



# World Para Taekwondo Newsletter

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## Welcome to 2021 - Para Taekwondo's Most Important Year Yet!



It's the beginning of a new year and for Para Taekwondo - it promises to be the most exciting yet!

Of course, what everyone has been waiting for is Para Taekwondo's debut at the Paralympic Games. Now six years since being accepted, the Para movement will be introduced to its first full contact sport! Keep reading to see some of the athletes expected to be contenders in Tokyo this summer.

2021 will also see the return of our regularly scheduled World Championships. Coming hot on the heels of its Paralympic debut, the ninth edition of Para Taekwondo's biggest event will see

record numbers of athletes and nations and a record global audience watching them. It's the first chance for our athletes to start racking up ranking points for Paris 2024, so expect the action to be fierce!

If events are able to be held as planned, 2021 should also mark Para Taekwondo's introduction to premiere events like the Grand Prix and Grand Slam events alongside our Olympic counterparts. Grand Prix events will offer lucrative ranking points for Paralympic qualification, while the Grand Slam will showcase Para Taekwondo's top fighters of 2021.

Para Taekwondo's rapid growth will continue on the Poomsae side with the introduction of several new impairment classifications for Poomsae. New Poomsae divisions for deaf athletes, visually impaired athletes, those with neurological or intellectual impairments, short stature athletes, and athletes in wheelchairs mean hundreds of new athletes will now have the opportunity to compete at a global level.

The increase in participation has also allowed the sport to refine its weight divisions to come more in line with Olympic divisions and increase the safety and competitiveness of our fighters. Para Taekwondo will move from three weight classes, where fighters can vary in weight by as much as 15 kg, to five weight classes, where most bouts will be between fighters ranging by no more than 10 kg.

It is a monumental year for Para Taekwondo - just take a look at our 'Around the World' section below to see how federations around the world are ramping up their training!

For more on what to expect from Para Taekwondo in 2021, check out our article on the World Taekwondo website by clicking [here](#).

## Ones to Watch 2021

Each year since 2017, the IPC has named 10-12 athletes as the 'Ones to Watch' for at the 2020 (now 202One) Paralympic Games.

This year's list of 12 fighters includes a mix of solid veterans, up-and-coming superstars, and four new fighters. Here's a preview of the new additions to the list:



### Angelica Espinoza

**Country:** Peru  
**Division:** K44 U49  
**World Championships:** No medals  
**Parapan Am Games:** 1 Gold (2019)  
**Pan Am Open Championships:** 1 Gold (2017), 1 Silver (2018), 1 Bronze (2019)  
**December 2020 Rank:** No. 6

Taekwondo season came to its COVID-necessitated halt. Not only was she selected to carry her country's flag at the Opening Ceremonies when her country hosted the Parapan Am Games in 2019, but she provided the

host country with one of the event's greatest memories by winning gold on home soil. She followed that up with an impressive silver at the European championships – showing her Paralympic bona-fides by besting some of the division's top talents along the way. Needing a win at the last chance, all-or-nothing Pan American Paralympic qualification tournament, she bested rival Claudia Romero (MEX) in the sport's final tournament before COVID shut down the sport. Peaking at just the right time months before the 2020 Paralympic Games were first due to be held, will the COVID break hinder Espinoza's chances, or will she come back stronger than ever?

## Yujie Li

**Country: China**  
**Division: K44 U58**  
**World Championships: 1 Gold (2019)**  
**Asian Open Championships: 1 Gold (2019)**  
**December 2020 Rank: No. 2**

Few fighters have risen to the top of the sport as quickly as China's Yujie Li. Before the 2019 world championships, China had no fighters in the Top 10 in any Paralympic division. Then Li won world championship gold in her first international tournament – and she hasn't looked back since. She went on to win three more tournaments in her breakout 2019 season, including her first Asian Open championship. Li made the final in all six international tournaments of her rookie season, setting up a highly-anticipated European final against four-time world champion and Para Taekwondo legend Lisa Gjessing (DEN), who had missed out on her chance at a fifth title in 2019 due to injury. In a potential preview of the Paralympic final, Gjessing bested the talented newcomer in their first fight 27-14. Still, Li's meteoric rise in the sport saw her move from unranked to No. 2 in a single calendar year – a remarkable achievement against fighters earning ranking points for several years. She also ushered in a Para Taekwondo renaissance in China, with her success leading to the near doubling in size of the Chinese national team and helping Wuxi land the 2021 World Championships. With an additional year of training, can Li close the gap with Gjessing in time for the 2020 Paralympic Games?



## Shoko Ota

**Country: Japan**  
**Division: K44 O58**  
**World Championships: 1 Bronze (2019)**  
**Asian Open Championships: 1 Bronze (2019)**  
**December 2019 Rank: No. 8**

There will be few stars bigger than Japan's Shoko Ota at the 2020 Paralympic Games in Tokyo. The Japanese fighter first made her Paralympic mark by winning a cross-country skiing bronze at the 2006 Paralympic Games in Torino. She added a silver at the 2010 Paralympic Games in Vancouver before being tapped to carry the country's colours at the Opening Ceremonies of the 2014 Paralympic Games in Sochi. She was then encouraged to pick up Para Taekwondo by Yoriko Okamoto – Japan's 2000 Olympic Games bronze medalist in Taekwondo. Showing her athleticism and adaptability, she managed to medal at her very first tournament – a bronze at the 2018 Asian championships. But she really showed she's serious by shocking reigning world champion Amy Truesdale (GBR) on her way to a bronze at the 2019 World Championships – Japan's first medal at a Para Taekwondo world championship. Few fighters will feel more pressure at the 2020 Paralympic Games. Then again – none have more experience dealing with Paralympic pressure than Ota.

## Ibrahima Seye

Country: Senegal

Division: K44 U75

World Championships: No medals

Asian Championships: No medals

December 2019 Rank: Unranked

One of 2020's most pleasant surprises was the emergence of Senegal's talented Ibrahima Sèye. Moving down a weight class to compete in the up to 75kg division for the first time, Sèye raised eyebrows by posting 117 points in just three fights at last year's African Paralympic qualification tournament. He showed why he is one of Africa's best medal hopes at the 2020 Paralympic Games by outclassing 2019 world championship bronze medalist – and perhaps Africa's top fighter – Mohammed Aatif (MAR) 24-16 in the final. Senegal has never had a medalist at any international Para Taekwondo tournament, but Sèye will look to change that on the sport's biggest stage at the 2020 Paralympic Games in Tokyo.



## UPCOMING COURSES REGISTRATIONS OPEN NOW!

With still a few weeks before the competition season gets up and running, now is the right time to get your certification. Remember - as of this year - Coach Certification is mandatory!

If you have any questions about the trainings or registration, please contact the World Para Taekwondo office ASAP.

### 10th World Para Taekwondo ONLINE International Coach Certification Course [Level I] (English/Arabic)

- Course: 12-14 February. Registration **Deadline: 8 FEB, 11:59:PM (GMT+02:00 Africa/Cairo)**

**7th Para Taekwondo ONLINE International Coach Certification Course [Level II]**  
(English/Persian)

- Course: 19-21 February. Registration **Deadline: 16 FEB, 11:59:PM (GMT+04:30 Asia/Tehran)**

**6th Para Taekwondo National Classifier ONLINE Certification Course [Level I]**  
(English)

- Course: 20-21 February. Registration **Deadline: 17 FEB, 11:59:PM (GMT-08:00 US/Pacific)**

**11th World Para Taekwondo ONLINE International Coach Certification Course [Level I]**  
(English)

- Course: 22-24 February. Registration **Deadline: 19 FEB, 11:59:PM (GMT-01:00 Europe/Berlin)**

**7th Para Taekwondo National Classifier ONLINE Certification Course [Level I]**  
(English)

- Course: 6-7 March. Registration **Deadline: 2 MAR, 11:59:PM (GMT+01:00 Europe/Brussels)**

**8th Para Taekwondo National Classifier ONLINE Certification Course [Level I]**  
(English)

- Course: 13-14 March. Registration **Deadline: 7 MAR, 11:59:PM (GMT+10:00 Australia/Sydney)**

[Click to Register for Para Taekwondo Courses](#)



**Para Taekwondo Around the World**



## Asia:

### Nepal

While Nepal has yet to qualify any fighters for this summer's 2020 Paralympic Games, the Nepal Taekwondo Association is doing everything they can to get its members prepared. First came the generous donation of new uniforms, track suits, bags, and shoes (estimated at 200,000 Rs, or 2,750 USD) to the Para Taekwondo team, including Paralympic hopefuls Palesha Govardhan and Ranjana Dhimi. Then government officials

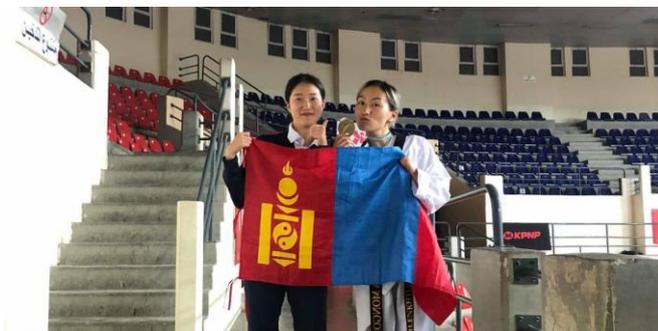
announced that any Nepali athlete that wins a medal at the Olympic or Paralympic Games will earn 500,000 Rs (6,900 USD) and implied that gold medallists could earn even more. Nepal has seen strong results in Para Taekwondo over the last few years, including Nepal's first world championship medal when Dhimi won bronze in 2017. In addition to the Asian Paralympic qualification tournament – and perhaps Paralympic Games – the fighters are also training for the 2021 Para Taekwondo world championships in Wuxi, China and the 2022 Asian Para Games in Hangzhou, China, where the sport will make its debut. The new uniforms were presented to the team by dignitaries from the National Sports Council, Nepal Taekwondo Association, federal government, and local government, including Godavari Mayor Gajendra Maharjan, who noted that “the most successful martial arts in Nepali sports are Taekwondo and Para Taekwondo.”

### Iran

Iran's Para Taekwondo stars have joined their Olympic counterparts in a training camp ahead of this summer's 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Mahdi Pourrahnama and Asghar Aziziaghdam, who secured their places in Tokyo through the rankings, join Iran's already-qualified Olympic athletes Armin Hadipour and Mirhashem Hosseini in the camp that was postponed from last year. The Asian Open championships are expected to be held in April, while the all-important Asian Para Qualification tournament – also postponed from last year – is expected to take place later this spring in Amman, Jordan.



Led by coaches Mahdi Ahmadi and Payam Khanlarkhani, the training camp also includes other athletes still hoping to qualify for the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, including Sajjad Javanbakht, who still hopes to qualify in the under 61kg division. “We decided to analyse all the rivals, but our concentration has been on past events due to the pandemic”, Kharlankhani told World Para Taekwondo. “Right now there is no news about the rivals from other countries but in the current year we can analyse the rivals by tracking the Asian and European [qualification tournaments].” He added that Pourrahnama and Asghari are in the fourth stage of their training and have technical and bodybuilding sessions twice per day.



### Mongolia

Mongolia's former world champion and No. 1-ranked Enkhtuya Khurelbaatar's story was recently profiled by the IPC in a feature article and video. The piece looks at how she picked up the sport of Para Taekwondo and overcame a divorce and raising a son on her own to become world champion and one of the favourites to pick up a gold medal when Para Taekwondo makes its debut at the Paralympic Games this summer. “It doesn't matter if you are single, you are

divorced, you have a child. I want to give the message that as a woman I can do it”, she told the IPC. The 2017 world champion and four-time Asian champion looked like she was on her way to capturing a second straight world title before being disqualified for an illegal head kick in the 2019 world championship final. “I lost my title and one thing I really understood in that moment was that life and sport are teamwork – I cannot do everything [alone]. Maybe I was very selfish in that moment. I was thinking ‘Oh, you are World Champion, you are amazing, you can do anything...’”.

To read the full story and watch the video, please visit Paralympic.org by clicking [here](#).

## Europe:

### Denmark

The coaches and trainer of Denmark’s four-time world champion Lisa Gjessing were nominated for Pressalit’s prestigious Keep Living Award last month. Normally awarded to Denmark’s top Para athlete – Gjessing won the award herself last year – the award had different criteria this year, due to the lack of competitions in 2020 because of COVID-19. This year the award was given to coaches and team leaders from Parasport Denmark’s national and talent team that were selected based on their ability “to think creatively and constructively in a corona-marked year, where sports activities and motivation have been seriously challenged and where restrictions have made [life less than] “business as usual”. Gjessing’s team of national coach Bjarne Johansen, assistant coach Jasmin Anderson, and physical trainer for Team Denmark, Line Hovgaard-Hansen were nominated for “the continued training and preparations leading up to the Paralympic Games for Denmark’s best Para fighter”, including designing a gym in his parking lot and adapting training exercises for home-based training.



Said Gjessing on Facebook, “Bjarne has, among other things, opened his home and carport for training, just as he has run countless online sessions and even rented another garage for corona bubble training. It makes me so unspeakably happy that they get this incredibly fine recognition, because if anyone [has] - they’ve spent [their] time, effort, and energy on me.” The award, and its 20,000 DKK (3250 USD) prize, ended up going to the national Para Shooting coaches, denying the Gjessing team a second straight award.

For more information, or to see a video of Gjessing’s training, please visit the Parasport Denmark page [here](#).



## Pan Am

### Mexico

Mexico’s Francisco Pedroza was named the Top Para Athlete in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico last month. At 41, the Para Taekwondo pioneer is likely to be the sport’s elder statesman when the sport makes its debut at the Paralympic Games later this summer. 2020 saw most sporting competitions canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but not before the No. 12-ranked Pedroza secured himself his shot at an inaugural Para Taekwondo Paralympic medal by dominating Aruba’s Elliot Loonstra 36-7 in the Pan American Paralympic qualification tournament final. Pedroza has been around the sport a long time, having won his first Pan American Open championship back in 2014 – two years before Para Taekwondo won its place at the Paralympic Games – and adding a silver at the sport’s debut at the 2019 Parapan Am Games in Lima, Peru.

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“Behind the Sportsman of the Year, there are many people who are always working hand in hand to achieve the goals”, he said on Facebook. “Today especially I want to thank with all my heart ... my wife ... for always

being [there] in the good and the bad, forever encouraging me to move forward, and [for] sharing this dream together ... I love you!!” Pedroza received a cheque for 25,000 MXN (1,250 USD) along with the award. He will compete in the over 75kg weight division in Tokyo this summer.

For more information, please check out this story on [puentelibre.mx](http://puentelibre.mx).

## Canada

Canadian Pan American Open Poomsae champion Austin Arbuckle is ramping up his training ahead of this month’s online Canada Open championships. Arbuckle became Canada’s first Poomsae champion at the Pan Am Open when he won gold in Portland in 2018 and has his sights set on winning his country a medal at the next Para Poomsae World Championships. Competing in the P20 Male U30 division, Arbuckle has continued to train throughout the pandemic and looks sharp, says his coach Lisa-Mae Petropolous.

For more on Arbuckle’s journey, check out this article from [YorkRegion.com](http://YorkRegion.com).



## Brazil

The Brazilian Taekwondo Federation published its selection guidelines for forming the Brazilian Para Taekwondo team for 2021. The process will be done through Draft Para Taekwondo 2021, which will evaluate athletes in physical, technical, and tactical protocols. Athletes must receive at least 70% in each of the evaluations. Taking place at the end of March in Curitiba, 11 K43 and K44 finalists at the 2019 Brazilian Para Taekwondo Championship and Parapan Am Games medalists were invited to participate. Those that pass the

evaluations will join the three Brazilian athletes that have already secured spots for Brazil at the 2020 Paralympic Games through the rankings – Nathan Torquato, Silvana Mayara Cardoso Fernandes, and reigning world champion Debora Menezes – to be considered for participation at the Paralympic Games and Continental Open tournaments.

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