

GKRKARATE

Referee Manual

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Section 4: TOURNAMENT KATA

4.1 OPERATION OF KATA DIVISIONS

When the new event is called (age and grade category), the Kata division is always conducted prior to the Kumite division. Most competitors enter both the Kata and Kumite divisions of their event, but there may be a few that choose to enter only one.

At the beginning of the division, one of the Ring's Officials conducts a roll-call of the Kata competitors only, using the paperwork provided by the central administration table. If competitors are only entered into Kumite, then they may relax at the back of the ring and wait for the official 'bow-in' of the event.

Note: When an event (age and grade category) is finished, all paperwork must be properly completed (with all medal winners clearly marked and names correctly spelt) and then taken to the tournament's central administration table. Once the administration table has this paperwork, they will release the paperwork for the following event on that ring.

ROLL-CALL PROCEDURES

CHECKING COMPETITORS ARE PRESENT

Upon hearing their name called, competitors respond with "Hai" so the Ring Official is aware of all competitors present/ or absent for the event. Where a competitor on the event paperwork is not present, a ring official should ask the central administration table to make an announcement over the P.A. system, calling for that person to report to the relevant ring immediately.

Alternatively, the Ring Official may ask competitors if they know of those people missing, and whether they are present at the tournament or not. Often a competitor can be found before any announcements are necessary.

ASSIGNING AKA OR SHIRO

Competitors should be told whether they will be Aka or Shiro. This is for the first round only as after the first round they will need to listen out for which side they have been allocated.

Beyond being assigned to Aka or Shiro, competitors should be told approximately what order they will be called so they may mentally and physically prepare for their bout.

PRE BOUTS

On many occasions there will be an odd number of competitors on a single draw sheet eg: 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15 etc. Whilst affording one of the competitor's a bye is an option, our preference is to design the draw that includes a pre-bout (or two). This involves inserting a preliminary bout on the far left of the draw sheet that effectively sees the winner of that bout progress into the first 'official' round. The main purpose of this pre-bout is to immediately create an even number of competitors in the draw. In a kata event, it will be necessary to inform the two competitors that they are engaged in a pre-bout and clarify which kata they are required to perform (given that it is still technically a first round). It is also important to note that the winner of this pre-bout will most likely need to perform the same 'first round kata' again in their second bout, as their second bout is still technically a first round (and will be their opponent's first round). Where this takes place, it is mandatory for the officials to explain these particulars to the relevant competitors before the first bout takes place.

REMINDING THEM OF THE KATA CRITERIA FOR THAT PARTICULAR TOURNAMENT

Kata criteria may change from tournament to tournament, so it's important to give competitors a reminder at the start as to what kata options they have for the first round and all subsequent rounds.

WHERE TO STAND

When organising Aka and Shiro for kumite, competitors line up on either side of the ring. This is because kumite competitors enter the ring from the side. Kata by contrast has competitors enter the ring from the back. Therefore, once competitors have been notified as to whether they are Aka or Shiro, and which bout they will be, they may all remain at the back of the ring.

BOWING IN TO THE DIVISION

Once all kata competitors are present, they will line up along the back of the Ring. This may also include those competitors who are only entered into Kumite (although they are not penalised if they are not present for this Bow in).

Using their hand, the Head Referee will then prompt all competitors to face the crowd. As they do this, they will call out “Shomen-ni” (face the front), “Rei” (bow). All competitors then bow to the crowd.

The Head Referee will then call out “Autoga-ni” (face everyone). Upon this command, all competitors face towards the Ring’s admin table and Judges. The head Referee then calls out “Rei” (bow), where both competitors and Judges bow to one another.

After this, competitors can prepare to start (sitting down, warm up, stretching etc). Competitors should always listen out for their name being called.

THE COMPLETION OF THE KATA DIVISION

At the completion of the kata division, competitors will line up at the back. The Head Referee will then call out ‘Autogani Rei’ (face everyone, bow). At this point the roll call for kumite may begin.

Those competitors who have only entered kata should stay at the ring as the certificates and medals are only handed out at the end of the kumite (ie: for that age and grade category).

Once the roll-call has been completed for the kumite division and the competitors allocated a red or white side for the first round, they will line up on either side of the ring and then face the officials. The Head Referee will announce ‘Autogani Rei’. The kumite division may now begin by calling up the first two competitors.

Note: *The double bow (Shomeni and Autogani) only occurs at the beginning and end of the overall division ie: the start of the kata division and the end of the kumite division. Between the kata and kumite, only one bow (Autogani) is necessary. Liken it to a normal karate class where the formal bow only occurs at the beginning and end of class, and all other bows (eg: a drink break or putting on equipment for kumite) are only informal bows.*

Competitors will not be penalised if they are not present for these bows. Often a competitor arrives late to a division eg: due to being in a team event or competing in a kata final whilst the kumite division commences on an adjacent ring. It is obviously preferred however, for all competitors in an Event to be present for the bow-in.

KATA OR KUMITE ONLY TOURNAMENTS

There may be certain occasions where a region conducts a ‘kata-only’ or ‘kumite-only’ tournament. In these cases, the bow for Shomeni and Autogani occur at the beginning and end of each division.

COMPETITORS WHOSE NAMES ARE NOT ON THE DRAW

There may be occasions where the roll-call has been completed and one or more competitors are insisting their name was not called out. When this occurs, the following applies:

- Ask the competitor if they are in the correct division (age and grade)?
- Ask the competitor if they only entered kumite (or only kata?)
- Ask the competitor if they entered correctly (eg. online, handed form in etc)?

If the competitor still believes they should be in the division, speak to the Senior Ring Coordinator. Their name/s can be added to the draw. Next to their name, add their Region number and contact phone number in case the Tournament Director needs to contact them afterwards.

IF THE DIVISION IS SPLIT OVER TWO OR MORE RINGS

There may be occasions where a division is split over more than one ring. When this occurs, it’s important that all competitors are brought together on one central ring to do the initial roll-call. During this roll-call they will be notified as to which ring they have been allocated for kata.

Once this occurs and competitors have moved to their assigned rings, the allocation of ‘Aka’ and ‘Shiro’ can commence.

4.2 COMPETITOR'S ENTRY AND PERFORMANCE

- When announced, each competitor will move to the back corner of the ring, to either the red (Aka) or white (Shiro) side.
- When both are in place the Referee will give them a subtle sign (often a nod) to begin.
- Both competitors will bow to one another (respect towards their opponent), and then walk along the baseline (towards each other) until they reach the spot where they will enter the ring.
- When they reach this spot they will turn to face the ring and bow before entering into the ring. (respect for the competition area and the rules)
- Each competitor will walk into the ring until they reach the designated starting mat.
- Upon reaching the mat they will bow (respect to the Judges).
- They will then stand in Heiko dachi and announce their kata.
- After announcing their kata they will bow into the kata and begin.
- When the first competitor finishes their kata, they will bow and stand in Heiko dachi whilst their opponent is finishing their kata.
- If a competitor makes a mistake in their kata and wishes to start again, they may do so without any prejudice against them. Note: the Open divisions are not permitted to start again. If a competitor stops to start again a second time (or first time during Opens) they will return to their starting spot and stand in Heiko-dachi until their opponent has finished. They will only exit the ring after the Judges have signalled a winner via the raising of flags.

Note: *In tournaments where a separate Black Belt Only division is running, the competitors will be bound by the same rules as the Open Divisions. This means they will not be able to start a kata again if a mistake is made. This DOES NOT apply to 3rd kyu and above divisions, even if there are black belt competitors in that division.*

4.3 AWARDING OF A WINNER

- At the completion of both competitor's kata, each will bow out of the kata and stand in Heiko dachi.
- The Head Judge will give a very brief period for the other Judges to make their decision, then blow a single-tone whistle calling for their decision (Hantei).
- Each Judge will raise either a Red or White flag quickly and simultaneously.
- The Score-keeper behind the table will assess which competitor has gained the most flags and immediately notify the Head Judge of the winner.
- The Head Judge will then blow another single-tone whistle and then raise either a Red or White flag, indicating the winner.
- Once the Head Judge awards a winner, both competitors bow to acknowledge the decision and then walk backwards to the edge of the ring.
- They then bow as they exit the ring.
- Competitors may then again informally bow to one another and shake hands if they choose.
- After the bout, the winner must approach the Ring's Administration table and confirm their name. They will be notified whether they are Aka or Shiro for the next round. In team kata, only one member of the team needs to approach the table.
- If a competitor has to compete two bouts in a row, they must be given one minute to rest and prepare for the next bout.

4.4 KATA OFFICIALS

Most tournaments shall have three Judges for Kata divisions. All 3 Judges shall sit along the front of the ring with the Head Judge in the Centre chair. On occasions, a tournament may have 5 Judges, in these cases 2 of the Judges will sit in the back corners of the ring.

During children's divisions, the Head Judge should encourage the ring table officials, the surrounding spectators, and the other competitors to give applause when both Aka and Shiro have completed their kata. This will provide encouragement for the children and maintain an environment of sportsmanship around the ring.

4.5 RING-SIDE ADMINISTRATION TABLE

For each bout, one person at the Ring's Administration table stands up and calls out both names clearly, using both first and surname. They are also clear about which competitor is to be on the side of Aka and Shiro.

At the completion of each bout, the Administration table will ensure the winner's name is placed into the next round. The competitor should also approach the table to confirm their name.

Where a division is split over multiple rings, the administration table officials must ensure they work the draw down to the specified numbers to move into the finals.

At the completion of the division, ensure the correct names (and spelling) are clearly listed as Gold, Silver and Bronze on the division paperwork. These results will often be posted on our club website so accuracy of placement and spelling are paramount.

4.6 ASSESSING KATA PERFORMANCE

Kata is not a dance or theatrical performance. It must adhere to traditional values and principles and therefore be realistic in fighting terms, displaying concentration, power and potential impact in its techniques. It must demonstrate strength, speed, as well as grace, rhythm, and balance. This is not only illustrated in the techniques, but also in the practitioner's focus and mindset. These principles should be demonstrated from the moment the competitors enter the ring, to the bow completing their kata.

Kata has many factors deciding its overall quality and it's rare that one competitor will be dominant in all aspects. One competitor may have more strength while the other has better technique. One may have better stances, the other better focus. As such, kata is subjective.

This is the reason why Kata has more than one overall deciding Judge (as kumite does). While Officials are expected to understand the following criteria for judging kata, each Judge's decision is of equal value in deciding the outcome of a bout. Additionally, each Judge's perspective and decision should be respected and unquestioned by other Judges, competitors or spectators. Everyone sees something different. Everyone's viewpoint is important.

In assessing each competitor or team, the Judges will evaluate the performance based on the following summary points. A more detailed description of each is outlined below:

1. TECHNICAL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY POINTS

- Technical proficiency
- Stances
- Transitional movements
- Focus
- Timing
- Correct breathing

2. ATHLETIC PERFORMANCE SUMMARY POINTS

- Strength
- Kime
- Speed/explosiveness
- Balance

3. OTHER FACTORS THAT MAY IMPACT DECISION MAKING

- Forgetting To Kiai.
- Loss of balance/stumble
- A distinct pause or stop in the performance
- Technical difficulty of movements being performed
- Belt falling off or coming undone during the kata
- Failing to bow at the beginning and completion of the kata performance

1. TECHNICAL PERFORMANCE

Technical proficiency:

Kata is comprised of many techniques, some of which can be found in Kihon (punches, blocks, kicks) and others that are more abstract and unique to the particular kata. Kihon techniques are universal in how they are taught, whereas more abstract techniques may inadvertently be taught with slight differences.

Therefore, when assessing technical proficiency in a kata competition, we are primarily assessing those Kihon techniques. Punches, blocks and kicks are easily identifiable as either correct or incorrect (eg: position of hips, legs, feet, shoulders, elbows, wrists etc).

Those 'abstract' techniques in kata (that are not part of our Kihon curriculum) therefore shall be viewed with slightly less scrutiny from a technical perspective. A large part of kata is about self-mastery, ie: moving your body the exact way you wish it to move. If a competitor is doing a technique exactly as they were taught, then they are demonstrating a high level of self-mastery.

EXAMPLE: Two competitors perform the first technique in Sepai. Both have a slightly different trajectory and timing as the hands circle around. Despite this difference, each Judge will assume both are doing it the way they are taught, thus both are correct. Therefore, on this technique, the comparison between the two could be noted on the quality of their Shiko-dachi, the angle of their stance, their focus, posture etc.

Stances:

Stances (like punches, blocks and kicks) are universal and therefore a major part of our Kihon (with the exception of Hangetsu-dachi and Fudo-dachi). They are therefore easily identifiable as correct or incorrect. There are three primary factors to consider when assessing stances:

- i. The quality of the finished product, including dimensions (such as length and width), along with its depth (being low) and its foot, knee and hip positions.
- ii. How quickly they are formed. Did the student land first time into stance? Or did they land and then correct themselves into stance (drop in height, straighten back leg etc)?
- iii. Does the stance look stable/strong? Much of this also falls into the ATHLETIC PERFORMANCE category.

Transitional movements:

This relates to how the body transitions between movements and/or stances. Much of this is also taken into account in the ATHLETIC PERFORMANCE criteria, such as speed, fluency etc.

From a technical proficiency perspective, factors to consider include:

- i. Did they move directly from one stance to the next, or did they make an adjustment first, such as moving the feet before stepping, or coming up in height before stepping etc?
- ii. During the movement did their torso lose correct posture? This might include leaning forward or backward.
- iii. Did their feet follow the correct path? For example, if required, did the foot move in a straight line to the next stance, or in an arc etc.?
- iv. Did their head remain upright or tilt slightly unnecessarily during the movement?
- v. Did they use too much or too little hip rotation when moving?
- vi. Are their Kihon techniques preparing properly during the transition? (wrists, fists, elbows, shoulders etc). Are they preparing at the correct time? (example, Uchi uke should start preparing towards the floating ribs the moment they begin stepping).
- vii. When they are kicking, are they retaining good posture in their upper body?
- viii. Is there unnecessary movement during transitions? (raising of shoulders, elbows floating out etc).

Focus

If kata is a series of imaginary fight sequences, then a competitor's focus and concentration must always be on his or her imagined opponent. Looking straight ahead (as opposed to looking up or down) is crucial, unless the kata move dictates otherwise. Unnecessary looking around would be viewed as very poor focus.

In younger divisions, the difference between two competitor's focus is often very noticeable.

Timing

While an overall kata does not have an official timing, the vast majority of individual techniques within kata have a general rule to be either explosive, medium pace or slow. Therefore, when judging TECHNICAL PROFICIENCY in the category of 'Timing', the following must be considered:

- i. Is the person rushing the kata? This will invariably cause each technique to be unfinished before the next one begins.
- ii. On fast techniques, is the competitor moving as fast as possible out of their stance, or starting without intent (slowing) and building speed through the step?
- iii. On the slow moves, is the competitor starting slowly and being consistent? Or are they starting a little fast and slowing down as the move progresses?

Correct breathing:

Kata as no 'official' right or wrong when it comes to technical breathing (Ibuki Waza). In terms of breathing, factors to consider include whether the competitor is holding their breath, or whether it appears they are in control of their breathing. Most importantly, does it appear that the breathing is either positively or negatively impacting their kata performance?

2. ATHLETIC PERFORMANCE

Strength

It's rare two competitors will be identical in their strength, and as such, it should not be that the naturally stronger competitor always gains favour. Strength is to be judged with the idea of, 'is this competitor drawing 100% of the potential strength out of their own body?' This is just one reason why Kata competition is so subjective and more than one Judge's viewpoint is required.

EXAMPLE: A naturally strong person who is accessing just 60% of their capacity is demonstrating a lesser degree of self-mastery over someone with less power who is drawing every ounce of strength possible from their body.

With this knowledge, strength can be assessed by the following criteria:

- i. Does it look like the competitor is accessing their full karate-spirit behind each technique? Strength is aided by a determined spirit.
- ii. On fast moves, is the competitor's attempt to gain strength causing them to be too tense, and in effect, actually diminishing their strength? In the quest to gain strength, it is often a case of less is more.
- iii. On slow moves, is the competitor showing intent, but not excessive tension in their arms?
- iv. Is the strength of their hands being matched by a strength in their legs, such as moving fast and landing solid?
- v. Is their entire body working in harmony to develop a flow of energy/power? Or, are their limbs firing at different intervals, or moving unnecessarily up and down in height to diminish strength?

Speed/explosiveness

When assessing speed and explosiveness, the following can be considered:

- i. Not all techniques in kata are strength-focused. There are many techniques however, where speed is crucial to overall effectiveness. Backfists, kicks, and transitioning between stances are all speed focused. Additionally, to generate more power in Kihon techniques, speed plays a major factor.
- ii. Like strength, speed and explosiveness are aided by the mind and spirit. If a competitor is focused on moving explosively out of their stance, then they will naturally move faster. Therefore, failure to move explosively out of stance can be seen as an error in focus or application.
- iii. Speed is also gained through correct technique (avoiding excessive or superfluous movements).

Kime

Kime has similarities to strength, speed and explosiveness as it demands a competitor give their full spirit to each technique. It also tests whether or not the competitor has the physical ability and control to stop their techniques at a precise point?

Kime is often assessed by a technique finishing in the correct position as a sudden stop, without any reverberation.

It requires excellent body control to tense the muscles at a precise point, although overly tensing them may cause un-called for extra movement or 'bounce-back'.

In summary, showing strong Kime means that the competitor can skilfully connect both relaxation and tension into their techniques. This aids in the development of speed during the movement, which in turn makes the sudden stop even more impressive.

Balance

Stances are designed to offer a karate-ka stability against a larger opponent. When done properly, they should feel centred, strong and balanced. This is why balance is a factor in judging kata. If each technique were a self-defence scenario in its own right, then poor balance diminishes our ability to stay on our feet, as well as our power, reach and agility.

Assessing balance is not purely about looking for large wobbles or extra steps. Anyone can make a single error, and this can be noted, but the overall balance in their stances and transitions is the key. Does the competitor look centred and stable throughout?

3. OTHER FACTORS THAT MAY IMPACT DECISION MAKING

The following are situations that occur from time to time in a kata competition. These should not be the main factors that impact a Judge's decision, but where competitors are very even in all other aspects they may help sway the final decision.

Belt coming falling off during the kata.

If a competitor's belt (in a non-Opens division) falls off during kata, they may stop, tie it back on and start again without any prejudice whatsoever. This is the same as if they stopped for any other reason.

If they are a young child, the Head Judge may call "Yame" to stop the bout and both competitors can move back to the starting position in the ring. An adult may help tie the competitor's belt and then the bout can start again. In this instance, the Head Judge should ease the minds of both children before re-starting the bout.

Alternatively, if a belt comes off one competitor at a safe distance away from the other person and it was going to be unnecessarily distracting to their kata to stop them, then it may not be fair or appropriate to stop the other competitor mid-kata (through no fault of their own). As such, in some cases the Head Judge can keep one of the 2 competitors going while the other one fixes their belt and immediately re-starts. The Head Judge's discretion should be used to determine the best course of action in these instances.

If a belt falls off during an Open division, the competitor would be disqualified.

Belt coming undone during kata.

If a belt comes undone but does not distract the competitor enough to stop them, then it may only provide a slight favour to the opponent. If both competitors are fairly even in all other areas, then this could be the deciding factor. If a Judge feels however, that the competitor would have undoubtedly won the bout irrespective of a loosened belt, then that person should still win.

In Children's divisions, if you feel the belt is causing distraction for the child, then you may call Yame and halt the bout (see point above).

Failing to bow at the beginning and completion of the kata performance.

In Children's divisions, and all 8th-7th kyu divisions, the Chief Referee can usher a quiet, friendly reminder for the competitor to bow. In these cases, there should be no prejudice against the opponent.

In adult or higher-grade divisions, this can be viewed more critically. If the competitor would have definitely won the bout, then they should still win the bout. However if the bout is very close, then this may be the deciding factor.

Forgetting To Kiai.

Like the points above, this is seen more harshly as grade and age go up. In Children's and low-grade teen or adult divisions, it can be less consequential unless the competitors are very even in all other aspects.

A distinct pause or stop in the performance.

From time-to-time a competitor may have a slight mental block. They will hold a technique for a brief period while they gather their thoughts and then continue with their kata. Like previous discussion points, if the bout is fairly even, then this loss of focus/clarity would be enough for them to lose the bout. If they have been clearly the dominant competitor however, then it should not prevent them from winning the bout.

Loss of balance/stumble.

A kata is a series of techniques put together. One way to look at Judging kata competition is like a test, where our aim is to tally up a high score. That is, if two competitors do the first move, who gets your vote? Now the second move, who gets your vote? Now the third and so on. At the end, which competitor gained more votes along the way? While this is not an exact system for making a decision, the premise is sound.

If one competitor is superior through the majority of a kata, but then has a slight stumble or loss of balance, then it should only imply that on that singular, particular exchange (comparison) that their opponent won your vote (gaining one 'vote').

The idea is - which competitor has the best kata overall? While a mistake may have been evident, it should only see a flag vote go against that competitor when the Judge is otherwise struggling to find a clear winner.

Technical Difficulty of the Kata.

This applies only to black belt kata divisions. It is not so much that extra sway is awarded for more difficult kata, but rather more leniency could be given towards errors in more difficult kata.

Example: The opening of Kanku-sho has three dynamic steps into Kokutsu-dachi, each on a different angle. While each stance should be correct, it is undeniable that this is far more difficult to execute perfectly than a competitor opening Sanseru, Shisoshin or Seisan with a slow step into Sanchin dachi. In such instances, a Judge may use their discretion and accept a 'less-than-perfect' stance in this case without impacting their decision making.

This also applies where jumps occur in kata, or having the hands placed on the ground. Some students lack the flexibility to completely flatten their body out and this need not be held against them unless all other factors were equal.

4.7 ASSESSING TEAM KATA

Team kata uses the same criteria as individual kata events where all members of the team must demonstrate competence in all aspects of the Kata. Team kata however has one extra criteria, which is synchronisation.

Synchronisation

When assessing a team's synchronisation, Judges must consider.

- i. Synchronisation includes their walk in, bowing process and kata.
- ii. It includes moving out of one technique (eg: stance) together, and landing into the next technique together.
- iii. If competitors are slowing the kata down to make synchronisation easier, this can sometimes work against them. The kata still must show traditional fighting principles (each technique should appear effective).
- iv. Competitors should not be wavering in their focus (eg: looking towards one another or even using their peripheral vision) to know when it is time to move. They should be judged on how well they synchronise without visual prompts.
- v. Competitors should not use excessive audible cues, such as louder than usual breathing, slapping of the gi or ribs etc.

Better Technique Verse Better Synchronisation

Judges will often face the difficult decision to determine whether to award a flag for the team with better technique or a team with better synchronisation.

This is where a Judge must use their discretion. For example, if the first team had only slightly better synchronisation, while the second team had far superior technique (or athletic ability) then the second team should win.

If the first team had far superior synchronisation and the second team had only slightly better technique, then the first team should win.

The difficulty lies when both margins are similar. However, providing the team that was better synchronised had not been guilty of any/many of the above points (slowing the kata down, visual or audible cues' etc.) then the team with better synchronisation should win.

NOTES
