acceptable, including but are not limited to: turbans, hijabs, skirts, and yamakas.

If the Referee Committee agrees, refereeing officials may be allowed to remove their blazers. However, should the referee committee allow the removal of the official's blazers; all officials must remove their blazers.

Coaches - Coach shall at all times wear the official uniform as prescribed during the course of the tournament.

The official uniform for coaches shall be as follows:

- A. Full length solid black athletic pants (tracksuit pants or leggings) or trousers, athletic shoes, an official coach's shirt, and an identifying credential placed around their neck. * Pants may have manufacturer logos, or stripes on the pants, otherwise the pants should be solid black.
- B. Coaches shall not wear their own team, organization or club jackets.
- C. Coaches must be current members of AAU in good standing.
- D. No coach shall have another person substitute or act on his behalf. Those in violation will not be able to coach for a minimum of two years.

National Coaching Staff - AAU/USA National coaching staff shall at all times during the tournament wear the official AAU/USA tracksuit and display official identification.

- A. National Coaching staff shall comply with all rules and regulations applicable to all coaches.

Contestants - Contestants shall at all times wear the official uniform as prescribed during the course of the tournament. The National Referee Council, Referee Panel may disbar any contestant or who does not comply with this regulation.

The official uniform for competitors shall be as follows:

- A. All contestants must wear a white unmarked Karate gi without stripes or piping.
- B. **Logos** – Only acceptable logo on uniform is an AAU logo unless approved by the AAU executive committee.
- C. The official AAU patch shall be worn on the uniform jacket and must be properly sewn on. This must be on the left breast of the jacket and shall not exceed an overall size of 10cm by 10cm.
- D. The Karate Gi jacket, when tightened around the waist with the belt, must be of minimum length that covers the hips, but no longer than three quarters of thigh. The Gi jacket must be of kimono style (left side over right), not V-neck style.

- E. Gi sleeves may not be rolled either on the outside or inside of the sleeve. The sleeves of the Gi jacket must come, in principle, at least halfway down the forearm. The maximum length of the Gi jacket sleeves must be no longer than the bend of the wrist.
- F. The Gi trousers must be long enough to cover at least two thirds of the shin. The maximum length of the Gi trousers must not exceed below the ankle bone. Gi trousers may not be rolled up either on the outside or inside of the leg.
- G. All contestants must wear a belt. The belts must be near 5 centimeters wide and of a length sufficient to allow 15 centimeters free on each side of the knot ends after it has been properly tied around the waist, but not to hang lower than the knee.
 - a. Beginner division – White Belt
 - b. Novice division – Green Belt
 - c. Intermediate division – Brown Belt
 - d. Advanced division – Black Belt
- H. Uniforms may not bear unreasonably sized trademarks or name of a product or manufacturer, and may not bear the name of a club or organization. Only the original manufacturer’s labels may be displayed on the gi and in the normally accepted locations.
- I. An identifying number issued by the organizing committee may be worn on the back, sleeve or breast area of the gi jacket.
- J. The National Executive Committee may authorize the display of special labels or trademarks of approved sponsors.
- K. For non-qualifying tournaments and competitions, the organizing committee may allow contestants to wear a single patch or emblem identifying their respective karate organization, school or system on the left breast pocket of the jacket. Such patch or emblem shall not exceed an overall size of 10cm x 10cm, and shall not be of a design or symbol that is offensive to the dignity of the match, unsportsmanlike, or contrary to the principles of Karate-do.
- L. Competitors may wear a plain white undergarment beneath the Karate Gi jacket.
- M. Contestants must keep their hair clean and cut to a length that does not obstruct competition performance or present a safety hazard to competitors.
- N. Long hair may be secured by an elastic band. Hair slides (“scrunchies”), metal hair grips (“barrettes”), Ribbons or other hair decorations and Hachimaki (head band) of any kind shall not be allowed.
- O. Contestants must have short fingers and toenails and must not wear jewelry or other object(s) that might injure their opponents.
- P. The use of orthodontic appliances or braces must be approved by the Referee Council and the Official Doctor. The contestant accepts full responsibility for any injury.
- Q. Jewelry, hats, caps and sweatbands shall not be allowed.
- R. If a contestant comes into the match area inappropriately dressed, they shall be given one minute to remedy matters.

Additional Uniform Criteria for KATA Contestants:

- A. Glasses that are secured to the head are permitted in competition.
- B. Protective gear shall NOT be worn.

Additional Uniform Criteria for KOBUDO Contestants:

- A. The contestants may elect to wear a white, blue or black jacket and hakama. The jacket and hakama colors may differ. However, if the contestant chooses to wear a karate-gi, both the jacket and the trousers must be solid white without stripes or piping.
- B. The sleeves of the Gi jacket may be modified, including rolled up, to facilitate safe progression of the performance.
- C. Glasses that are secured to the head are permitted in competition.
- D. Protective gear shall NOT be worn.

Additional Uniform Criteria for KUMITE Contestants:

- A. Standard glasses are forbidden in Kumite divisions. Only plastic safety glasses manufactured specifically for sport use are allowed for all athletes.
- B. In the Ippon **and Sanbon** competition, one contestant must be designated as (Aka) red and the other as (Shiro) white. One contestant must wear a red belt and the other a white belt to designate Aka and Shiro respectively.
- C. As an alternative identification method for **Ippon** and **Sanbon** competition, one contestant designated as (Aka) red may wear a red cloth sash in their (Obi) belt as identification and the other side without a sash will be designated as (Shiro) white.

ARTICLE 1.4 EQUIPMENT

- A. **General-** Only AAU Karate approved equipment shall be allowed. In regard to contact rules, such protective equipment shall be considered an extension/part of the body.
- B. **Logos** – Only acceptable logo on equipment is an AAU logo unless approved by the AAU executive committee.
- C. **Head Gear-** Kumite contestants’ ages 5-17 must have AAU approved white head gear with plastic face shield. (such as Mizuno or Macho Warrior) **(Mandatory)**
- D. Headgear, with or without a face shield is optional for contestants 18 years and older. **(Optional)**
- E. **Fist Guards-** Approved fist pads are compulsory in all divisions. **(Mandatory)**
- F. Approved white naugahyde fist guards for **Ippon** and **Sanbon** Kumite. **(Mandatory)**
- G. **Mouth Guards-** Gum shields are compulsory in all Kumite divisions. **(Mandatory)**
- H. **Groin Cups-** Groin protectors are compulsory in all Kumite divisions for male competitors. Groin Cups are to be worn under the Gi trousers. **(Mandatory)**
- I. **Chest Protectors-** All contestants may wear the authorized white or clear plastic breast protective equipment. Must be worn under the gi top. **(Optional)**
- J. **Foot Protectors (for Ippon)-** Shin pads and boot/instep protectors are NOT allowed for Ippon kumite.
- K. **Foot Protectors (for Sanbon)-** AAU approved (white cloth or naugahyde) shin pads and boot/instep protectors (cloth or naugahyde). The boot must match the glove color. **(Optional)**
- L. The use of bandages, padding, or supports due to injury must be approved by the Referee Council on the advice of the Official Doctor. No braces that include any metallic parts shall be used. The Referee shall make the final decision as to the permitted use of items or products applied or adhered to the competitor, related to medical treatment, such as tape or other supportive or corrective materials.
- M. The National executive committee may approve additional equipment.

ARTICLE 1.5 PROTESTS

- A. Only a Technical Coach may file a protest of an action or decision about his/her athlete.
- B. The protest must be submitted to the National Referee Council within 60 minutes of the incident or the decision in question.
- C. A protest may pertain to an infraction of a rule (for example, wrong range of scoring for kobudo, a point called and awarded after time's up) or an administrative error (for example, omission of an athlete after an athlete had reported for competition at the ring).
- D. A protest shall not pertain to a difference in judgment by the referees and the coach, or used to persuade or lobby for a change in the results.

There shall be a fee of \$100 cash for filing a protest at the time of submitting the protest.

Protest submission procedure

- A. For an administrative protest, any coach should alert the ring coordinator by raising their credential. An administrative protest includes: errors in score keeping, errors score total, etc. Challenging a judgment call or rules decision made by an official is not an administrative protest.
- B. For all other protests:
 - a. Complete a protest form (**APPENDIX J**)
 - b. Attach a fee of \$100 cash
 - c. Submit form and fee to the ring coordinator within 60 minutes of the incident
 - d. The referee council and/or executive committee will review the protest and render a decision
- C. Use of Video for Protest - The AAU does not allow the use of video to challenge technical and/or judgment decisions. A video may be reviewed for administrative errors by the Referee Council only after an official protest is made (point awarded to incorrect athlete, incorrect total of points, etc.)

ARTICLE 1.6 REPECHAGE

- A. Single elimination brackets are used to determine the two athletes who will compete in the final for first and second place. The repechage bracket is built from each athlete (including any bye in the first round) who was eliminated by the finalists. The winners of the repechage round will be considered double third place winners.

ARTICLE 1.7 POWERS AND DUTIES

- A. Power and Duties of the Shushin (Referee), the Fukushin (judge) and the Kansa (Arbitrator) - For the purpose of ensuring strict fairness and uniformity of the methods of judging and thus enhancing the authority of judges, these responsibilities shall be applicable to matches held under the auspices of the National AAU Karate committee.
- B. The National Executive Committee may direct the National AAU Karate Referee Council and Technical Committee to modify these rules.
- C. Duties and roles listed below may be combined at competitions as necessary, except in the case of Referee (Shushin) and the Officials (Fukushin). There must be a minimum number of Referees and Officials as prescribed to ensure fairness.

Referee Council

The Referee Council's powers and duties shall be as follows:

- A. To ensure the correct preparation for each given tournament in consultation with the National Executive Committee and the Organizing Committee. This shall include preparations with regard to competition area arrangement, the provision and deployment of all equipment and necessary facilities, match operation and supervision, safety precautions.
- B. To appoint and deploy the Area Controllers (with approval of the National Executive Committee) to their respective areas and to act upon and take such action as may be required by the reports of the Area Controllers.
- C. To supervise, monitor and coordinate the overall performance of the refereeing officials.
- D. To nominate substitute officials when required. (The composition of a panel of officials may not be changed at the sole discretion of the Arbitrator, Referee or Judge in the ring).
- E. To investigate and render judgment on official protests.
- F. To investigate and pass the final judgment on matters of a technical nature which may arise during a given match and for which there are no stipulations in the rules, with consultation and approval of the National Executive Committee.
- G. The Executive Committee shall establish duties that it finds necessary to the Referees Council as needed.

Area Controllers

The Area Controllers powers and duties shall be as follows:

- A. To supervise the Referees and judges, for all matches in areas under their control.
- B. To oversee the performance of the Referees and Judges in their areas and to ensure that the Officials appointed are capable of the tasks allotted them.
- C. To order the Referee to halt the match when the Arbitrator signals a contravention of the Rules of Competition.
- D. To prepare a daily, written report, on the performance of each official under their supervision, together with their recommendations, if any, to the Referee Council.

Referees

The Referee's powers shall be as follows:

- A. The Referee ('SHUSHIN') shall have the power to conduct matches (including announcing the start, the suspension, and the end of the match).
- B. Give all commands and make all announcements.
- C. To inspect equipment to ensure it is in compliance with requirements and possess no threat of injury to either competitor.
- D. To inspect equipment to ensure it presents no safety hazard or offers no significant competitive advantage.
- E. To award score for an accurate and decisive technique in accordance with guidelines and criteria set forth in these rules.
- F. To obtain and act upon the opinion(s) of the Judges.
- G. To conduct voting (HANTEI) of the Referee Panel and announce the result.
- H. To announce the winner.

- I. To resolve ties in accordance with prescribed rules.
- J. To announce and start an extra bout when required.
- K. When three or more judges signaled (by flags or whistle) indicating an effective technique delivered by one of the contestants, the referee must suspend the match, observe their opinion and render a decision on the match.
- L. To explain to the Area Controller or Referee Council, if necessary the basis for giving a judgment.
- M. To impose penalties and to issue warnings (before, during, or after a bout).
- N. The authority of the Referee is not confined solely to the competition area but also to its entire immediate perimeter.
- O. To request confirmation of the Judges' verdict in instances where there may, in the Referee's opinion, be grounds for the judges to re-evaluate their call for warning or penalty.
- P. To stop the match when in the Referee's opinion, there has been a point scored, a foul committed, or to ensure the safety of the contestants.
- Q. Has the power to call up the judges to discuss disqualification (Kata or Kumite Hansoku/Shikaku).

Judges

The judge(s) ("FUKUSHIN") powers shall be as follows:

- A. At the beginning of the match take up their positions at prescribed locations outside the match area, carrying a pair of red and blue/white flags and a whistle.
- B. Signal their judgment regarding score or foul by means of flags and whistle.
- C. Shall carefully observe the actions of the contestants within his range of vision and in the following cases he shall at once signal the referee by means of whistle or flag correctly giving his opinion:
 - a. When he notices that a contestant is about to commit or has committed a prohibited act.
 - b. When both or either of the contestants have moved out of the competition area (JOGAI).
 - c. In all cases when he deems it necessary to bring something to the attention of the referee.
 - d. To exercise a right to vote on a decision to be taken.
 - e. When an injury, illness or inability of a contestant to continue is noticed.
 - f. In other cases when it is deemed necessary to call the attention of the Referee.

Arbitrator

The Arbitrator's (KANSA) powers shall be as follows:

- A. Supervise time and scorekeepers. Records kept of the match shall become an official record subject to the approval of the Arbitrator (Kansa). See **APPENDIX F** for symbols. The Arbitrator shall keep a separate record of the scores awarded by the Referee and at the same time oversee the actions of the appointed timekeepers and scorekeepers.
- B. The Arbitrator (KANSA) will assist the Area Controllers by overseeing the match or bout in progress. Should decisions of the Referee and/or Judges not be in accordance with the Rules of Competition, the Kansa will immediately raise the red flag and blow a whistle. The Area Controller will instruct the Referee to halt the match or bout and correct the irregularity. Records kept of the match shall become official records subject to the approval of the Arbitrator. Before the start of each match or bout, the Arbitrator will ensure that the contestants are wearing approved equipment.

Record Keeper

The Record Keeper's powers shall be as follows:

- A. Keep the individual match record and assist the Kansa.
- B. Keep track of each incident, and if required, the time of each occurrence.
- C. Make certain that records are properly filled and signed by all officials of that match.
- D. Responsible for proper charting of the elimination chart (including repechage), preparing the match scorecard for the scorekeeper and assisting the Kansa. (See **APPENDIX G** for symbols)
- E. At all licensed competition, every effort shall be made to avoid first round competition between members of the same club or district.
- F. No chart may be altered from its original form, substituted for, or rewritten at National Championships and AAU Junior Olympic Games without the consent of those appointed for that specific event by the National Chairman who shall attest to its fairness and accuracy.
- G. List all the winners as well as qualifiers whenever applicable and assure that the official charts are delivered to the proper Administrative Committee member.

Match Expediter

Shall assume such duties as necessary to ensure the proper order of the competition including but not limited to:

- A. Summoning the tournament medical person when necessary.
- B. Seeing that each (Youth) competitor is properly identified and that the Gi, safety gear, red sash, and head guard are fixed correctly.
- C. Ensure that the match is run precisely and with minimum delay.
- D. Directing winners of each bout to confirm victory with the Control Table.

Announcer

- A. Shall announce the competing contestants (designating Aka and Shiro/Ao), the competitors who are on deck and shall announce the winners unless otherwise instructed.

Considerations

- A. When explaining the basis for a judgment after the match, the Referee may speak to the Area Controller or the Referee Council. The Referee will explain to no one else.
- B. The good Referee will not halt the smooth flow of the bout unless it is necessary to do so. All halts with no outcome such as "Yame-Torimasu" must be avoided.
- C. All consultations between the referee panel must be kept as brief as possible. Whenever possible, discussion should be strenuously avoided and reliance placed upon the prescribed signals and gestures, as given in the **APPENDIX H**, to communicate views.
- D. Every effort should be made to utilize "R" officials for advanced divisions.
- E. The Referee need not halt about when the Judges signal, if convinced the signals are incorrect. The Referee's judgment in this instance is made on the move. Before over-ruling the Judges signal the Referee must consider whether the Judges were better sighted. Judges will signal only by flag gesture.
- F. When, however, the match has been halted and the judges have a different opinion to that of the Referee then the majority decision will prevail.
- G. The Judges must only score what they actually see. If they are not sure that a technique actually reached a scoring area they should signal "Mienai".
- H. In the event that the Referee does not hear the time-up bell, the Arbitrator will blow his whistle.
- I. Judges may signal the referee by raising their flag in a circular motion for administrative errors, safety issues or violations by coaches, athletes, volunteers or spectators.

- J. When restarting the bout, the Referee should check that both contestants are on their lines and properly composed. Contestants jumping up and down or otherwise moving excessively must be stilled before combat can recommence. The Referee must restart the bout with the minimum of delay.
- K. When halting a bout, the Referee does not merely call "YAME!". He/she also makes the appropriate signal. The Referee must first identify the scoring opponent ("Aka" or "Ao/Shiro"), then the scoring area attacked ("Chudan, Jodan"). This was followed by the general classification of scoring techniques used ("Tsuki", "Uchi" or "Keri") and finally the score awarded.

ARTICLE 1.8 DETERMINATION OF AGE

- A. Athletes must compete and/or qualify in their proper age division.
- B. An athlete's age is determined by their age on July 1st of the calendar year of the National Championships.
- C. Whatever the age that athlete will be on July 1st, shall constitute their competition age category.
- D. Athletes must compete in that age division for the entire calendar year.

ARTICLE 1.9 DETERMINATION OF EXPERIENCE LEVEL

- A. Beginner division – less than 1 year of training.
- B. Novice division – 1 to 2 years of training.
- C. Intermediate division – 2 to 4 years of training.
- D. Advanced division – greater than 4 years of training.

ARTICLE 1.10 QUALIFICATION PROCEDURE

District and Regional Qualifiers

- A. All athletes must compete at a District and/or Regional level qualifier.

National Championships

- A. Shall qualify the top 16 athletes in the junior divisions (ages 20 and under category) to participate at the AAU Junior Olympic Games.

Special Qualifiers:

- A. The AAU/USA Karate Executive Committee shall have the right to qualify an athlete to the National Karate Championships and the AAU Junior Olympic Games from any District or Region within the AAU.
- B. The number of athletes qualifying directly to the National Championships and the AAU Junior Olympic Games shall be determined by the AAU/USA Karate Executive Committee.

License

- A. For each tournament to be valid, the appropriate license for the event must be secured, and all competitors must be properly registered. All athletes must be current members of the AAU in good standing.

Deadlines

- A. A List of all athletes who have qualified to participate at the National Championships and AAU Junior Olympic Games must be received by the National Karate office no later than thirty (30) days prior to the opening ceremonies of these events.

Financial

- A. All financial statements, copies of license, appropriate per competitor participation fee and any other financial obligations must be received by the National AAU Karate Treasurer ten (10) days after closing ceremonies of the qualifying event. Failure to do so shall result in an additional \$3.00 per athlete late penalty fee.
- B. Unreported events may disqualify any athletes from that qualifying competition or to participate in and to receive any awards at the AAU National Karate Championships.
- C. Future awards for qualifiers and licenses will be withheld for any organizations or individuals who fail to meet this requirement.
- D. For District/Regional level qualifying events, a \$5.00/\$5.00 per competitor participation fee and any other financial obligations must be received by the National AAU Karate Treasurer ten days after closing ceremonies of the qualifying event.

Exceptions

- A. Upon petition to the AAU National Committee, the District Chairman or the Regional Director may for an individual on a case by case basis ask to waive certain or all requirements for participation at the AAU National Championships. The National AAU Karate Executive Committee may consider waiving in part some requirements for qualification procedures to these National Championships. A written request must be received by the National Chairman no later than (30) days prior to commencement of these championships for consideration. Waivers are limited to one per athlete per year.
- B. District or Regional Directors may petition in writing to the AAU National Committee requesting an increase in the number of qualifiers in their district or region.
- C. Athletes who are granted a waiver must forward the appropriate application and fee for that qualifier waived through to the tournament director. This is in fairness for all participating athletes.

ARTICLE 1.12 COACHES' CODE OF CONDUCT

- A. Coaches are expected to behave in a professional and respectful manner.
- B. Coaches can be penalized for excessive repeated violations after verbal warnings and/or bad behavior/sportsmanship (verbal abuse, physical aggressiveness towards any person(s) to include against an athlete even if their student).
 - a. In the event a coach is penalized, the referee in charge of the ring will ask for the coach's credential, the referee will present the credential to either the Referee Council or the tournament director. The Referee Council or the tournament director will then hole punch the credential indicating the coach has been warned/penalized. If a coach receives three warnings/penalties they will be banned from coaching the rest of the tournament. At the discretion of the referee council or the tournament director, the coach can potentially be banned from the entire event, and be required to leave the tournament.

ARTICLE 1.13 OFFICIALS' CODE OF CONDUCT

- A. Officials shall behave in a professional and respectful manner when interacting with any participant(s) of an event.
- B. Officiating your athlete/student:
 - a. When judging kata or kobudo, if the panel of officials has 5 members, you do not have to remove yourself from the panel.
 - b. When judging kata or kobudo, if the panel consists of only 3 members, it is recommended you do not officiate a division which has direct students of yours.

- c. When officiating kumite, if you have a student competing in that division, you should not be the center/ head referee in any match involving your student and when possible you should attempt to not participate in officiating any part of the division.
- C. Officiating a family member's division or match:
 - a. While officiating, if a family member's division is assigned to your ring, the official should request to be reassigned or step out for the complete division. Officials should not officiate divisions, should not assist with the jury table, and should not stand by/hover around the ring their family member is competing in. Officials should not attempt or appear to influence the outcome of a division their family member is involved in, whether intentional or unintentionally.

Due to the limited number of officials available at events, exceptions to the code of conduct for officials may be made.