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World Para Taekwondo Newsletter

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Last Chance to Qualify for Parapan Am Games



Focus Shifts to Pan America as Parapan Am Games Qualification Tournament Looms

Athletes hoping to use the Santiago 2023 Parapan Am Games as a statement for their Paris 2024 intentions have one final chance to qualify for the event at this month's Parapan Am Qualification tournament in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Before Brazil's **Nathan Torquato** and Peru's **Angelica Espinoza** became the first-ever Paralympic champions in Para Taekwondo history, they emerged as Tokyo 2020 medal favourites by winning gold at the Lima 2019 Parapan Am Games.

Athletes looking to follow in their footsteps have one last chance to qualify for this year's Santiago 2023 Parapan Am Games by winning one of two spots set aside for each weight category at the Parapan Am Qualification tournament in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on 22 March.

With the top fighters in each weight category ineligible to compete having already qualified for Santiago 2023, the Parapan Am Qualification tournament is the ideal breakout event for new or up-and-coming fighters.

The registration deadline is 9 March, with late registrations being accepted until 19 March.

For more information, including the event outline, please click [HERE](#).

Last Chance to Qualify

Brazil and Mexico lead the way, with 9 and 7 athletes already qualified through the world rankings, respectively, although each nation hopes to qualify even more in Rio.

Several nations will be looking to qualify their first fighter to Santiago 2023, including athletes from Ecuador and Puerto Rico.

The event will feature several high-profile athletes still looking to punch their tickets to Santiago 2023.

The pressure will be on Brazil's **Leylianne Dos Santos** to finish in the Top 2 at home in order to qualify for the Parapan Am Games. At world No. 5, Dos Santos is set to be one of the highest-ranked athletes at the qualification event.

All eyes will be on Cuba's **Lilisbet Rodriguez**, who stunned the -47 kg division by beating Peru's reigning Paralympic champion Espinoza at a Pan Am Series event in Brazil last year.

The USA's veteran **Felix Sabates** will look to kick his way back to the Parapan Am Games by winning one of the two -80 kg invites. The 2021 Pan American championship runner-up will hope to improve on his quarterfinal exit at the Lima 2019 Parapan Am Games.

Pan Am Series Returns

Fighters in Brazil for the Parapan Am Qualification tournament – and those who are looking to pick up world rankings points and are ineligible to compete at the qualification event – will have the chance to earn G1 rankings points at the return of the Pan Am Series.

Last year's event saw several memorable matches, none bigger than Cuba's Rodriguez stunning Peru's Espinoza in the -47 kg semi-final.

The event will be held at the Olympic Park in Rio de Janeiro on 24 March, two days after the conclusion of the Parapan Am Qualification tournament.

Registration deadline is 14 March, with late registrations accepted until 19 March.

For more information, including the event outline, please click [HERE](#).



Early Events Show Anyone Can Win in 2023



The busiest year in Para Taekwondo history got off to a roaring start in February, with stunning upsets, incredible comeback stories, and new nations earning their first-ever international medals.

If the first events of 2023 are any indication, it won't be easy to win world rankings points to qualify for Paris 2024.

Para Taekwondo athletes showcased how professional their programmes have become by showing mid-season form in a series of tournaments that proved that the best can be beaten and anyone can win.

In a sign of things to come, Mexico's **Jessica Garcia** edged Türkiye's hometown favourite and 2022 Female Fighter of the Year **Meryem Cavdar** 11-10 in an enthralling back-and-forth affair that is already considered one of the greatest women's fights in Para Taekwondo history.

The host nations dominated the events, with Türkiye winning 9 medals (3 gold) at the President's Cup, 10 more at the Turkish Open, and Egypt winning 17 as host of the Egypt Open.

New Stars Emerge As Champions Falter

Even the sport's top athletes showed they will have to work in order to stay at the top.

After winning gold at the President's Cup, Uzbekistan's reigning Paralympic and world champion **Guljonoy Naimova** was shocked in the Turkish Open Round of 16 by Iran's **Leila Mirzaee**, suffering just her second loss in two years and marking the arrival of Mirzaee as a Paris 2024 medal threat in the +65 kg division.

Israel's reigning world champion **Asaf Yasur** was stunned by Japan's **Mitsuya Tanaka** in the President's Cup -58 kg final before rebounding to capture gold in the rematch in the Turkish Open final.

Türkiye's hometown favourite **Mehmet Sami Sarac** showed he's ready to move to Paris 2024 medal contender status by upending Iran's reigning world champion **Hamed Haghshenas** for gold at the President's Cup.

Even Mexico's reigning world champion **Juan Diego Garcia Lopez** struggled to get out of the President's Cup Round of 16, requiring a superiority victory over former African champion **Ismael Oumarou** (now fighting out of USA) before withdrawing from the semi-final due to injury.

Compelling Comebacks as Athletes Make Paris 2024 Push

There were several notable comebacks at the year's first events.

Morocco's three-time African champion **Rajae Akermach** made a successful return to the mat by upending former rival and Paralympic bronze medalist **Amy Truesdale** (Great Britain) on her way to bronze at the President's Cup. The pair had fought many memorable battles before Tokyo 2020, including the 2017 World Championship final, won by Truesdale at home, the rematch at the 2017 IWAS World Games final, won by Akermach, and the Tokyo 2020 quarterfinal, won by Truesdale.

An anticipated rematch was scuttled when Akermach was forced to withdraw from the Turkish Open Round of 16. Truesdale made the most of the opportunity, winning her first tournament since before Tokyo 2020.

Spanish national team coach and former world champion **Gabriel Garagarza** saw a successful return to action by winning bronze at the President's Cup just days before being named Spain's Top Para Taekwondo Coach of 2022.

New Nations Make Para Taekwondo History

Showing how deep the pool of quality Para Taekwondo fighters has grown, several nations saw their first-ever international champions in February.

After his viral introduction to the world by setting scoring records at the Paralympic Qualification tournament in 2021, Georgia's **Sandro Megrelishvili** won his first international gold medal at the Turkish Open. It was a breakout party for Georgia, which saw teammates **Giorgi Nikoladze** win silver at the President's Cup and **Lia Chachibaia** win bronze at both the President's Cup and Turkish Open.

Aruba's **Elliot Loonstra** made Para sport history by becoming the first Para champion from any sport to win an international gold medal when he beat Egypt's Anas Saleh Taha for gold at the Egypt Open.

Côte d'Ivoire's **Michel Boli** also made history by winning his country's first-ever international Para Taekwondo gold medal.

With the bulk of the 2023 calendar still ahead, the first events of the year have shown that with the right training and dedication – any athlete from any country on earth has the chance to not only compete, but to excel in Para Taekwondo.



Paris 2024 Releases Schedule & Pictograms

DAY 1

AUG. 29

W K44 -47 KG
 M K44 -58 KG
 W K44 -52 KG

GRAND PALAIS

PARA TAEKWONDO

Para Taekwondo athletes now know when they will fight for Paralympic glory and what logo will be on their Paris 2024 swag when they arrive at the Paralympic Games next summer.

With less than 18 months before Para Taekwondo's newest Paralympic champions are crowned, the anticipation is building. In the last month, the competition schedule was released, tickets went on sale, and the official Olympic and Paralympic pictograms were released.

Para Taekwondo fighters now know when they will have their chance to fight to become a Paralympic champion:

Day 1 (Aug. 29, 2024): -47 kg, -52 kg, -58 kg

Day 2 (Aug. 30, 2024): -57 kg, -63 kg, -65 kg, -70 kg

Day 3 (Aug. 31, 2024): +65 kg, -80 kg, +80 kg

Paris 2024 organisers released the new sport pictograms, adding an element of the famous French style to the classic Olympic look.

Organisers believe that athletes wear the pictograms as “badges of honour” symbolising their belonging to their chosen sporting community”.

Each symbol is composed of three elements – an axis of symmetry, a depiction of the ground used for the sport, and a representation of the sport. Para Taekwondo’s pictogram features two fighters facing each other on the mat.

“A pictogram is also a symbol that is collectible”, said Paris 2024 President Tony Estanguet at the pictogram launch, “When you’re an athlete, you’re proud about showing off the pictogram of your sport [on] pins, T-shirts ... I remember collecting those things”.

For more, please click [HERE](#).



LA2028



Para Taekwondo is Hollywood-bound after the International Paralympic Committee confirmed its participation at the Paralympic Games in Los Angeles, California in 2028.

Pack your sunglasses and suntan lotion and start looking for flights – because Para Taekwondo is headed to Hollywood!

The IPC named Para Taekwondo as one of 22 Para sports included on the Los Angeles Paralympic Games programme last month, marking the third straight Paralympics in which Para Taekwondo athletes will have the opportunity to participate.

Mickey Mouse will be on hand to meet the USA’s bronze-medal-winning Paralympian **Evan Medell** and scores of other Para Taekwondo stars in 2028.

“The LA28 Paralympic Games will be an incredible moment for elite adaptive sport against the backdrop of one of the most diverse and inclusive cities on the planet”, said LA2028 Chairperson Casey Wasserman.

“All International Federations who submitted applications should be congratulated on the quality of their submissions as they underline that all Para sports are getting stronger”, added IPC President Andrew Parsons.

To read the full announcement, please click [HERE](#).



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Education



Upcoming Courses

- World Para Taekwondo International Classifier Course Level I, Online - March 9-10, 2023
- World Para Taekwondo International Classifier Course Level II, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - March 18-19, 2023

Registrations Open!

Calendar



2023

(Provisional calendar subject to change)

- Qualification Tournament for 2023 Parapan American Games (G1) - March 22 - Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
(International Para Taekwondo Coach Certification Level I required for all coaches)
- 2023 Pan Am Series Para Taekwondo - March 24 - Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
(International Para Taekwondo Coach Certification Level I required for all coaches)
- Virtus Global Games (TBC) - June 9-10 - Vichy, France
(International Para Taekwondo Coach Certification Level III required for all coaches)
- 2023 European Para Taekwondo Open Championships (G2) - June 30 - Montargis, France
(International Para Taekwondo Coach Certification Level III required for all coaches)

For the full, updated 2023 calendar, please click [HERE](#).

Around the World

Refugee:

Ukraine's Refugee Athletes in Spotlight Year After Fleeing

Ukraine's Para Taekwondo team, who has been based in Denmark since shortly after Russia invaded their country in February 2022, were sought-after ambassadors as Denmark marked the one-year anniversary of the invasion. Ukraine's six-time world champion **Vika Marchuk** spoke to Danish students about her life and career and answered their questions about living with an impairment in Ukraine, fleeing the war, and competing on the world stage. DR Sportsmagisinet also profiled the team last month, focussing on how the team has adapted to life in Denmark and featuring interviews and training footage of Ukraine's athletes and Denmark's Paralympic champion **Lisa Gjessing**.



"I am impressed daily by Vika", said Danish national team coach **Bjarne Johanssen** after Marchuk's visit to the Danish school, "I am impressed by her approach to the situation and life in general".

To view the DR Sportsmagasinet profile, please click [HERE](#).

Africa:

Côte d'Ivoire Media Savours First-Ever Medals

Côte d'Ivoire athlete **Michel Boli** made history by winning his country's first-ever international Para Taekwondo gold medal by triumphing at the Egypt Open in February – and national media took note. NCI Television caught up with Boli and teammate **Adama Magassouba**, bronze medalist at the 2022 African championships, at their homes to profile the new stars and followed them to a training session in Yamoussoukro. The interview highlights their childhoods, how they got involved in Para Taekwondo, and what life is like for athletes with impairments in Côte d'Ivoire.



"First Para Taekwondo champion in the whole history of Côte d'Ivoire today. Tomorrow – who knows?", their sponsoring club said on social media. "Persevere in the work [and] you will get there".

To watch the interview, please click [HERE](#).



Asia:

Nepal's Para GP Finals Champ Ghising & Team Make Funding Pitch

Sporting two of the sport's most promising young talents – Para Grand Prix Finals gold medalist **Shrijana Ghising** and Asian Youth Para Games champion **Palesha Goverdhan** – Nepal has big hopes for 2023, including winning its first-ever gold medals at the Asian Para Games. The shoestring-budget team is currently looking for sponsors and has gone on a media blitz in the first months of 2023 in an attempt to secure funding. Last month Kantipur TV HD visited the team's training and

interviewed Ghising and coach **Kabiraj Negi Lama** to amplify the team's message. Later in the month, Ghising and Negi Lama were awarded certificates of appreciation and a small financial reward for their success at the 2022 Para Grand Prix Finals.

For more on the awards, please click [HERE](#). To view the team's profile on Kantipur TV HD, please click [HERE](#).

Europe:

France's Paris 2024 Medal Hopeful Bopha Kong Profiled

Just over one year before he attempts to make Paralympic history by becoming the first Para Taekwondo athlete to win a Paralympic medal at home, France's four-time world champion **Bopha Kong** was featured in a Paralympic profile. Camera crews followed the Para Taekwondo pioneer throughout the day – from spending time with his daughter at daycare, to training with the national team, to living life at home. Kong nearly captured France's first Paralympic medal in Para Taekwondo at Tokyo 2020, before falling in a hard-fought bronze medal match. The segment also features an interview with long-time France head coach **Oury Szantman**.



To watch the profile, please click [HERE](#).



Georgian Successes Set Off Media Victory Tour

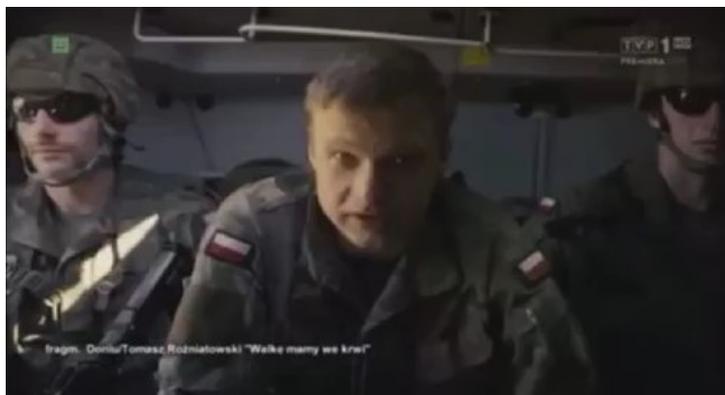
If you win it – they will call. Georgia's national Para Taekwondo team roared out of the gate last month, winning 10 medals at the President's Cup – Europe and Turkish Open events in Turkiye. The team won 10 medals, including four in the Paralympic-eligible K44 events, highlighted by **Sandro Megrelishvili's** gold medal win over Uzbekistan's **Kudraton Haydarov** at the Turkish Open. Teammate **Giorgi Nikoladze** won a hard-fought silver at the President's Cup, while **Lia Chachibaia**

won bronze at both events. Megrelishvili and Nikoladze made an in-person studio visit for at least one visit, while Chachibaia was the focus of coverage from another station.

For the Megrelishvili and Nikoladze clip, please click [HERE](#). For the Chachibaia clip, please click [HERE](#).

Invictus Games Champ Rozniatkowski Stars on Polish National TV

Poland is looking to make big waves in Para Taekwondo this year and dreams of qualifying more than one fighter for Paris 2024. Right now, the team's best chances lie with world No. 7 **Maciej Kesicki** in -70 kg and world No. 11 **Tomasz Rozniatkowski** in +80 kg. The latter was recently featured in one of three episodes of 'Pełnosprawni' on Polish national carrier TVP. Rozniatkowski is an Invictus Games champion in Sitting Volleyball who lost his arm during military service in the Afghan War. When not training, he works for the army by sharing his story with students and other organisations across Poland, including TVP. Other episodes focused on 'What is Para Taekwondo' and 'How to Get Involved'.



To watch the clip on Rozniatkowski, please click [HERE](#).

GeSpain Holds National Championships & Gala Awards

The Spanish Taekwondo Federation held its National Taekwondo and Para Taekwondo Championships in La Nucia last month and capped off the festivities with a Gala Awards ceremony to recognise the best athletes, coaches, and clubs of 2022. More than 700 competitors were on hand for the different events, which saw a record number of Para Taekwondo athletes compete. There was a "passing of the torch" in the -58 kg category, as up-and-coming **Joel Martin** beat Para Taekwondo pioneer **Alejandro Vidal Alvarez** for gold in one of the event's most intriguing matchups. **Luis Castro**, **Gabriel Garagarza**, **Dalia Moreno**, and **Lidia Sanchez** also became national champions, while more than 20 athletes competed in the Para Poomsae events. Moreno, who ended Uzbekistan's Paralympic and world champion **Guljonoy Naimova's** long winning streak to capture last year's Paris Para Grand Prix gold, was named the Top Para Taekwondo Athlete of 2022, while coach Garagarza, who made a comeback this month at the President's Cup – Europe before capturing his national championship gold, was named the Top Para Taekwondo Coach of 2022. The awards



were handed out by Spain's National Olympic Committee President **Alejandro Blanco**, Royal Spanish Taekwondo Federation President **Jesus Castellanos**, and La Nucia Mayor Bernabe Cano.

"It is a pleasure to see first-hand the evolution of Spanish Taekwondo, and Olympic [and Paralympic] sport that continues to grow and achieve more and more successes", said Blanco after the Awards Gala.

For a video of the event, please click [HERE](#).

Pan Am:

Loonstra Wins Aruba's First-Ever Para Sports Gold Medal

Aruba's **Elliot Loonstra** has done what no Para athlete on the island has ever done before – he's won an international gold medal. Until recently, the Paralympic flagbearer was the only Para athlete on the island, until he found a sparring partner and new teammate earlier this year. A veteran of the international circuit, Loonstra won his first-ever international gold medal by beating Egypt's Anas Saleh Taha in the -80 kg final at the Egypt Open. Coach **Luciano Mazzeo** was named the tournament's second-best coach. Already a celebrity on the island, Loonstra was featured by several media, including a TV profile by Aruba's Noticia Impacto.

To watch the full clip, please click [HERE](#).



Brazil Holds Annual Para Taekwondo Draft

For the second straight year, Brazil held a Para Taekwondo draft to identify and assess its top up-and-coming Para Taekwondo athletes. This year, 14 new athletes (11 adult males, 2 junior males, and 1 adult female) attempted to qualify for the Brazilian national team – named the Top MNA in Para Taekwondo last

year. Brazil has already qualified nine athletes for Santiago 2023, including reigning Paralympic champion **Nathan Torquato** and reigning world champion **Silvana Cardoso**, but will be looking to qualify even more when the country hosts the Parapan Am Games Qualification tournament next month. Brazil's newest national team members will also have a chance to compete at the Pan Am Series event held in Rio directly after the qualification tournament.

"If we compare this year's test with that of previous years, the evolution was gigantic", said national team coach Rodrigo Ferla, "Athletes are coming more prepared for the process ... because we develop the [sport] even more and better prepare them for the process".

For more, please click [HERE](#).

Ecuador Looks to Grow Para Taekwondo Ahead of Parapan Am Games

The Ecuador Taekwondo Federation (ETF) is looking to grow Para Taekwondo's profile at home with the Parapan Am Games Qualification tournament around the corner. ETF President **Rodrigo Salazar** brought athletes **Celeste Lema** and **Camilo Centeno**, along with coach **Edgar Varela**, to put on a demonstration on national TV channel Fedepdal last month. The athletes performed on the morning programme 'Enciende Tus Mañanas' ('Ignite Your Mornings') in front of their coach, federation president, and a national audience. Ecuador qualified a single athlete to Lima 2019, with **Jordy Espinoza** falling in the Round of 16, but is still looking to qualify its first athlete in Para Taekwondo for Santiago 2023.

For more, please click [HERE](#).



Mexico Hosts National Selection Tournament

Just weeks before the last-chance Parapan Am Games Qualification tournament, Mexico's Para Taekwondo team held a national team selection tournament at the Xalapa Velodrome in Veracruz to determine the final placements for the qualification event in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. One of the most successful

federations in the sport, Mexico has already qualified athletes like Paralympic champion **Juan Diego Garcia Lopez**, No. 1-ranked **Claudia Romero**, and up-and-coming star **Luis Najera**. Najera's club teammate, **Victor Tadeo**, is one of the athletes still looking to book his ticket to Santiago 2023. At the same time, national team members are regularly being covered by Mexican media, including an exclusive article on Garcia Lopez for Titan Sports and a TV profile of **Daniela Martinez** for La Aficion.

"We are starting the year [by] analysing the rivals with whom we are going to compete", Garcia Lopez told Titan Sports, "But we know that there are always new things to learn and obviously this is to add [to that] to become better every time".

For more information on the selection event, please click [HERE](#). For the article on Garcia Lopez, please click [HERE](#). For the TV profile of Martinez, please click [HERE](#).

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