

# 2025 AAU Karate Handbook –Kumite Rules

## **SECTION 2. AAU/USA KARATE RULES FOR KUMITE COMPETITION**

### **ARTICLE 2.1 GENERAL GUIDELINES**

- A. See General Rules SECTION 1 ARTICLE 1.1
- B. Kumite divisions may be divided into weight divisions as prescribed in **APPENDIX A**.
- C. Adult Black Belt Sanbon division will be divided into weight classes as prescribed in **APPENDIX A**.

### **ARTICLE 2.2 COMPETITION AREA**

- A. See General Rules SECTION 1 ARTICLE 1.2
- B. Two parallel lines, each one meter long, must be drawn at a distance of one and one half meters from the center of the competition area for positioning the competitors.
- C. A one-meter wide border inside the prescribed fighting area shall be the warning area. The line should be of a different color than the rest of the surface (floor or mat).

### **POSITION OF OFFICIALS/COACHES IN COMPETITION AREA**

- A. **Referee**-The Referee may move around the entire tatami (when 4 corner judges are used), including the safety area where judges are seated.
- B. **Judges**- Each judge will be seated at the corners on the mat in the safety area. Each judge will be equipped with appropriate equipment for the conduct of that match.
- C. **Arbitrator**- the Arbitrator and or the Match Supervisor shall be seated just outside the safety area, behind and to the left or the right of the Referee.
- D. **Coaches**- Coaches will be seated outside the safety area, on their respective sides at the side of the tatami towards the official table. The Coach may be assigned a specific place by the Referee Committee in conjunction with the Tournament Organizing Officials. This area shall be close to the competition area and the Coach allowed a free and uninterrupted access to contestants between bouts.

### **ARTICLE 2.3 REFEREE/OFFICIAL PANEL**

- A. The Referee Panel shall consist of one Referee (Shushin), one, two, or four Judges (Fukushin), and one Match Supervisor (Kansa).
- B. Several timekeepers, caller-announcers, and record keepers shall be appointed to facilitate the operation of matches.

### **ARTICLE 2.4 OFFICIAL ATTIRE**

- A. See General Rules SECTION 1 ARTICLE 1.3.

## ARTICLE 2.5 EQUIPMENT

- B. See General Rules SECTION 1 ARTICLE 1.4

## ARTICLE 2.6 SCORING AREA

The scoring areas shall be limited to the following:

- A. Head
- B. Face
- C. Neck (including throat, but not touching the throat)
- D. Abdomen
- E. Chest
- F. Side
- G. Back

## ARTICLE 2.7 CRITERIA FOR SCORING

A score is awarded when a technique is performed to a scoring area and according to the following criteria:

- A. **Good form** - a technique with good form is said to have characteristics conferring probable effectiveness within the framework of traditional karate concepts.
- B. **Correct attitude** - a non-malicious attitude of great concentration obvious during delivery of the scoring technique within the framework of traditional Karate concepts.
- C. **Vigorous application** - defines the power, speed and controlled delivery of the technique, with the purpose of succeeding.
- D. **Zanshin** - a continued state of awareness and commitment which endures after the technique has landed. The contestant with Zanshin maintains total concentration and awareness of the opponent's potential to counter attack and the ability to continue with proper form and other continuing techniques.
- E. **Proper timing** - delivering a technique when it will have the greatest potential effect. Proper timing is carrying out a technique at the optimum moment in time to achieve the greatest result.
- F. **Correct distance** - delivering a technique at the precise distance where it will have the greatest potential effect.

### Scoring

- A. A full point is awarded to two techniques only: controlled kick to the head or face, break of balance / safe takedown immediately followed by a scoring technique.
- B. All other techniques including multiple scoring techniques (RENSOKU WAZA) to scoring areas will be awarded a half point.

## ARTICLE 2.8 PENALTIES

- A. There are no points awarded to the opponent for penalties.

- B. A Hansoku or Kiken (disqualification or loss of match due to penalties) will count as the full score (Ippon, Sanbon) for the opponent.

### **Penalty Categories**

- A. Hansoku – Prohibited actions and behaviors. Contact and non-contact penalties.
- B. Jogai - Out of bounds.
- C. Mubobi – defenseless behavior.
- D. Shikkaku - disqualification or expulsion from the event/competition.

### **Penalty Levels**

- A. Levels of penalty – for each of the penalty categories (Hansoku, and Mubobi) there are 3 levels:
  - a. Chukoku (warning)
  - b. Hansoku Chui (penalty)
  - c. Hansoku (disqualification)
- B. Penalty levels DO NOT cross accumulate in different Penalty Categories

### **Prohibited behavior**

- A. Face Contact –
  - a. All Beginner and Novice Divisions (kick/hand technique): Contact is not allowed, and may be penalized.
  - b. All Intermediate and Advanced Divisions (kick/hand technique): “skin touch” is allowed, but excessive transfer of energy to the target area is prohibited and will be penalized.
- B. Any excessive contact regarding the target area.
- C. Attacks and contact to the joints, throat, below the pubic bone or groin, and legs are not considered points and may result in a penalty.
- D. A sweep of the ankle or foot must be followed up with an attempt to score to one of the scoring targets otherwise may result in a penalty.
- E. Exiting the ring during the match (Jogai).
- F. Avoiding the opponent, running around the ring and generally disengaging from the match is a non-contact violation and may result in a penalty.
- G. When SHIKKAKU is imposed, the severity of the penalty is decided by the Referee Council and Executive Committee (disqualification from the actual tournament, competition, or match).

### **ARTICLE 2.9 INJURIES**

- A. An injured contestant who has been declared unfit to fight by the tournament doctor cannot fight again in that competition.

- B. A competitor who is injured during a bout in progress and requires medical treatment will be allowed three minutes in which to receive it. If treatment is not completed within the time allowed, the Referee will decide if the competitor shall be declared unfit to fight, or whether an extension of treatment time shall be given.
- C. An injured contestant who wins a bout through disqualification due to injury is not allowed to fight again in the competition without permission from the doctor. If they are injured, they may win a second bout by disqualification but are then immediately withdrawn from further Kumite competition in that tournament.
- D. A contestant who wins two matches in a single division through disqualification will not be allowed to continue.

### **Feigning Injury**

- A. In order that the credibility of the sport is maintained, competitors who feign injury will be subject to the strongest penalties up to and including suspension for life for repeated offenses.
- B. Competitors who receive SHIKKAKU for feigning injury will be taken from the competition area and put directly into the hands of the tournament Medical Commission who will carry out an immediate examination of the competitor. The Medical Commission will submit its report before the end of the Championship, for the consideration of the Referee Council.

### **ARTICLE 2.10 10-SECOND RULE**

- A. Any competitor who falls, is thrown or knocked down and does not fully regain his/her feet within ten seconds is considered unfit to continue fighting and shall be automatically withdrawn from all Kumite events in that tournament.

### **ARTICLE 2.11 SHOBU IPPON KUMITE**

Shobu Ippon Kumite is a sparring match where the goal is to score a full point (IPPON) or two half points (WAZA-ARI) to equal a full point to win the match.

### **Scoring**

Scoring is described in ARTICLE 2.7

### **Winning a Match**

To win the match the following criteria is considered in this order:

- A. Earning a score of ippon during the allotted time.
- B. If an ippon is not reached during the allotted time of the match, the referee calls for HANTEI (judges' decision). The judges' vote plus the referee's silent vote/judgment will determine the winner or if there is a tie (HIKIWAKE).
- C. If HANTEI determines there is a tie (HIKIWAKE), the athletes will conduct a new match

(SAI SHIAI), where no points, penalties, or memory of previous penalties will be considered in the new match.

- D. The winner of SAI SHIAI is the athlete who earns an ippon, or if no ippon is reached during the allotted time of the match, the referee calls for HANTEI. At this point, the judges must pick a winner (NO HIKIWAKE).

### **Duration of bout**

- A. An ippon match will be 2 minutes running time for all divisions.
- B. Atoshi Baraku's announcement shall be when there are 30 seconds left in the allotted time.
- C. The duration of the SAI SHIAI match will be 2 minutes for all divisions.

### **Penalties**

Penalties and prohibited behavior is described in ARTICLE 2.8

### **Penalty Levels for Jogai**

- A. There are 3 levels for Jogai:
  - a. Jogai (warning)
  - b. Jogai Hansoku Chui (penalty)
  - c. Jogai Hansoku (disqualification)

### **Equipment**

Mandatory and elective equipment are described in ARTICLE 2.5

### **ARTICLE 2.12 SHOBU SANBON KUMITE**

Shobu Sanbon Kumite is a sparring match where the goal is to score 3 full points to win the match.

### **Scoring**

Scoring is described in ARTICLE 2.7

### **Winning a Match**

To win the match the following criteria is considered in this order:

- A. Earning a score of sanbon (3) during the allotted time.
- B. Having the leading score at the end of the allotted time.
- C. If the score at the end of the allotted time is tied the referee calls for HANTEI (judges decision). The judges' vote plus the referee's silent vote/judgment will determine the

winner or if there is a tie (HIKIWAKE).

- D. If HANTEI determines there is a tie (HIKIWAKE), the athletes will conduct a match extension (ENCHO-SEN), where no points are carried over. However, penalties will carry over and be considered in the match extension.
- E. The ENCHO-SEN match is where the first competitor to score wins (“sudden death”).
- F. If there is no score at the end of the allotted time of the match extension, the referee calls for HANTEI. At this point, the judges must pick a winner (NO HIKIWAKE).
- G. Duration of bout
- H. A Sanbon match will be 2 minutes for all divisions except for adult black belts 18-34 years old.
- I. Adult Black belt 18-34 year old matches will be 3 minutes.
- J. Atoshi Baraku's announcement shall be when there are 30 seconds left in the allotted time.
- K. The ENCHO-SEN match is 1 minute for all divisions.

## **Penalties**

Penalties and prohibited behavior is described in ARTICLE 2.8 with the following exception:

### **Penalty Levels for Jogai**

- A. There are 4 levels for Jogai:
  - a. Jogai Ichi (warning)
  - b. Jogai Ni (warning)
  - c. Jogai Hansoku Chui (penalty)
  - d. Jogai Hansoku (disqualification)

## **Equipment**

Mandatory and elective equipment are described in ARTICLE 2.5

## **ARTICLE 2.13 TEAM COMPETITION**

**Each athlete may join only one team per type of Team Kumite.**

### **1. TEAM SANBON KUMITE**

- A. Individual matches will use the same time/length and rules for Sanbon individual matches except in case of a tied score. No decision is rendered by the judging panel; a tie (HIKIWAKE) is recorded instead.

### Categories Allowed:

Male		Female	
All Experience Levels		All Experience Levels	
Age	Weight	Age	Weight
8-10 years	Open	8-10 years	Open
11-12 years	Open	11-12 years	Open
13-14 years	Open	13-14 years	Open
15-17 years	Open	15-17 years	Open
18-35 years	Open	18-35 years	Open
36+ years	Open	36+ years	Open

All team members must be within the same age group, with the exception of the 18-35 category. In the 18-35 category, competitors 36+ and older may drop to that age group. No mixed sex teams are allowed.

### Sanbon Team Members:

- A. Kumite teams shall consist of 3 contestants.
- B. Each team may have only one reserve, who may be substituted for an injured competitor or if the coach requires. However, this substitution may only be made in the next round.
- C. A team that does not have 3 competitors at the start of the 1st round of the competition will not be allowed to compete and will be declared Kiken.
- D. At the beginning of the match, only the team (3 members), without the reserve, will line up on the Tatami.
- E. If, during a round, one member of the team is injured, and the Competition Doctor says that the competitor is unable to continue in the competition, the team will be allowed to use their reserve in order to compete in the next round.
- F. If during a round, another team member is injured, and the Competition Doctor says that competitor is unable to continue in the competition, the team will be allowed to compete in the remainder of that team category with only 2 competitors.

### Sanbon Team Match:

- A. At the beginning of each team match, each team must submit in writing the order of contestants for that match and not vary from that order.
- B. The fighting order can be changed for each round, but once notified, it cannot then be amended.
- C. The use of a reserve constitutes a change in fighting order.
- D. If the fighting order is changed, without notifying the Jury Table before the start of the match, the team will be disqualified.
- E. Matches between individual members of each team shall be held in a predetermined order.

**Criteria For Deciding the Winning Team Sanbon Kumite**

- A. The order of situations in determining the winning team shall be:
  - a. Number of Sanbon matches won. Kiken and Hansoku will be considered a loss of a match (the match score will be elevated to 3 ippons to the opposite team).
  - b. Total score accumulated (taking both winning and losing matches into account).
  - c. A tie breaker match ending with a winner or by HANTEI (NO HIKIWAKE). The contestant's name must be submitted to the table.
- B. In team matches, should a team member receive KIKEN, or be disqualified (contact HANSOKU or SHIKKAKU) their score will be reduced to zero and the opponent's score will be set to the maximum allowable score.

**2. ROTATIONAL TEAM SANBON KUMITE**

- A. In principle, the rules are similar to individual Sanbon kumite, and the mirror system will be used to adjudicate each match.

**Categories Allowed:**

Male		Female	
All Experience Levels		All Experience Levels	
Age	Weight	Age	Weight
8-10 years	Open	8-10 years	Open
11-12 years	Open	11-12 years	Open
13-14 years	Open	13-14 years	Open
15-17 years	Open	15-17 years	Open
18-35 years	Open	18-35 years	Open
36+ years	Open	36+ years	Open

All team members must be within the same age group, with the exception of the 18-35 category. In the 18-35 category, competitors 36+ and older may drop to that age group. No mixed sex teams are allowed.

**Duration**

- A. In Kumite Team Rotation the duration of each match will be 6 minutes running time.
- B. The clock will stop only when the Referee requests "Time".

**Rotational Team Match**

- A. The Sanbon Rotation team will be composed of 3 competitors and a coach in each round.



- B. A team that does not have 3 competitors at the start of each round of the competition will not be allowed to compete and will be declared Kiken.
- C. Each team may have only one reserve, who may be substituted for an injured competitor or if the coach requires. However, this substitution may only be made in the next round.
- D. Each competitor must fight at least once and for at least 15 seconds during the prescribed time (6 minutes).
- E. If, at the end of the match, one of the competitors has not fought, the team involved will be disqualified (Hansoku).
- F. In the final seconds of the allotted time, a competitor can fight for less than 15 seconds if the change was requested by the Coach and validated by the Change Judge.
- G. **EXCEPTION:** If one team reaches an advantage of “6 points” (3 Ippon, or 6 waza-ari, or a combination of Ippon and Waza-ari), ahead of the other team and before the time-up bell is sounded, their team will be declared the winner even if the other members of his team did not fight.

#### **Criteria For Deciding The Winning Team**

- A. There will be no limit to the number of points that may be scored. Each team may score as many points as its competitors are capable of, during the prescribed time.
- B. At Time-Up, the winner will be the team who scored more points (total score) than the opponent team, during the prescribed time.
- C. However, if one of the teams reaches an advantage of “6 points” (3 Ippon, or 6 waza-ari, or a combination of Ippon and Waza-ari), within the prescribed time, it will be declared the winner.

#### **Tie In Rotational Team**

- A. If at the end of the match there is a tie, the team who has the most Ippon(s) will be declared the winner.
- B. If the tie persists, HANTEI will be called. The decision could be AKA/SHIRO NO-KACHI or HIKIWAKE. In the situation of HIKIWAKE there will be a 2 minute extension of time (Encho-Sen) and the team who scores the first point will be declared the winner. Each coach will choose 1 competitor from their team to initiate the extension. This competitor may be changed after the extension has begun.

#### **Substitutions In Rotational Team**

- A. One Change-Judge will be used for the Rotation Team and be positioned outside of the tatami on the opposite side of the Jury table having 2 flags (AKA and SHIRO) described in Appendix K.
- B. The sole function of the Change-Judge is to indicate to the referee when and which competitor should be changed.
- C. The Change-Judge will have no opinion on scores, warnings or penalties, and will not

participate in Hantei.

- D. During the match, the coach or, in exceptional circumstances and with Referee Council permission, the team captain, may make as many substitutions between the 3 team members as they desire. A competitor who has already been replaced may come back to fight again in the same round and whenever requested during the match.
- E. Requests to change must be made by the Coach and validated by the Change Judge **BEFORE** Atoshi Baraku.
- F. The competitor who is to be substituted must be ready and have all the required equipment and protectors when the referee calls him onto the Tatami.

### **Substitution Procedure**

- A. Coaches must sit down in identified chairs placed on either side of the Change-Judge described in Appendix K.
- B. Whilst one member of the team is on the Tatami, the other 2 members of the team will always have to be equipped and ready to be called onto the Tatami.
- C. When the Coach intends to make a substitution, the Coach must request “**CHANGE**” to the Change-Judge.
- D. The Change-Judge must validate the request and ensure (checking the official scoring screen) that there is at least 15 seconds between changes.
- E. The Change-Judge, using the whistle, the flag, and the command “Change”, will indicate to the Referee to stop the match to allow a substitution.
- F. Only the Referee can decide when to stop the match and allow the substitution, by calling ‘Change’. The substitution will have to be made in a maximum of **3 seconds**. If the change exceeds these 3 seconds the Referee will penalize the team involved for time wasting and not permit the substitution. Penalties and prohibited behavior is described in ARTICLE 8.
- G. If a competitor is substituted without the referee’s command, the team will be penalized. Penalties and prohibited behavior is described in ARTICLE 8. This is considered a noncontact violation.
- H. When a substitution occurs, at least another 15 seconds must elapse before another change request is made.
- I. When a substitution occurs, the opponent will have to fight for at least another **15 seconds** before she/he may also be substituted.
- J. Both teams cannot substitute or change competitors at the same time. The Change-Judge must be very attentive as to which team was first to request a change.

### **Penalties in Rotational Team**

- A. All the warnings incurred by the competitors in a team will be carried forward and added to any incurred by the substitute in the same round. Penalties and prohibited behavior is described in ARTICLE 2.8

**Example:** If a competitor has been warned with excessive contact, the competitor

who comes onto the Tatami as the substitute will automatically have this same warning applied to them.

- B. In a team match, if a competitor is penalized with HANSOKU, the whole team will be disqualified.
- C. In a team match, if a competitor is penalized with SHIKKAKU, the whole team will be eliminated for the entire tournament.
- D. Before applying the SHIKKAKU penalty the Referee will have to consult the Referee Council.

## **ARTICLE 2.14 REFEREE PROCEDURES**

### **Suspending Matches**

- A. The Referee shall suspend the match by using the appropriate gesture and calling "Yame." When resuming the match, the Referee will announce "Tszukete Hajime".

### **Ending Matches**

- A. The timekeeper shall give signals by a gong or buzzer indicating Atoshi Baraku (a little time to go), using one sharp blast.
- B. Time-Up signal shall have two long blasts of the signaling equipment. At "time-up" the Referee will halt the match and announce "Soremade". He will then check the score, announce the decision and award the contest to the winner, or call Hantei.
- C. The Referee shall end the match with the formal exchange of bows by the contestants and Referee Panel (Otagai ni Rei - Shomen ni Rei) and at that stage the match is deemed to be over.

### **Match Procedure**

- A. At the start of a Kumite match, the Referee stands on the outside edge of the match area facing toward the center of the mat. Judges shall stand to the left and right of the referee.
- B. After the formal exchange of bows by the contestants and the Referee Panel, the Referee takes a step back and the Judges turn inward and all bow together.
- C. The Referee and Judges shall take up their prescribed positions and following an exchange of bows between the contestants, the Referee will announce "SHOBU HAJIME" and the bout will commence.
- D. The Referee will stop the bout by announcing "YAME". If necessary, the Referee will order the contestants to take up their original positions (MOTO NO ICHI).
- E. The Referee returns to the starting position and the Judges will indicate their opinions by means of a signal. In the case of a score to be awarded the Referee identifies the contestant (AKA or SHIRO/AO), the area attacked, and then awards the relevant score using the prescribed gesture. The Referee then restarts the bout by calling "TSUZUKETE

HAJIME”.

- F. When a contestant has scored the maximum points as allowed during a bout, the Referee shall call "YAME!" and order the contestants back to their standing lines as he returns to his. The winner is then declared and indicated by the Referee raising a hand on the side of the winner and declaring "SHIRO/Ao (AKA) NO KACHI". The bout is ended at this point.
- G. When time is up and the scoring situation tied, the Referee shall call "YAME!" and return to his position. The Referee will call "HANTE!" and following his signal (by whistle) the judges will indicate their opinions. The majority decision will be taken. The judges and Referee have one vote each at HANTE.
- H. The Referee will award the decision and announce the winner, or give a draw ("HIKIWAKE") as allowed by appropriate rules.
- I. When changing the entire referee panel, the departing officials take one step forward, turn around and face the incoming panel. They bow to each other and on the command of the incoming Referee and in one line (facing the same direction) leave the competition area.
- J. When individual Judges change, the incoming judge goes to the outgoing judge, they bow together and change positions.
- K. Officials should not referee, when possible, a competitor who is from the official's dojo or karate organization.
- L. At the start of a Team Kumite match, the Referee stands on the outside edge of the fighting area. On his left and right sides stand the Judges. The Referee will call both teams (only the actual fighters, not the substitutes or coach), to line up in order, properly composed and proceed to initiate the formal exchange of bows by both contestants and officials (Shomen Ni Rei - Otagai Ni Rei). The Referee will then take one step back, the Judges will turn inwards towards the Referee and all bow together. The match shall start with the announcement by the Referee of "Shobu Hajime" and the bout will then commence.

### **SHIKKAKU Procedure**

- A. The referee shall call up all of the judges (SHUGO).
- B. The judging panel discusses the offense. If the entire judging panel agrees to the SHIKKAKU, they write up a description of the offense and the agreed upon SHIKKAKU.
- C. Every judge on the panel signs the SHIKKAKU document.
- D. The referee then SHIKKAKU the athlete and takes possession of their credential.
- E. The referee then continues with the division.
- F. The referee council and executive committee are notified and review the SHIKKAKU document.
- G. The referee council and executive committee determine the extent of the SHIKKAKU penalty (Shikkaku from the match, the division, the day, the tournament, the season, for life, etc.). They record the ruling on the credential and return it.

### **10 Second Rule Procedure:**

- A. In the event that a competitor falls, is thrown or knocked down and does not return to his feet immediately, the Referee shall signal to the timekeeper to start the ten second count-down by a blast on the whistle, raising his/her hand and then calling out for the doctor.
- B. The timekeeper will stop the clock when the competitor stands fully upright and the Referee raises his/her arm. In all cases where the 10 second clock has been started the doctor will be asked to examine the contestant. For incidents falling under this 10 second rule, the contestant may be examined on the mat.
- C. If the contestant does not regain their feet within the 10-seconds, the Referee Panel will decide on KIKEN, HANSOKU or SHIKKAKU as the case maybe.

### **Calling Doctor Procedure:**

- A. The Referee should call the doctor when a contestant is injured and needs medical treatment by raising his/her hand and verbally calling out "doctor".
- B. If physically able to do so, the injured contestant should be directed off the mat for examination and treatment by the doctor.
- C. The doctor is obliged to make safety recommendations only as they relate to the proper medical management of that particular injured contestant.

### **Other Procedures for Suspending the Match:**

When faced with the following situations, the referee shall call "YAME" and halt the bout temporarily:

- A. When both or either of the contestants are out of the match area (or when a Judge signals a JOGAI).
- B. When a Referee orders a contestant to adjust the karate-gi or protective equipment.
- C. When the Referee notices that a contestant appears about to contravene the rules.
- D. When the Referee notices that a contestant has contravened the rules.
- E. When the Referee considers that one or both of the contestants cannot continue with the bout due to injuries, illness or other causes. Heeding the tournament doctor's opinion, the Referee shall decide whether the bout should be continued.
- F. When a contestant seizes the opponent and does not perform an immediate technique or throw within two seconds.
- G. When one or both contestants fall or are thrown and no effective techniques are immediately forthcoming.
- H. When one or both contestants are off their feet following a fall or attempted throw and begin to wrestle.
- I. When both competitors seize or clinch each other without attempting a throw or score within two seconds.
- J. When both competitors stand chest to chest without attempting a throw or score

within two seconds.

- K. When a score or foul is indicated by two or more judges for the same competitor.
- L. When in the opinion of the Referee, there has been a point scored or foul committed.
- M. When the situation calls for halting the match for safety reasons.
- N. When requested to do so by the Area Controller or Referee Council Member.

**Table Procedure:**

- A. The timing of the bout starts when the Referee gives the signal to start and stops each time the match is stopped (HAJIME/ YAME).
- B. The timekeeper shall give signals by a bell, gong or buzzer. A short signal indicates "thirty seconds remaining" ("atoshibaraku"), and a long signal indicating "time-up". When using a bell, one ding indicates "atoshibaraku", and several dings indicate "time-up".
- C. The timekeeper will also have available an additional stopwatch for the "10 second" rule.