



Open Letter to the World Karate Federation on behalf of UK Karate Athletes

18 December 2025

Antonio Espinós
President
World Karate Federation

Dear Mr. Espinós

On behalf of UK Karate athletes, Global Athlete is writing to demand your immediate intervention in a situation that gravely undermines the rights and welfare of athletes within the UK Karate Federation. Athletes are being used as political leverage and effectively barred from competition unless they endorse a newly formed national federation. A federation that appears designed to appease UK Sport leaders rather than serve athletes.

A manufactured internal dispute has resulted in the creation of a new UK federation, leaving athletes in good standing arbitrarily excluded from their sport. No athlete should ever be coerced into switching clubs or aligning with a particular body to satisfy the interests of sport administrators. What is happening in the UK is a direct violation of athletes' fundamental right to compete and a stark example of the deeply regressive governance practices plaguing sport today.

UK Sport and World Karate leaders have been fully informed of this unacceptable situation and have chosen not to act. Their inaction leaves athletes powerless and reinforces the disturbing pattern of leaders prioritizing their own institutional agendas over athlete welfare.

Athletes commit substantial time and financial resources to prepare for competitions for which they are already registered. It is unacceptable that this investment is being undermined by an ultimatum forcing them to either change clubs or exit the sport. Registered athletes in good standing should never be placed in such a position. The lack of transparency in England's governance rules jeopardizes the rights and futures of all UK Karate athletes.

As the global leaders of sport, you have a clear obligation to uphold the rights of these athletes and ensure they are not sacrificed to political disputes or governance failures. Continued silence will make it unmistakably clear that the often-repeated "athletes-first"



rhetoric is just that – rhetoric. Failure to intervene now will leave all of you complicit in denying these athletes their right to participate in the sport they represent.

We also call on the IOC Athletes' Commission to stand unequivocally with these athletes and support their right to compete without coercion or retaliation. Should you require additional details, we are prepared to convene a meeting with the affected athletes immediately.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rob Koehler".

Rob Koehler,
Director General

CC: Kirsty Coventry, President, International Olympic Committee
Emma Tehro, Athlete Commission Chair, International Olympic Committee
Christophe de Kepper, Director General, International Olympic Committee
Sally Munday, Chief Executive Officer, UK Sport