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Taekwondo profiles: Men's up to 61kg K44

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A look at top contenders in division ahead of sport's debut at Tokyo 2020



France's Bopha Kong, left, is No. 1 in the men's up to 61kg K43 division © - World Taekwondo Federation



By Lee Reaney | For the IPC

Taekwondo will debut at the Paralympics Games two years from now. Athletes will contend over six medal events, and Paralympic.org will profile each one ahead of Tokyo 2020, beginning with the men's up to 61kg K44. This event is the lightest weight division on the men's side, and will see lightning-quick fights, with some of the sport's fastest and most accurate kickers.

Twelve fighters will qualify for the 2020 **Paralympic Games** in Tokyo: six via world rankings (four from K44, two from K43), five through continental qualification tournaments (Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe and Oceania), and one from the host country or special invitation.

Based on the May world rankings, these are the top athletes to look for:

World rankings route

Mongolia's **Bolor-Erdene Ganbat** owns the K44 division with three world titles and a 122-point rankings lead. France's Bopha Kong, the king of the K43 side, also has

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three world titles and an 85-point rankings lead.

The emergence of talented young fighters like Turkey's Mahmut Bozteke (No. 2 in K44) and Russia's Danilii Sidorov* (No. 3 in K44) have challenged the leaders, with the former pushing Ganbat in last year's World Championships and the latter besting him at the [International Wheelchair and Amputee Sports Federation \(IWAS\) World Games](#) – Ganbat's first-ever loss. Spain's Alejandro Vidal Alvarez (No. 2 in K43) bested Kong at last year's Worlds, denying the French fighter his fourth title.

Continental qualification route

Those who do not qualify through the world rankings route will need to win a continental qualification tournament to be held in early 2020. Countries that qualify four or more fighters in the six divisions will not be able to send athletes to these tournaments. This will be the first time K43 fighters will face their K44 foes.

Rwanda's Jean-Claude Niringiyimana (No. 13 in K44) is the early favourite to come out of Africa, although Morocco's pair of Ayoub Adouich (No. 18 in K44) and Hamid Fakir (No. 15 in K43) might politely disagree.

Costa Rica's Edwin Pizarro (No. 20 in K44) and Guatemala's Gersson Mejia (No. 4 in K43) have some work to do to catch Argentina's Facundo Andres Novik (No. 7 in K44) in the Americas.

South Korea's Kook-Hyun Han (No. 19 in K44) and Kazakhstan's Nyssanbek Aidarbekov (No. 8 in K43) will have their work cut out for them in defeating Iran's Sajjad Javanbakht (No. 11 in K44).

If Bossolo gets in via world rankings, the European qualifiers look to be up for grabs. Watch out for Great Britain's Leif Thobroe (No. 12 in K44), Azerbaijan's Rovshan Gahamanli (No. 14 in K44), and Finland's Matti Sairanen (No. 15 in K44).

Host country route

Japan has up to three positions set aside for host country athletes among the six divisions and must select at least one woman. Japan will likely use the world ranking to choose these fighters.

Chikara Ito (No. 10 in K44) is currently the top athlete aiming to bring Japan home glory in the sport.

Special invitation route

While there are no other qualification spots available if the host country fills one of their quotas, an extra spot might become available if no fighters qualify from one of the continental qualification tournaments.

This will be the only second-chance method to qualify for the 2020 [Paralympic Games](#) if an athlete is unable to qualify from one of the routes mentioned above.

**Editor's note: The International Paralympic Committee suspended the Russian Paralympic Committee on 7 August 2016 for its inability to fulfil its IPC membership responsibilities and obligations, in particular its obligation to comply with the IPC Anti-Doping Code and the World Anti-Doping Code (to which it is also a signatory). As a result of the suspension, Russian athletes cannot enter IPC sanctioned events or competitions, including the [Paralympic Games](#) .*

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