

November 1, 2012

**Interview with General Secretary of the World Karate Federation George Yerolimpos
(by editor in chief Vitaliy Svadkovskiy)**

1. WKF today? How many countries are the WKF members?

- 187 countries and more than 100 millions karatekas.

2. Question concerning Foreign policy of the WKF. Relationships with government authorities in different countries.

- WKF is concentrating on the national federations not the governments of the countries. We have our members and they are dealing with their governments. But we have very good relationships with the local governments also.

3. Relations with other Karate Federation.

With what federations does the WKF cooperate? And are there any federations that WKF will never cooperate with?

- Karate today is covered by WKF. If there are exist some "Mickey Mouse" organizations that claim national federations of the karate and cover some clubs and they tell they cover countries- I think this is not serious for me to discuss this. Karate is WKF. And WKF is karate.

WKF has 187 country members recognized by the national Olympic Committees and high sport authorities.

4. Does WKF itself intend to hold World Championships for the main styles - Shotokan, Shito-ryu, Wado and Gogu? Is this an exhaustive list? Or there will be any other styles?

It's not a secret that a lot of people practice Shotokan, less people practice Shito, very few practice Wado and Gogu . Therefore the value of the title of the World Champion in Shotokan is much higher than Gogu world title. Don't you think that such practice devalue the Championship Title?

- We give them the status of WKF accredited competitions for the styles. This is what we have today. The source of the karate were the styles and then karate united and different styles decided that they would have one way of kumite but also keep their technical level through the kata. These are the different approaches for the karate. Different schools.

Of course the value is different. But I would like to tell you that the top-value is the World Championship and afterwards the Premier League's Karate 1 tournaments. These are the big events of WKF. The accredited event is in order to give a chance to the 3d division athletes who cannot participate in the World Championship or in Premier League. They have a possibility to participate in the official WKF event.

5. Will it be World Championships?



- WKF international accredited competitions. There is only one World Championship and only one world champion, the WKF one.

6. Do you intend to organize these championships by yourself (I mean the WKF) or will delegate it to the large style federations?

- We will delegate it to the national federation and the styles organizations. But we supervise this with our people in order to fulfill the requirements and we have our timing and scoring system of database.

7. How will you choose them? What will be the criterion?

- We know which are the big organizations in the world. WKF knows it very well. We will not recognize 20 competitions per shotokan for example or shito ruy... We will recognize 1-2 maximum. The biggest. And yes, we have the criteria already. And according to it if they fulfill the criteria we accredit them or not. We have a list.

8. Concerning membership in the WKF. Only members of the national federations recognized by WKF can be the members of WKF itself.

This is very important now concerning the Olympic status of the WKF.

Are there any sanctions in WKF to athletes competing in other federations events?

- WKF has an open doors policy. But we want to give the privileged to participate in our championships to our members solid. We don't want somebody to be in one organization, then to come to us, then to other. If you want to be in real karate you need to be in WKF.

9. It means that WKF is open to everyone, you give every sportsman a chance to take part in WKF events, but then this sportsman will have to make a choice?

- Yes. Of course. Person shouldn't be little with us, little with the other. I can't understand now with the accredited events that we have and the system of Premier League why an athlete would like to go to a Mickey Mouse' event.

WKF is not doing business, it's doing sport. We don't care about their business. WKF is an international sport federation. I would like to tell you that with this set up we have today soon all these unofficial events will disappear. Because the athletes are interested in participation in official karate, not in the unofficial ones. The athletes understand what is official and what is not. 98 percent of karate people in the world belongs to WKF. And we are speaking about 2 percent of the people who can't understand this.

10. We understand your desire. Karate is too scattered but it has to compete with such sports as basketball, rugby, football instead of suffering from internal conflicts.

- Karate one of the 10th biggest sport in the planet. And the biggest martial art, by far the biggest.

11. Sport development in Russia.

Our sports officials still cannot decide how to manage the karate. There are two options - the first one is to unite all the karate in Russia? The second one – to create one National federation that will unite many different federations (including WKF) on an equal basis. And all these federations have their own relations with its international headquarters. How could you comment these options?

- For me this is strange situation. They understand the model of world football. I hope that they understand. We are working exactly the same. I can't understand why they don't understand our system. Maybe this is because the lack of information. Your country authorities need to read IOC Statutes very carefully. If they read this they will understand that only one federation per sport is recognized. For karate this is WKF. And if they will do this one - to recognize other federations for the same sport – then they violate the IOC Statutes. And if they violate the IOC Statute they need to know which will be the consequences of this. I can tell you that this is very dangerous game.

12. But still they intend to violate the IOC Statute. Nothing will stop Russian officials. Maybe reading your interview will help them not to make such a mistake.

- WKF has in Russia recognized national federation with legal elected executive committee and president – Mr. Sokolovskiy. This national federation covers all styles of the karate. It means that there is no need to create a new federation. They already have this federation. If they will create another federation we will protect our rights. And we will not recognize any new federation. Karate now is the candidate for the Olympic Games and we will not deal with the organizations that violate the IOC Statutes.

13. In other words it means that Russian officials will have some problems with WKF at the international Olympic level?

- This already happened to karate in South Africa. National authorities changed their Statute and included all dissident groups with the official karate together. This is against our statutes and for this reason this national federation was suspended until to come again on line. Because of this the National Olympic Committee interferes and they change their status and clean their house in order to enter WKF again. This will happen in any similar case.

14. Olympic perspective of the WKF.

- This is the main. Karate is a very big sport. And IOC knows this very well. Karate also is fulfilling all the criteria of IOC (by far!) in order to become an Olympic sport. Karate belongs to be inside the Olympic program and has a lot to offer in the Olympic movement.

15. IOC decisions are very difficult to explain. There were many times when the Olympic status got unpopular sports like curling for example.

- I'm not speaking for other sports. I will speak for the karate which is the most popular martial art in the world and very well organized in the Olympic level. We are very serious organization and we fulfill all the criteria of IOC. If karate will not enter the Olympic program now the IOC should have very strong arguments for this refuse. We respect the Olympic values and principles and we want to serve them. And we are ready to do this. And we hope that IOC will give us this privilege. More than 100 million persons will be crazy happy. More than 60 million children among them will celebrate this. No one of the today candidates has the size of the karate. No one is even close.

16. A new WKF rules often compared to former Sanbon and shobu-ippon. Don't you think that: New rules are too complicated and difficult for spectators? For example football is so popular, because of its rules which are simple and clear.

- No, I disagree with you. Offside, foul – these are quite subjective. The same is in karate. We realize that it's not very easy to understand all the rules in the karate. For these reasons we have changed that. The new ones are very simple – flags majority is giving the result. Everybody could understand the color. No points system. It is very easy to understand now.

And also I will give you something very new which will pass in November in WKF Congress in Paris – no limitations in the kata. New rules in the kata – free kata and any of the styles.

17. An opinion exists that after the introduction of new rules WKF karate became more light weighted, there are no more power attacks as it was before?

- No, absolutely not. We try to combine spectacularity, strong performance and safety of the athletes. Because you can have a strong karate, but not safe. And I would like to repeat that for us the most important thing is the safety of the athletes. And I would like to give you the statistic that we have today with the new rules – the accidents that we have is 0.04 % and these 0.04% are not serious accidents. That means that karate today is a very safe sport. But also very strong. Because it's more difficult to control your power instead doing it without control. You need a high technique to do it.

18. The new ammunition of the athletes also contributes the entertainment

It seems that the less ammunition has the fighter (boxing, for example), the more spectacular is the fight.

- We don't want to change the image of our sport and to make Robocop fighters. For this reason after a lot of research we indentified some special equipment which is a very light and where we using very special material which guarantees the safety of the athletes without changing the image of our sport. This is developing always.

19. Are you planning to allow placement a sponsors logo on karate-gi as other sports do (biathlon, for example), at least on the commercial competition.

- Yes of course, we have special approved places for differents logos.

20. Thank you very much for this talk. We wish World Karate Federation an Olympic dream to become true!

- Good luck to all Russian karatekas!