

Introduction

The major rules of karate competition are those of the World Union of Karate-do Organizations (WUKO). These rules are in use by over 130 countries who are members of WUKO. In the United States, the USA Karate Federation is the WUKO member. USA Karate has developed a program that expands the international test of the WUKO rules so that karate competition can be enjoyed by all ages and sex of the American population. An understanding of what these rules are about is very important to anyone who desires to compete under these rules.

We like to think that when the referee raises his hand for "no kachi" (winner) that he is recognizing without a doubt the best of the fighters in the match and when the final gold medal is awarded, that this winner is the most feared fighter in the world. Is the winner the best fighter in karate competition? No, not necessarily! Referees are told that the correct fighter must win. This is not necessarily the best fighter. The winner is the best fighter under the athletic test defined by the rules of the competition. The competition rules are designed to elicit a certain type and standard of technique. For example, certain techniques such as wheel kicks cannot demonstrate kime and are therefore not recognized under the rules. Thus the rules have an inherent bias in their application. It makes no sense to prepare for any type of competition with techniques that will not be recognized under the rule system in effect for that competition. Obviously, the karate competitor must understand what he is trying to accomplish in competition if he is to succeed. To do this he must understand the rules of the competition.

In karate competition there is no such thing as a point or half point. Karate competition scores ippon and waza-ari. We often find ourselves referring to points or half points but, this is incorrect. The concepts of ippon and waza-ari bear no relation to the concepts of point or half point. Just to hit the opponent before he/she hits you is not enough. Karate is not a game of tag. It is not that you hit, it is how you hit. This defines the difference in the sports concept between a mere point or half point and an ippon or waza-ari. Under the karate rules, two waza-ari are combined to equate one ippon. In reality, to earn a score of waza-ari, the technique must equal 90% or better of that required for an ippon.

For an award of ippon or waza-ari to be given in karate competition, the action must consist of a karate technique with kime to a target area while the competitor is in bounds and the match time is in play. Because of the requirement for kime, a technique with no kime is not recognized under the rules. It is not that such techniques are ineffective, it is just that the rules were designed to require a certain type of athletic test and scoring concept. What the rules are designed to recognize affects the way a match is fought, range and distancing, strategy, as well as the techniques and tactics used. Permitted target areas also affect the type of techniques and tactics used. For example, the omission of the of groin as a target permits different distancing and ranging tactics then would otherwise be the case if the groin was a target.

Scoring Basics

Scoring can occur only as long as the match is in play. That is, between the announcement of hajime and the signal of yame. Techniques after yame cannot score and can get a penalty for failure to follow the referees instructions. The only exception to the yame is at the end of the match. The match is over at the time-up signal, not at the call of yame. The time up signal signals the end of scoring possibilities, but penalties can still be given.

To score, a competitor must be in bounds. A competitor is in bounds as long as no part of his/her foot extends beyond or outside the boundary line. While a competitor out of bounds cannot score, a competitor in bounds can score on an out of bounds competitor.

Karate techniques must be controlled to the target area. The target areas consist of the head, face, neck, chest, abdomen, and back. The face is generally considered to extend to 1 centimeter above the eyebrow. Shoulders are not considered a scoring area, but the shoulder blades are. The abdomen is not limited by the obi (belt), but extends to the pubic bone.

Kime is the unification of the weapon, mind and hara in concentrated awareness. It is not merely the focusing of energy of the karate blow but is also an awareness of what the strike is intended to do. In kime, energy is concentrated but awareness remains with the situation at hand. Kime requires not only synchronization of the body in the karate technique, but the further support of the striking weapon by correct hara movement and the concentration of the mind in its field of awareness -- the karate match. Lack of any of these factors to act in concert will not allow kime.

Criteria for Ippon

Under the rules, there are six criteria for ippon. All six criteria must all be present to score an ippon. A technique almost comparable to that needed to score ippon is called a waza-ari. While two waza-ari can be combined in the total score to account for one ippon, a waza-ari is not a 1/2 point. A waza-ari can be given only as long as the technique is not less than 90% of ippon. If any one criteria is completely missing, no score can be given.

It is important to study the criteria for Ippon. These six criteria for ippon are as follows:

good form	correct attitude	vigorous application
proper timing	correct distance	zanshin

Good form means that the kihon is correct. Proper kihon is style specific, but generally includes such things as not bending the wrist while punching, keeping both shoulders down and the back balanced, not overextending the technique and making sure the connections remain unbroken.

Correct attitude means the competitor demonstrates that the strike is intended to be a killing blow. Accidental strikes are not ippon. If you attack with a flurry of technique and one happens to land, you have not demonstrated that this technique is a killing blow. You must control the fighter, set up a circumstance and then show to the referee that your technique is meant to score. One way to bring the referee's attention to your technique is to kiai as you deliver your vital strike.

To score a blow, a karate technique must be applied with vigor. Vigorous application requires techniques to be executed with power. Power is a combination of strength and speed. Sluggish, lackadaisical techniques are not karate techniques and do not score. In karate, nothing is wasted, nothing is withheld. A technique with no speed or strength is not a karate technique.

Correct distance and proper timing go hand in hand. Correct distance means that the weapon can be extended into the target. Not only is the extension of the arm considered, but also the ability of the hara to be extended. If the hara cannot get behind the technique the distance is too close. If the hara and weapon are fully extended, no score can be awarded even if the technique impacts the target area.

Proper timing considers that the attack hits the target at an angle that could cause damage. The rotation of the opponents body to and from the attacking weapon is an important consideration as well as the direction the opponent is moving. In the case of a retreating opponent, you must move farther and faster than the opponent for your technique to have an effect. When attacking a retreating opponent, the referee must consider whether the blow if taken to completion could have done any more damage than it already did. If not, even though you hit him, there is no score. This is seen in the case of a kick. Often a kick hits and then pushes out against the opponent. This push will deny any possibility of getting an award.

Zanshin is that criterion most often overlooked by the competitor. It is the state of continued commitment which continues after the technique has landed. The contestant with zanshin maintains total concentration and awareness of the opponent's potentiality to counter-attack and expresses this through maintaining an impenetrable posture. Posture is only the physical expression. Zanshin is a heightened alertness of the mind to the matter at hand. Concentration doesn't end until the dominance is obtained.

Technical Exceptions

Finally, there are five technical exceptions -- techniques which may be awarded an ippon even if they are of waza-ari quality. An ippon may be awarded for techniques deficient in one of the criteria for ippon but which conform to the following schedule:

a. Jodan kicks	Kicks to the head
b. Successfully scoring at the precise moment the opponent attacks	sen no sen
c. Deflecting an attack and scoring to the unguarded back of the opponent	go no sen
d. Sweeping or throwing followed by a scoring technique	the sweep need only break the opponents balance
e. Delivering a combination technique, the individual components of which each score in their own right	the opponent must not be able to interrupt the attacking combination

Note that these exceptions allow a waza-ari to be elevated up to an ippon. They are either scored as ippon or they do not score at all.

This discussion has treated the WUKO rules for international competition, but the concepts are the same for all youth and low rank divisions. Of course standards are lowered for lower ranks and youth, but all aspects of the requirements for ippon must be shown. In order for a erstwhile competitor to excel, it is important the aspiring fighter train with the idea of ippon in mind and to discard peripheral techniques which will not be ippon. To do this, the fighter must practice ippon tactics and techniques over and over again.