

# TRADITIONAL KARATE

# 传统空手道

## 1. History and Definition

Although today there are many different Karate sports, originally there was only one. The first or Traditional Karate (Karate-Do) was the original Karate from which these later sports borrowed the name “Karate”, as it is commonly and widely used today.

Karate has its roots in “Tode” – a weaponless self-defense system developed in Okinawa, influenced by Chinese martial arts with more than two thousand years of history. In mainland Japan, it was established as a part of “Budo” (Japanese martial arts) system; “Traditional Karate” therefore is a general term for Karate that follows Budo principles.

After World War II, Karate’s value for self defense, physical fitness, competition, and overall mental and physical development came to be increasingly recognized. However, as a martial art, it necessitated long and repeated careful study. Because the practice of Karate soon came to approach the semblance of a “boom” in popularity, the requirements of long and repeated careful study came to be overridden by the demands of today’s world for more rapid results and quicker development. The result was the emergence of many new sports using the name of Karate. To avoid confusion with these new sports, the public began distinguishing the original Karate as “Traditional Karate”.

The international governing body of Traditional Karate is the International Traditional Karate Federation (ITKF), which is composed of Traditional Karate national federation from each member country. Each member national federation is the governing body for Traditional Karate in its respective country. Worldwide, members of ITKF practice many different “styles” of Karate (such as Shotokan, Goju-ryu, etc.). These “styles” are comparable to schools or academies and have their own unique training systems developed by Karate masters over many centuries. However, even under the same style, groups affiliated with ITKF pursue Budo Karate while others not belonging to ITKF practice so called “karate sports” which are merely punching / kicking games with no Budo principles.

## 2. Objectives and Values

The purpose of Traditional Karate is to develop well-balanced mind and body, through training in fighting techniques. Traditional Karate also shares the ultimate aim with Budo, which is to cultivate great human character of a higher class that prevents any violent attack before an actual fight occurs.

Budo originates in the practice of physical fighting; however, it has a significant effect on the spiritual and physical development of a human since Budo philosophy and ethics are absolute requirements for the study of techniques and improvement of skills. Elements such as manners and etiquette were not adapted from outside elements nor are they independent from the physical training, but existed within the system since the origin of Budo and were integrated to the technical improvement:

- A. **Seriousness:**  
Budo training must be done in a serious manner, because its techniques are derived from severe life-or-death situations, where one must win the fight in order to survive. This is why Budo practitioners are required to have a serious mind set. Only in such a condition can one possibly achieve extreme levels of mind and body far beyond ordinary levels. This is apparent in competitions. For example, a Kumite (sparring) match is carried out in Ippon-shobu (one perfect “finishing blow” determines the winner) format. Because only one definitive technique can conclude a match, competitors are driven to learn the importance of serious attitude.
- B. **Humility:**  
To achieve a higher level, Budo requires a practitioner to keep a humble mind and behavior. This allows one to always learn something from anyone. Once one thinks that he or she is better than others, the possibility of improvement ceases. This is the basis of the high importance of respecting instructors as well as training partners in Budo.
- C. **Calmness & Discipline:**  
As already mentioned, the original Budo techniques were designed for the critical situation where one may or may not survive. Under such a condition, it is difficult for anybody to keep a calm mind; the ability of clear judgment or physical reflex slows down, and often one may find himself immobilized due to nervousness. Therefore keeping a calm mind is a crucial concern in Budo practice, and this is why a training session begins and ends with a period of meditation. In addition, Budo’s rigorous and disciplined training makes a practitioner confident about his techniques and gain mental stability. According to the recent research by sports psychologists, this method is recognized as most effective in avoiding mental fluctuation.
- D. **Skillfulness:**  
In Budo, the proper technique and power are generated by skill, rather than relying only on muscular strength. Techniques are delivered from the center of the body so that it can utilize a quick and efficient reflex of the entire body. In the same way, Traditional Karate requires an integrated physical action controlled by the center of the body, starting from the feet on the floor. Proper training develops a body with each part moving in proper sequence without unnecessary moves, and as a result, allows one to build a well-balanced body.

Acknowledging the above described values, it is easy to see why such physical and mental training became the basis for the concept of Budo and Traditional Karate demanding unlimited seeking of total human development.

### 3. **Competition**

*“A Karate contest conducted under the rules of the ITKF must conform to the definition of Karate. All rules enacted by the ITKF must always be considered from the standpoint of helping and motivating the participant toward the perfection of human character through unlimited physical and mental seeking.”*

ITKF Constitution  
Article 1, Section 1.3

Traditional Karate competitions, both national and international levels, follow the competition rules established by ITKF.

A. Traditional Karate vs. General Sports

In a general competitive sport, the competition rules define the sport itself. For example, soccer is defined as the game played by the “soccer rules”. In contrast, Traditional Karate competition rules do not define what Traditional Karate is. Budo competition has its roots in a practice method called “Shiai” in which the practitioners try their techniques and test each other’s skills. ITKF competition rules were compiled based on this “Shiai” philosophy: for the athletes to improve their mental and technical skills.

B. Traditional Karate vs. Karate-like Sports

The most visible and compelling difference between Traditional Karate and other Karate-like sports is that Traditional Karate’s competition rules specifically require each technique to have sufficient maximum force resulting in a “finishing blow.” These other sports do not have competition rules that exact such a requirement of each of their techniques. Because of this very important distinction, the training methods and biomechanics of Traditional Karate are therefore much different from these other sports.

C. Competition Categories of Traditional Karate

- 1) Kumite (Sparring)
  - a. Men’s Individual: Free sparring
  - b. Women’s Individual: Ko-go sparring (Alternate offense and defense)
  - c. Team: 3 persons
- 2) Kata (Form)
  - a. Men’s Individual
  - b. Women’s Individual
  - c. Team (3 persons perform a Kata together. In the final match, the athletes demonstrate the application of the techniques in the Kata.)
- 3) Fuku-go (Alternate individual Kata and Kumite)
  - a. Men
  - b. Women (Ko-go sparring is used instead of free sparring)
- 4) En-bu (A pair of athletes performs choreographed offense/defense techniques)
  - a. Men: 2 Men (Free offense and defense)
  - b. Mixed: Woman & Man (Man attacks and woman defends)



**International Traditional Karate Federation**

Members of the International Traditional Karate Federation continue striving to preserve the spirit of Budo in traditional karate training and promote its development worldwide for the benefit of succeeding generations dedicated to learning this true martial art.