

Budo international magazine has published an

□□ **interview with WKF President, Antonio Espinós**



Due to the length and interest of this article, we have considered convenient

to post it divided into several parts.

Let's talk about Japan and its role in a discipline – I'm still reluctant to call it a sport – that was born there.

Is Japan today just another country within the WKF or is it special because karate originated in Japan?

Things are running smoothly with the Japanese Karate Federation right now. We have a Japanese technical director, Tsuguo Sakumoto. And soon the general secretary will be Japanese too, Toshihisa Nagura. Japan is a benchmark. My first major trip last year was to Tokyo. We all know where we come from and it's important that we do. And it's also important for the Japanese to appreciate that we do.

But a few years ago there was a time when the Japanese federation had their ups and downs with the WKF, didn't they?

There was one tense moment at the Munich world championships in 2000. We changed the competition rules for kumite and the Japanese Federation wasn't happy about it at all. They even said that if those changes were approved, they'd leave the WKF. That was when Keiichi Hasumi and Toru Arakawa were in charge.

I know both of them. Hasumi was Vice-president of the JKF for many years and so Sasagawa's right hand in karate, while Arakawa is a Wado Kai ninth dan and ran the technical side back then.

Well, during the World Championships, Arakawa was the one who spoke up about it. But in the end the changes were approved anyway and that was the end of it.

So there's no special attitude towards Japan, then, other than the kind of courtesy you mentioned?

Now we no longer see Japan as a special case, no. In any company or group there comes a time when you have to choose between control and growth. To grow you have to discard

some ballast and lose some control. Something that we've achieved is to make karate

universal by releasing ourselves from Japanese control. What we were talking about earlier

regarding Spain.

But karate is Japanese, so shouldn't it have certain values that are related to Japan?

We still hold by the values that have made karate what it is today. In that respect the Japanese

have done a good job. Yes, Japan is just another country but it's an important one, and

they're way up there in the medals table. They're a major power, with their ups and downs

but still a major power.

Indeed, for several years after International competition began the Japanese were not surprisingly the best, but then they went through a period when they won nothing.

Why do you think that happened?

The Japanese have struggled to adapt to change, but they've managed it and done it well.

Now the JKF, with their president Sasagawa, has a good relationship with the WKF and that matters to me a lot. Also, the Japanese culture is very different. The Chinese too, and Asian people in general. It's a different world. We often don't realise it but they're still a long way away and that's an issue that we still need to resolve, whether it's to do business with them or in several other areas as well. We haven't managed to win them over the way we have other countries, including America, who we've finally managed to reach an understanding with.

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