WORLD KARATE FEDERATION

The Book
It gives me great pleasure to write the foreword to this book about Karate. I hope that it will help fans, enthusiasts and newcomers alike to know more about the origins, progress and prospects of Karate, a unique and multifaceted sport.

Karate is a massive global phenomenon, with millions of participants in all five continents. The word, “Karate”, literally meaning "empty hands", is a Japanese term that is now securely embedded in the lexicons of languages in all corners of the world. The expansion projects of the World Karate Federation have catalysed the growth of sport Karate through unification, standardisation and the development of key supporting pillars.

During five decades of innovative success, the WKF has become the sole organization to have achieved consensus among innumerable visions, styles and cultures of Karate, and it has driven the discipline from its origins in Japan into a captivating and dynamic sport that appeals to all nations and transcends socioeconomic status.

This expansion of Karate has conferred benefits upon the sport ecosystem and to all humanity due to core principles that are inherent to its martial history such as ethics, respect for others, self-discipline and a desire for stability and peace.

An Olympic dream fuelled the hopes and aspirations of all those involved in Karate for many years. The WKF realized this dream of taking Karate into the Olympics in 2016 when it achieved inclusion in the programme of the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. This moment will be forever embedded in the collective memory of all those associated with Karate.

Before its anticipated Olympic debut in Tokyo 2020, Karate experienced its first Olympic event namely, the 2018 Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The event was a resounding success for Karate as its sporting spirit and added values were obvious to all. Karate has another chance to demonstrate the tremendous appeal of our sport at young ages as Karate is part of the sports programme of the Youth Olympic Games Dakar 2022.

Now, as it continues to aspire and pass new landmarks, effort will be boosted to ensure that Karate will remain where it always should: in the Olympic Games.

ANTONIO ESPINOS
WKF President

FOREWORD

"The WKF is the only organization to have achieved consensus among innumerable visions, styles and cultures of Karate."
After decades of rapid worldwide growth, several competitions during the 1960s started to attract Karate athletes from various countries.

The different styles of karate, the diversity of rules and the lack of unified protocols to govern competitions indicated that a united international body should be created to govern National Karate Federations. Diverse stakeholders in the sport quickly realized the need to address these issues from a unified global perspective.

Ryoichi Sasakawa, President of the Japan Karate Federation (JKF) and Jacques Delcourt, President of the European Karate Union (EKU) jointly proposed a series of meetings. These meetings led to the inauguration of the World Union of Karate-Do Organisations (WUKO), the production of internationally accepted rules for sport Karate, and the first WUKO World Championships during 1970 in Tokyo, Japan.
The new WUKO Directing Committee initially convened in Portland, Oregon (USA), with the key objective of laying the foundations for the future of unified sport Karate.

National Karate Federations recognised by their National Olympic Committees and National Sport Authorities soon became members and WUKO became the international sport governing body for Karate.
The scale and importance of the first WUKO World Championships at the Nippon Budokan, Tokyo, 1970 was unprecedented in Karate history; athletes from 33 countries participated in male open individual and team kumite categories.

The success and media impact of the event was immediately recognised worldwide as an innovative milestone in the development of sport Karate.

Since then, Karate competition has been refined to a level of incomparable sophistication in terms of technical quality and credibility. It is now a showcase sport event that reaches millions of karate practitioners worldwide via state-of-the-art communications platforms.
The integration of several new organizations during the 1990s saw WUKO membership increase to 150 National Federations. This created a need for a new name that would more accurately reflect the size and scope of the organization. Therefore, the name of the first international organization to represent sport Karate was changed to the World Karate Federation (WKF) on December 20, 1992.

Ryoichi Sasakawa, President of the Federation of All-Japan Karate-Do Organisations, promoted the creation of WUKO and was designated as the founding WUKO President in 1970.

Jacques Delcourt, President of the French Karate Federation, promoted the creation of the European Federation and became its founding President. Mr Delcourt served as President of WUKO/WKF from 1992 until 1998.

Antonio Espinós is the current President of the WKF and the driving force behind the global thrust to take Karate to the Olympic Games. During his mandate, the WKF achieved IOC recognition as the sole official organisation representing international Karate, and the sport has been included in the programmes of the Youth Olympic Games Buenos Aires 2018 and Dakar 2022 and the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020.
The 1970 World Championships in Tokyo paved the way for a remarkable evolution in international Karate competitions over the next five decades.

The inaugural event at the magnificent Nippon Budokan comprised only two male kumite divisions. Kata and female divisions were added at the 1980 World Championships in Madrid, Spain. Current competitions comprise four male and female kata divisions and twelve male and female kumite categories.

The incorporation of Karate for Persons with Disabilities, or Para-Karate, into the World Championships generated an overwhelmingly positive public response. These exceptional athletes validated the perception of Karate as a widely inclusive activity. In a breakthrough decision, Para-Karate competitions were added to the programme of the 2012 World Championships, which clearly emphasized the integral values of sport Karate.
CHAPTER II

THE IOC RECOGNITION.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Significant growth of the WKF resulted in a consolidated international organisation that fully represented sport Karate.

This legitimacy was confirmed in 1999 when the IOC officially recognised the World Karate Federation as the sole international sport governing body for Karate.
The World Karate Federation comprises 199 National Federations in five continents that govern over millions of sport Karate athletes. There are currently 10 million affiliated practitioners around the world. Five Continental Federations are represented within the WKF:

The five colours in the WKF logo symbolise the universal nature of Karate as a sport as well as the global scope of its organisational structures.
Karate is included in the following multi-sport games:

- African Games
- Asian Games
- European Games
- Pacific Games
- Pan-American Games
- Mediterranean Games
- The World Games
- ANOC Beach Games
- 2018 Youth Olympic Games
- 2020 Olympic Games
- 2022 Youth Olympic Games
The quest for sport Karate to become an Olympic sport has been strenuous, laborious and extremely complex. For nearly two decades, the World Karate Federation has aspired to achieve inclusion in the Olympic Games, with mixed results. Nevertheless, the outstanding resilience and courage that is prevalent among Karate practitioners never faltered in pursuit of the Olympic dream.

The first clear outcome of efforts to achieve this most important goal of sport Karate arrived in 2004 when the sport was shortlisted for the 2012 Olympic Games. Unfortunately, Karate did not receive the necessary votes at the 121st Session of the International Olympic Committee in 2005 in Singapore. Nonetheless, the battle continued, but despite all efforts, sport Karate was again opted out of the Olympic race at the 125th Session of the International Olympic Committee in 2013.
However, the dream was finally realized on August 3rd, 2016 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, when the 129th Session of the International Olympic Committee ratified the inclusion of sport Karate in the sports programme of the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo.

Karate’s biggest goal was achieved during the presidency of Antonio Espinós, who has been leading the quest to make Karate’s Olympic dreams come true. Nonetheless, the struggle to remain an Olympic sport continues. Karate faces the constant challenge of ensuring inclusion in the sports programme of the Olympic Games as a permanent discipline. While this moment arrives, sport Karate can celebrate its Olympic debut at the Nippon Budokan, 50 years after the launch of the first World Championships in the same venue.
Among the many elements that have produced significant progress in the sport, improvements in the presentation of competitions have resulted in increasing numbers of practitioners and more visually engaging events.

One of the most notable transformations is the competition layout. The outline for major events presently comprises four aligned competition areas during elimination rounds and one elevated area during the finals.

These updates have clarified Karate competitions and have rendered sport Karate events more attractive to fans. Simplification and revision of the competition rules have also been instrumental in reaching more followers. Gender equity, the inclusion of athletes with disabilities and the addition of various age groups to competitive divisions have notably increased participation.
The quadrennial homologation of innovative competition-related items such as protective devices has also had a crucial impact on maximising athlete safety.

The implementation of the WADA anti-doping programme now guarantees competition transparency and educates participants about the importance of practising and competing in a clean and fair sport environment.
Trained and qualified referees are integral to the progress and success of WKF competitions. Officials actively collaborate to refine competition rules that render WKF events as fair and objective as possible, and they are provided with consistent training opportunities and assessment programmes to ensure optimal performance. These programmes also encourage the participation of new officials and maintain the competence of qualified officials.
The evolution of sport Karate is accurately reflected in the progress of the World Championships.

The WKF World Championships have emerged over the past decade as the largest and most successful sport Karate event, as about 1,200 of the best athletes from over 130 countries compete for six days to become World Champions. This event has had tremendous impact on society thanks to online and televised distribution. The introduction of novel elements such as captivating presentations of competitions, and innovative features like “mapping” allows millions of followers to see and understand sport Karate.

Indeed, the Karate World Championships have transformed from being an excellent sport event that could already attract tens of thousands of supporters to stadiums, into a magnificent global sports extravaganza.
The excitement generated by the WKF World Championships and other major WKF events demands global distribution.

The WKF produces major events for TV in the highest quality format using contemporary technologies. Major sport Karate competitions are now available to hundreds of networks and platforms to ensure that fans can watch live streaming of all events, directly from the tatami.

The World Championships are televised live in over 180 countries. The WKF YouTube channel also offers fans Karate competitions through highlights, special features and fascinating programming. Fans and supporters are now able to follow important Karate events to the minute on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.
The WKF and its Continental Federations organize annual and biannual competitions in male and female cadet, junior and senior divisions.

These competitions proceed worldwide with the endorsement of 199 National Federations and anyone can follow them from any point on the planet.

An estimated 100 million individuals are involved with karate and the WKF Internet channel surpassed 10 million views within the first 18 months of existence.
The WKF has registered exponential growth on social media channels over the last decade.

The popularity of sport Karate has increased so much that over one million fans follow WKF social media channels. Whether on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or YouTube, sport Karate enthusiasts can find all information, images, videos and activities required to remain current with any activities in the Karate world. Fans and supporters now use WKF social media to participate in WKF campaigns and implement outreach actions to further expand social awareness of, and participation in the sport.

The official WKF website has become the hub for fans to find the latest information about the WKF and sport Karate. News, special features, results, general data ... all information is available to anyone at WKF.net. Due to having a modern and easily accessible format that is adaptable to all devices, WKF.net continues to grow and strive to become the finest window to the Karate world.
Karate has become a sport of reference among Martial Arts in terms of garnering the interest of brands for the promotion and distribution of companies and products.

With its values of respect, ethical principles, social integration, physical and mental balance, rejection of violence and ability to conquer obstacles, Karate is an excellent platform for brands that seek to acquire a positive image.

The considerable public appeal and the popularity of the sport among youth renders Karate the right choice for companies and prospective sponsors seeking an effective branding tool.
Karate is an innovative and developing sport that has introduced new technologies while maintaining its traditions and core values. Over the last few years, Karate events and competitions have been revised to keep pace with changing times and to ensure that it remains an appealing sport for generations to come.

One innovation that has shaped modern Karate competition is the Video Review System. Several cameras positioned around the competition area allow questionable actions in bouts to undergo review for appropriate outcomes. This impartial second opinion increases transparency and fairness and adds excitement to competitions.

A new electronic judging system is now applied to Kata competitions. This novel point-allocation system replaces traditional flags held by judges. Kata performances are now evaluated through the distribution of points by a panel of judges.
The WKF is the only organisation that has succeeded in uniting the multifaceted sport of Karate under one roof. As the home of this discipline, the WKF is the focal point for its member federations, supporters, referees, coaches, fans, and above all, athletes, in the quest to move an art with battlefield roots into an incredibly popular sport that encourages aspiration to achieve ever higher levels of excellence.

Karate has evolved throughout almost half a century from its martial roots to become an exciting, charismatic and universal sport that millions of people can enjoy today. With the help of practitioners, athletes, fans, and supporters around the world, the WKF will continue to evolve and improve sport Karate for the benefit of all humanity.

We believe that world peace will be positively influenced through face-to-face interaction and global friendships made possible by involvement in this inspiring sport, Karate.