

2025 AAU Karate Handbook – Kata Rules

SECTION 3. AAU/USA KARATE RULES FOR KATA COMPETITION

ARTICLE 3.1 GENERAL GUIDELINE

- A. See General Rules SECTION 1 ARTICLE 1.1

ARTICLE 3.2 COMPETITION AREA

- A. See General Rules SECTION 1 ARTICLE 1.2

ARTICLE 3.3 OFFICIAL ATTIRE

- A. See General Rules SECTION 1 ARTICLE 1.3

ARTICLE 3.4 ORGANIZATION OF KATA COMPETITION

- A. Kata competition takes the form of team, family team and individual matches.
- B. Team Competition is conducted between three people in unison against each other. Teams may be coed.
- C. Family Team Competition is conducted between three or four people in unison against each other. Team may be three or four coed family members.
- D. Individual competition is where contestants compete against each other in separate male and female categories.
- E. Advanced male or female kata contestants 16 years and older may compete in the Compulsory Kata Competition, the repechage flag system kata division, as well their individual age categories.
- F. The National Referee Council may waive in part or in its entirety the requirements set forth with the approval of the National Executive Committee for specific competition or event. Allowance may be made to allow male and female athletes to compete in the same categories or to suspend the requirement for compulsory Kata. The Referee Council may further combine and adjust divisions for enhancement of meaningful competition. However, consideration must be taken to ensure that deviation does not distract from safety and the dignity of the competition.

ARTICLE 3.5 INDIVIDUAL KATA REGULATIONS

- A. Individual KATA Competitors shall compete in the same age and skill divisions that they would for Kumite.
- B. There shall be no weight divisions as described for KATA competition.
- C. Beginner athletes must use a basic (Kihon) Kata from their style (see **APPENDIX D**).
- D. Novice athletes may perform any kata except those listed in APPENDIX E.
- E. Advanced and Intermediate athletes may use any Kata.

ARTICLE 3.6 INDIVIDUAL KATA COMPETITION

Individual Flag System

- A. By the approval of the AAU/USA Karate Committee, the flag judgment system may be incorporated for all kata divisions.
- B. The Organization of Individual Competition for the flag judgment system shall be Free Selection (TOKUI) or Open Selection Kata.

- C. In the flag system if sufficient personnel are available, a panel of five judges for each match shall be designated by the Referee Council. Otherwise, a panel may consist of three judges.
- D. In addition, an expeditor and when necessary, a caller/announcer shall be appointed.
- E. Two rounds of competition shall determine the winners in the flag judgment system.

Flag Judgment System First Round Procedure:

- A. At the beginning of the division all competitors will sit on the Aka side of the ring.
- B. All competitors will remain seated in a prescribed order.
- C. The order of seating may be altered by the Referee to avoid competitors from the same district competing against each other in the first round only.
- D. The first two competitors will bow before entering the match area and the next two competitors will stand up and be on deck.
- E. Both competitors shall enter the match area and space themselves so as to avoid collision or interference in the performance of their Kata.
- F. The competitors will bow and announce their Kata. They shall commence their performance at the sound of the whistle by the Referee.
- G. On completion of their Kata, the competitors shall stand side-by-side in the match area and await the decision from the Panel.
- H. If the Kata does not conform to the rules, or there is some other irregularity, the Referee may call the other Judges in order to reach a verdict.
- I. After completion of both Kata, the Referee shall call for a decision (HANTEI) and blow a two-tone blast on the whistle. The flags shall be raised at the same time.
- J. The Referee shall blow a further short blast on the whistle, whereupon the flags shall be lowered.
- K. The decision shall be for Aka or Shiro. No ties are permitted. The competitor who receives the majority of votes shall be declared the winner.
- L. The Referee will then raise the flag for the winner.
- M. The competitors will then bow to the judging panel and exit the match area.
- N. The winner will go to the end of the line on the Aka side.
- O. The defeated competitor will form a line on the Shiro side furthest from the Referee panel.
- P. The next two competitors will perform their kata in the same manner and will sit behind the previous competitor in the appropriate line (Winner to Aka side and defeated competitor to Shiro side).
- Q. The procedure outlined above will continue until there is only one competitor remaining in the first round line, who will be the gold medalist.
- R. The last two competitors remaining will be allowed a one-minute rest period, before beginning the final match.
- S. The gold medalist and the last competitor of the first round will sit on the Shiro side of the Referee panel and be exempt from the second round of elimination. The gold medalist will sit closest to the Referee panel.

Flag Judgment System Second Round Procedure:

- A. At the beginning of the second round all competitors will sit on the Shiro side of the ring.
- B. All competitors will remain seated in a prescribed order.
- C. The order of seating MAY NOT be altered.
- D. The first two competitors will bow before entering the match area and the next two competitors will stand up and be on deck.

- E. Both competitors shall enter the match area and space themselves so as to avoid collision or interference in the performance of their Kata.
- F. The competitors will bow and announce their Kata. They shall commence their performance at the sound of the whistle by the Referee.
- G. On completion of their Kata, the competitors shall stand side-by-side in the match area and await the decision from the Panel.
- H. If the Kata does not conform to the rules, or there is some other irregularity, the Referee may call the other Judges in order to reach a verdict.
- I. After completion of both Kata, the Referee shall call for a decision (HANTEI) and blow a two-tone blast on the whistle. The flags shall be raised at the same time.
- J. The Referee shall blow a further short blast on the whistle, whereupon the flags shall be lowered.
- K. The decision shall be for Aka or Shiro. No ties are permitted. The competitor who receives the majority of votes shall be declared the winner.
- L. The Referee will then raise the flag for the winner.
- M. The competitors will then bow to the judging panel and exit the match area.
- N. The winner will go to the end of the line on the Shiro side.
- O. The defeated competitor will form a line on the Aka side furthest from the Referee panel.
- P. The next two competitors will perform their kata in the same manner and will sit behind the previous competitor in the appropriate line (Winner to Shiro side and defeated competitor to Aka side).
- Q. The procedure outlined above will continue until there is only one competitor remaining in the second round. At this juncture the remaining athlete will compete against the defeated competitor from the first round. There will be a one minute rest period before the beginning of the final match. This match will determine the silver and bronze medalist.

Repechage Flag System

- A. By the approval of the AAU/USA Karate Committee, the repechage flag system may be incorporated for 16 years and older Black belt divisions.
- B. The Organization of Individual Competition for the flag judgment system shall be Free Selection (TOKUI) or Open Selection Kata.
- C. Each round the competitor must perform a different kata.
- D. In the repechage flag system, a panel of five judges for each match shall be designated by the Referee Council.
- E. In addition a caller/announcer and when necessary, an expeditor shall be appointed.
- F. A single round of competition shall determine the 1st and 2nd place winners.
- G. Repechage will be utilized in determining double 3rd.
- H. Repechage identifies the athletes who lost to the 1st/2nd place winners to compete in a second elimination round. The winners of this round will both receive 3rd place.
- I. The top 4 competitors from the previous year's nationals should be charted on different branches.
- J. The top 4 competitors from the previous year's nationals should get preference for any bye.

Individual Scoring System

- A. In the point system, if sufficient personnel are available, a panel of five judges for each match shall be designated by the Referee Council. Otherwise, a panel may consist of three judges.
- B. In addition, a scorekeeper, caller/announcer and when necessary, an expeditor shall be appointed.
- C. One round of competition shall determine the winners in the individual scoring system.

- D. When all competitors have performed, the highest total scores shall determine the first, second, third, and if applicable, fourth place winners.

Individual Scoring System Procedure:

- A. When called upon by the announcer, the competitor(s) will proceed inside the match area, bow to the Referee and will announce the name of the Kata to be performed to the Judges.
- B. The Referee will clearly repeat the name of the Kata to be performed.
- C. The participant(s) will then commence their performance, and upon completion, will return to their original position(s) and await the Judge's decision.
- D. Once the Kata has been completed, the Referee shall call Hantei, for the corner Judge's decisions. All scoreboards will be raised simultaneously. The announcer will call out the scores given, Referee first and going in a clockwise direction at all times announcing all the scores of the corner Judges.
- E. After the score has been announced and recorded, the Referee shall give a signal (by means of a short whistle), to the Corner Judges to lower the scoreboards.
- F. The Administration Table Official and the Scorekeeper shall record the announced scores on separate Official Record Sheets and will separately calculate the final score as follows:
 - a. Seven Scores – delete the highest and lowest and add all the remainder.
 - b. Five Scores - delete the highest and lowest and add all the remainder.
 - c. Three Scores - add all three scores.
- G. After checking that the scores of both the Jury Table Judge and the Scorekeeper agree, the Announcer shall announce the total score.
- H. The participant will bow to the Referee and leave the match area.

ARTICLE 3.7 TEAM KATA COMPETITION

- A. A team shall consist of three members. Teams may be all male, all female, or mixed gender teams.
 - a. For Family Team Kata, the team can be made up of 3-4 direct family members. Team members must have a familial relationship (Husband, Wife, Child, Stepchild, Parent, Grandparent, Grandchild, Brother, Sister, Stepbrother, Stepsister, Stepmother, Stepfather)
- B. In Team Kata, all team members must start and end the Kata facing in the same direction and towards the Referee.
- C. They shall start and finish in a triangular formation.
- D. All members shall perform the same kata.
- E. The performance must be synchronized.
- F. Team Kata uses the individual scoring system with the winner being the contestant (team) with the highest total score.
- G. One round of competition shall determine the winners in team kata.
- H. The age division the team competes in is determined by the age of the oldest team member. For a team to compete in the Veterans (36+ years) category all team members must be 36 or older. If not all team members are 36 and over, the team will compete in the Seniors (18-35) category.
- I. If team kata competition is separated by experience levels, the team shall compete in the division corresponding with the highest experience level of the individual team members. (For example, the team consists of an advanced competitor, an intermediate competitor, and a novice competitor: the team will be considered an advanced team.)

ARTICLE 3.8 STYLE SPECIFIC COMPULSORY KATA COMPETITION

- A. A competitor in their specific style will be expected to perform in a “Mandatory Style Specific” Kata from the Shitei, Sentei and Tokui Kata list (see **APPENDIX F**).
- B. Compulsory Kata shall be organized into three rounds of competition.
- C. Each round, a different kata must be performed.
- D. Scores do not accumulate between rounds.
- E. In Round 1 competitors must perform Shitei Kata. The 16 highest scoring competitors will proceed from Round 1 into Round 2.
- F. In Round 2 competitors must perform Sentei Kata. The 8 highest scoring competitors will proceed from Round 2 into Round 3.
- G. In Round 3 (Final), competitors must perform a Tokui Kata.
- H. The number of competitors will determine the number of rounds that will take place:
 - a. Seventeen (17) or More Competitors - Three Rounds of Competition Will Take Place. (Shitei, Sentei, Tokui)
 - b. Nine (9) to Sixteen (16) Competitors - Two Rounds of Competition Will Take Place. (Sentei, Tokui)
 - c. Eight (8) or Less - One Round of Competition Will Take Place. (Tokui)
- I. In case of a tie, a tiebreaker KATA must not be one already performed in the same or earlier round.
- J. KATAs used in the tie breaking process must be from the list, which is applicable for the specific round of competition. (Shitei, Sentei, Tokui).
- K. The order of performance in all three rounds shall be determined by random selection.
- L. Compulsory Style Specific Competition - shall be restricted to traditional (Okinawan, Japanese, or other styles approved by the executive committee) based Karate Styles.
- M. Style Specific competition may be conducted in Shotokan, Shito Ryu, Shorin Ryu, Goju Ryu, Wado Ryu, and Isshinryu.
- N. Mandatory All Style divisions may be formed to accommodate specified styles that do not meet the entry requirements.
- O. In the “Mandatory All Style”, a competitor will be expected to perform free selection (TOKUI) Katas.
- P. At the discretion of the national committee, Style Specific kata may be judged using the repechage flag system.

Requirements for a Style Specific Compulsory division:

- A. Petition submitted and approved by the National Karate Committee.
- B. There must be at least eight (8) athletes for the style division identified as such in writing competing at the National Championships.
- C. Furnish in writing no later than 30 days prior to the opening ceremonies of the National Championships a list of Shitei, Sentei, and Tokui Katas’ specific to the style.
- D. Provide a minimum of five (5) qualified judges during the AAU Karate National Championships.
- E. All athletes that do not qualify for Style Specific or wish to participate in Mandatory Style Specific KATA divisions may participate in the Mandatory All Style KATA Division.
- F. Athletes may participate in only one category of Mandatory KATA. They cannot participate in both the All Style and Style Specific Divisions.

Kata Grand Championship:

- A. The top performer(s) in each of the Style Specific divisions (including the all style division), 16-20 open flag division, 21+ open flag division will compete for the grand championship. For divisions

with larger representation, at the discretion of the tournament director, the top two competitors in those divisions will be selected to compete in the grand championship.

- B. Competition will be judged either using a single round of the scoring system or a single round of the flag system.

ARTICLE 3.9 CRITERIA FOR DECISION FOR KATA COMPETITION

- A. It is the responsibility of the Referee Council, and the Referees to administrate the rules set forth. If the Kata does not conform to the rules, or there is some other irregularity, the Referee may call the other judges in order to reach a verdict.
- B. The Kata must be performed with competence, and must demonstrate a clear understanding of the traditional principles it contains. Kata is not a dance or theatrical performance. It must adhere to the traditional values and principles. It must be Budo based, realistic in fighting terms and display concentration, power, and potential impact in its techniques. It must demonstrate strength, power, and speed as well as grace, rhythm and balance.
- C. In assessing the performance of a contestant or team the Judges will look for:
 - a. Realistic performance of the Kata with correct attitude (REIGI).
 - b. Understanding of the application of the techniques being used (BUNKAI).
 - c. Good timing, rhythm, speed, and focus of power (KIME). Control of speed and rhythm.
 - d. Correct and proper use of breathing.
 - e. Correct focus of attention (CHAKUGAN) and concentration.
 - f. Correct stances (DACHI) with proper tension in the legs, and feet flat on the floor. Stability and balance.
 - g. Proper tension in the abdomen (HARA) and no bobbing up and down of the hips when moving. Control of tension and contraction.
 - h. Kata sequence (EMBUSEN).
 - i. Correct form (KIHON) of the style being demonstrated.

Additional Criteria for Team Kata:

- A. Synchronization without external cues such as commands to start and stop the performance, stomping the feet, slapping the chest, arms or karate-gi, and inappropriate exhalation.
- B. The members of the team must demonstrate competence in all aspects of the Kata performance.

ARTICLE 3.10 BREAKING TIES FOR KATA COMPETITION

- A. In the event of a point score tie, the low score from the remaining scores shall be added into the final score. If the tie persists, the high score from the remaining scores is added into the final score.
- B. In the event of a continuing tie, the contestants must perform again. The athlete may repeat the same kata only in the beginner division.
- C. If the point scores for the tiebreaker kata are tied, the Referee shall call for a decision by Hantei. A decision must be taken by the Panel of Judges (based only on the last Kata performed) at which time the judges shall each indicate their choice of either Aka or Shiro as the winner.

ARTICLE 3.11 SCORING FOR KATA COMPETITION

Deductions - In the smooth performance of the Kata points will be deducted from competitors score in accordance to the following schedule:

- A. 0.1 point shall be deducted from the final score for a quickly remedied momentary hesitation.
- B. 0.1 to 0.2 points shall be deducted for a momentary, but discernible pause.

- C. 0.2 to 0.3 points shall be deducted for a momentary imbalance, with barely a wobble quickly remedied.
- D. 0.3 to 0.4 points shall be deducted for actual instabilities where there is a distinct but recoverable loss of balance.

Disqualification may be imposed for the following:

- A. A contestant who varies the SHITEI Kata.
- B. A contestant who comes to a distinct halt during the performance of the SHITEI or TOKUI Kata or who performs a Kata different from that announced or as notified to the score table.
- C. A contestant who performs an ineligible Kata (mandatory) or repeats a Kata (when prohibited by rules) may be disqualified.
- D. If the contestant loses balance completely and/or falls over.

Point System Scoring Range

The following scoring range shall be used for the specified experience levels:

- | | | | |
|-------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|
| ● Beginner: | 5.0 – 7.0 | ● Intermediate: | 6.0 – 8.0 |
| ● Novice: | 5.5 – 7.5 | ● Advanced: | 6.5 – 8.5 |

The following scoring range shall be used for the mandatory Kata divisions:

- Shitei: 6.5 – 8.5
- Sentei: 7.0 – 9.0
- Tokui: 7.5 – 9.5