

Flag Sparring Rules: General

Overview

Flag sparring is a form of non-contact sparring. To flag spar, competitors are fitted with two “flags”, fragments of belt or other material, which hang at each competitor's side from their karate belts. Competitors score by removing flags from their opponent and win by removing all of their opponent's flags.

Competition Setup

Competition Area

- Flag sparring is performed in an 18-foot square kumite ring.
- Competitors begin the match standing behind starting lines located in the center of the ring 6 feet in from the edge of the ring.

Arrangement of Flags

All flags should be of similar length and material, differing only in color.

Flags are attached to by looping half of the flag between the competitor’s karate uniform and belt. If the karate belt is worn in such a way that it forms multiple layers, the flag shall be inside all layers.

Flags shall be worn with one on the right and one on the left side of the body. Flags should be placed as directly on the left and sides of the body as possible, avoiding placement toward the competitor’s front or back.

Beginning and Ending the Match

A match begins by having competitors face each other, standing completely behind the designated starting lines. Opponents shall bow to each other prior to starting the match to demonstrate respect. The Referee shall then signal the competitors to start.

A match ends when:

- Only one competitor has flags remaining.
- Time expires.
- There are fewer than two competitors due to disqualifications.

At the end of a match:

- The competitors stand completely behind the designated starting lines.
- The Referee shall indicate the winner.
- The opponents shall bow to each other to demonstrate respect.
- Competitors are also encouraged to shake hands to demonstrate sportsmanship.

The Referee shall stop the match at the end of the match time.

Timing

Matches last for one minute thirty seconds. The Timekeeper shall signal clearly when ten seconds remain in the match time. Time is measured in “stop-time”; the timekeeper shall begin recording time as soon as the Referee commands the match to start and shall stop recording time as soon as the Referee commands the match to stop.

Starting and Stopping the Match

The Referee shall command forcefully and signal the competitors to stop in the following situations:

- Whenever a flag is removed.
- Whenever a competitor commits a penalty.
- When time has expired.
- If a competitor's karate belt appears loose or in danger of falling off.

When the match is stopped, competitors should stand completely behind the designated starting lines.

Before starting a match, the Referee should check to ensure that both competitors':

- Karate belts are securely fastened with an appropriate knot.
- Shirt sleeves and pant legs are cut or rolled to avoid causing a hazard.
- Protective gear is worn and fastened properly.
- Both flags are placed appropriately.
- There are no other conditions which may negatively impact the fairness or safety of the match.

Scoring

A competitor's score is the number of flags which have not been removed from their body before the end of the match. A flag is considered removed if it is completely separated from a competitor's body or if, in the opinion of the Referee, would have been separated except for the competitor's use of a prohibited defense. A flag is only successfully removed if it is removed without the use of a prohibited attack.

In the event a competitor's flag is removed by the use of a prohibited attack, the flag shall be replaced in a manner similar to how the flag appeared prior to the prohibited attack.

In the event a competitor's flag is moved but not removed, the flag shall not be repositioned or replaced. If a flag is moved after the match has stopped, the Referee may reposition the flag back to where it was positioned before the flag was moved.

In general, if more than one flag is removed prior to the referee stopping the match, the Referee should collect only the first flag removed and replace the remaining flag(s). If it is not possible to determine the first flag removed, the referee should collect all of the flags removed. As an exception, if both competitors remove their opponent's last flag simultaneously, the Referee shall return the flags to the competitors and resume the match as if no flags had been removed.

Prohibited Attacks

- Removing a flag after the match has stopped.
- Removing a flag while a body part other than the foot is in contact with the ground.

- Removing a flag by or during the commission of a penalty.
- Removing a flag in a way which, in the opinion of the Referee, is dangerous or likely to cause injury to one or both competitors.

Prohibited Defenses

- Holding one's own flag.

Winning the Match

The competitor with the highest score at the end of the match shall be declared the winner. If competitors have equal scores, the Referee shall declare a winner based on which competitor, in the Referee's opinion, the greatest character, skill, technique, or other appropriate criteria.

Penalties

- Leaving the ring.
- Falling to the ground.
- Pushing an opponent to the ground.
- Slapping at an opponent.
- Grabbing hold of an opponent's body or arms (particularly if not done as part of a [missed] attempt to score).
- Moving, repositioning, or otherwise handling one's own flag after the match has begun.
- Taunting an opponent or otherwise demonstrating poor sportsmanship.
- Behaving in a way which is dangerous or likely to cause injury.

The Referee has discretion to determine when competitors' behaviors become dangerous.

Behaviors which may be dangerous include, but are not limited to:

- Competitors standing off from one another and then one or both charging at the other.
- Competitor raising hands and arms to an opponent's head level.
- Competitor leaning forward, particularly if done over an extended period of time / not as part of a specific attempt to score.

Penalties should generally be resolved with the least punitive method possible. Punitive methods should escalate only if necessary. In general, the Referee may choose to escalate punitive methods for repetitive penalties as follows:

- First offense: Verbal warning. The Referee may choose to not stop the match if continuing does not negatively impact fairness.
- Second offense: Stop match and repeat verbal warning.
- Third offense: Stand directly in front of offending competitor and issue another verbal warning.
- Fourth offense: Remove one flag or replace one flag on the offending competitor's opponent. Ending a match by removing a flag for penalty should generally be avoided.
- Fifth offense: Disqualification.

Flag Sparring Rules: 2-Person Competition

Except where modified by the rules below, 2-person competition shall proceed in accordance with the general rules for flag sparring.

Overview

2-Person competition places one competitor directly against one other competitor in a format that resembles traditional kumite. Each competitor attempts to remove the other competitor's flags while avoiding having their own flags removed.

Competition Setup

Both competitors begin the match facing each other. The competitor wearing red flags shall stand to the right-hand side of the referee and the competitor wearing blue flags shall stand to the left-hand side of the referee.

Flag Sparring Rules: 3-Person Competition

Except where modified by the rules below, 3-person competition shall proceed in accordance with the general rules for flag sparring.

Overview

3-Person competition places three competitors directly against each other. In 3-person competition, all competitors act independently. Each competitor attempts to remove flags from both other competitors while avoiding having their own flags removed.

Competition Setup

All three competitors begin the match facing the center of the ring. The competitor wearing red flags shall stand to the right-hand side of the referee, the competitor wearing blue flags shall stand to the left-hand side of the referee, and the competitor wearing green flags shall stand directly across the ring from the referee.

Scoring and Elimination

Because three competitors are involved in the match, competitors may be eliminated from the match without the match ending. A competitor becomes eliminated when:

- The competitor has no flags remaining.
- The competitor is disqualified.

A competitor who has been eliminated shall stand outside the competition area until the end of the match and may not continue to participate in the match in any way.

Winning the Match

Competitors shall be awarded first, second, and third place as follows:

- First place shall be awarded to the competitor with the greatest number of flags remaining at the end of the match.
- Second place shall be awarded to the competitor with the second-greatest number of flags remaining at the end of the match. If two competitors are eliminated from the match, second place shall be awarded to the second competitor to be eliminated from the match.
- Third place shall be awarded to the competitor with the fewest number of flags remaining at the end of the match or to the first competitor to be eliminated from the match.

In the event two competitors are tied:

- Identify which competitor is not tied and award the correct placement to that competitor.
- Conduct a 1-minute overtime period consisting of only the tied competitors. Overtime is “sudden death” and ends as soon as the first flag is removed or a competitor is disqualified.
- Award the highest remaining placement to the winner of the overtime period and the lowest remaining placement to the other competitor.

- If a tie remains at the end of overtime, the Referee shall declare the winner of the overtime period based on which competitor, in the Referee's opinion, the greatest character, skill, technique, or other appropriate criteria.

In the event three competitors are tied:

- Conduct a 1-minute overtime period. Overtime is “sudden death” and ends as soon as the first flag is removed.
- Award first place to the competitor who removes the first flag, third place to the competitor whose flag was removed, and second place to the remaining competitor.
- If a competitor is disqualified during the overtime period, award third place to the eliminated competitor and continue with overtime following the procedures for when two competitors are tied. The overtime period does not restart.
- If a tie remains at the end of overtime, the Referee shall assign first, second, and third place based on which competitor, in the Referee's opinion, the greatest character, skill, technique, or other appropriate criteria.

Flag Sparring Rules: 3 vs. 3 Competition

Except where modified by the rules below, 3 vs. 3 competition shall proceed in accordance with the general rules for flag sparring.

Overview

3 vs. 3 competition places a group of three competitors against another group of three competitors. Members of each group work together to remove flags and eliminate competitors from the opposing group, while protecting their own flags from removal and their own members from elimination.

Competition Setup

Both groups begin the match facing each other. The group wearing red flags shall stand to the right-hand side of the referee and the group wearing blue flags shall stand to the left-hand side of the referee. The members of each group shall stand side by side in a straight line at the start of the match, end of the match, and whenever the match is stopped by the Referee.

Scoring and Elimination

A group's score shall consist of the total number of flags remaining on all of its members regardless of how the flags are distributed.

Because three competitors are in each group, competitors may be eliminated from the match without the match ending. A competitor becomes eliminated when:

- The competitor has no flags remaining.
- The competitor is disqualified.

A competitor who has been eliminated shall stand outside the competition area until the end of the match and may not continue to participate in the match in any way.

Winning the Match

The group with the highest score at the end of the match shall be declared the winner. If groups have equal scores, the Referee shall declare a winner based on which competitor, in the Referee's opinion, the greatest character, skill, technique, or other appropriate criteria. All members of a group share equally in the result of a match.