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Taekwondo: 5 things learned from 2017

11.01.2018

Breakout performances and new moves headline year of change



Amy Truesdale won gold for Great Britain in front of her home crowd at the Para Taekwondo Worlds © World Taekwondo



By Lee Reaney | For the IPC

The countdown to taekwondo's Paralympic debut at Tokyo 2020 continues. So what did we learn about the sport heading into 2018?






1. Continued growth

The 2017 World Championships saw a record-breaking 260 athletes from 59 countries compete, while nearly 100 more competed at the biennial International Wheelchair and Amputee Sports Federation (IWAS) World Games.

Some athletes who made the switch from other sports to give taekwondo a try have excelled, such as France's Alain Akakpo who started in Para athletics. Rwanda's Jean Claude Niringiyimana and Nepal's Ranjana Dhami are among elite athletes from their regions. The sport has also attracted refugee athletes such as Austrian-trained Afghan Hadi Hassanzada.

2. Breakout performances

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The upsurge in talent has led to many new faces emerging at the forefront. Perhaps none as promising as Mongolia's [Enkhtuya Khurelbaatar](#), who capped off a dominant two-year run by claiming her first World Championship title in 2017 and being named the top women's fighter.

A strong performance at the World Championships by Turkey's Meryem Betul Cavdar saw her reach the semi-finals of the women's up to 49kg K44, and later turned into a European champion.

Perhaps the year's biggest breakout star was Great Britain's Amy Truesdale, who won four tournaments – including her first world title at home in London. Ranked No.1 in the women's over 58kg K44 division, she has joined the ranks of elite fighters.

3. Still hard to beat

Denmark's undefeated [Lisa Gjessing](#) is still the star of the women's up to 58kg K44 division, capturing her fourth straight world crown and adding an IWAS Games gold.

Iran's Mehdi Pourrahnamaahmad claimed his fourth straight world crown, was named the tournament's top male fighter, and added Asian and IWAS Games titles. He has lost just once in the past five years.

Ukraine's pair of No.1-ranked fighters – Vika Marchuk (women's up to 49kg K43) and Anton Shvets (men's up to 75kg K43) – continued their successes in 2017. Marchuk captured her fifth world title and added a European crown, while Shvets captured the European and IWAS Games titles in addition to his World Championship silver.

4. New moves expected to excite

Several key rule changes took effect in 2017 with the effort to “dazzle and excite audiences,” as World [Taekwondo](#) President Chungwon Choue said.

The addition of a four-point spin kick allows fighters the chance to gain valuable points for the high-skill technique. This offsets the inability to score points for head kicks and trunk punches which, unlike its Olympic counterpart, are prohibited in [Para taekwondo](#) for safety.

The sport also moved to a new five-minute, one round fight, replacing the previous three two-minute round system. Coaches are given one timeout each, to be used at their discretion, introducing a new tactical element to the sport.

5. Tokyo 2020 medal events to focus on

In a first for the sport, K43 fighters will join the K44 division for six ‘super events’ – three on the women's side and three on the men's. In total, 72 athletes will be fighting to claim the title of the sport's first Paralympic champions.

This could set-up some intriguing ‘super fights,’ like Mongolia's three-time world champion [Bolor-Erdene Ganbat](#) (K44) against France's three-time champion Bopha Kong (K43) in the men's up to 61kg division; and Ukraine's five-time world champion Vika Marchuk (K43) versus Mongolia's reigning K44 world champion [Enkhtuya Khurelbaatar](#) in the women's up to 49kg event.

Both Khurelbaatar and Ganbat lost their first fights in years at December's IWAS World Games, while Kong was upset in the World Championship final by Spain's Alejandro Vidal Alvarez, setting-up a dynamic 2018 for fighters hoping to gain automatic qualification to [taekwondo](#)'s Paralympic debut.

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