

American Judo Alliance (AJA) Expiry

A Report – Keith Chu

In March USA Judo announced that it was formally withdrawing from the American Judo Alliance Agreement and as a consequence it would not be recognizing the medical and accidental insurance of non-USA Judo participants. This effectively prevented USJF and USJA members from participation in any USA Judo sanctioned event.

How did we get to this point? The following are the facts.

- **Spring 2022:** USJF agreed to inform USA Judo and USJA of their intent to renegotiate the American Judo Alliance Agreement.
- **September 2022:** USA Judo President Mark Hill sent a letter on administrative burdens of the three organizations and a proposal to consider sharing those burdens.
- **October 2022:** USJF discussed above Letter and President Palacio agreed to form a team to review and reach out to USA Judo and create an open dialog regarding its contents. (BTW the minutes for this meeting are not posted on the USJF website)
- **February 2023** email exchange between USJF and new USA Judo President Joe Ragan begin. (see provided document history on Nanka Website). This was one month prior to the expiry of the AJA.
- Also attached are the email perspective provided to me by the USA Judo. This includes emails that were not included in the USJF document.
- **March 2023:** Consequence of receiving these communications from USJF and believing there was no common ground between them the USA Judo decided to formally withdraw from the American Judo Alliance effective of the expiry date.
- **March 15:** USJF publish President Palacio address. In which a membership discount program was introduced along with formal recognition of certain USA Judo credentials.
- **March 22:** USA Judo announce their *Your Choice* option. Allowing non-USA Judo players to participate in USA Judo Sanctioned events as long as they sign a waiver understanding that they will not have any medical and accident insurance.
- **April 15:** USJF held its Spring BOD meeting in Boise Idaho. Nanka was represented by me, Hayward Nishioka and Cheryl Harai. My report for this meeting is available on the Nanka Website.

Three key aspects were presented at this meeting.

1. USJF negotiation team as chosen by President Palacio stated they were in communication with USA Judo to resolve the situation.
2. Larry Tutsui asked for clarification on risks for clubs that have multiple organization memberships and have members which represent a mix of affiliations. David Matsumoto spoke to this issue.
3. USJF presented a letter that they co-developed with USJA that advised USJF members on the risk perspective of agreeing to the USA Judo *Your Choice* option. This letter was supposed to be sent out to the Yudanshakai immediately following the meeting, As of the date of this report, this letter has still to be distributed and received.

That's where we are currently.

I now would like to share my perspectives. These are my opinions and not representative of the organization.

1. I believe the primary motivation for USA Judo in their September 2022 letter was their need to support the USOC mandate to provide better protection and assurances of all participants in support against forms of abuse. Safesport is a key element in this and it was USA Judo's goal to provide a seamless system that would be shared between the organizations to ensure complete compliance as required by the USOC. Failure to manage this would be to the detriment of their funding. Was this badly explained? Yes it was.
2. The USJF Negotiation team approached the discussions far too rigidly. Leaving the USA Judo with the perspective that there was no room to negotiate with USJF. USA Judo requested for a meeting to discuss the situation further during the Boise meeting, but were turned down by the USJF. The email threads as captured by both USJF and USA Judo are on our website and key differences between them do exist. The USJF thread is no longer available on the USJF web site. In the USA Judo email set I noticed that USJF is no longer a 'A' level Organization member of the USA Judo.
3. Regarding the issue of mixed member affiliation, David Matsumoto (USJF lead negotiator) indicated that dojo/clubs with both USJF and USA Judo membership, should not allow a member to practice together if their own memberships are different. I.e., USJF cannot work out with a USA Judo member. This can only happen if both members have the same or dual membership. This is a considerable risk to Dojos/Clubs.

I also asked USA Judo President about this and what is the perspective from their side. Keith Bryant's response was for as long as he has been at USA Judo and for many years before that, this arrangement has been happening in dojos all across the United States. The only thing that changed was the [existence] of the Alliance agreement. Further Keith seemed to imply that the conditions of current club general and participant accident insurance still apply.

In my opinion only, I confess to some skepticism on the USJF statement as I have never seen that policy written down anywhere. Although I confess to being not sure how it could be tested.

4. During the Boise meeting the USJF BOD approved a joint USJF/USJA letter describing USJF's concerns in regard USA Judo allowing participation by USJF and USJA members as long as they sign a waiver acknowledging their medical and accidental insurance will not be valid. USJA published their version a couple of days later (a copy is available on our website). We have still to receive the version from the USJF.

With respect to both items 3 and 4 above a letter from Nanka via our legal counsel was sent to USJF President asking for clarity on the official position of the items (Letter is available on our website)

Nanka Leadership has worked hard to provide workarounds to the situation to ensure that we are able to do business as usual and to deliver on the mission and goals of the organization.

The current circumstances has rocked the judo community and it is obvious that Nanka BOD needs to consider the options open to us to resolve the situation in our best interests. Within our organization, there are people with opposing viewpoints and opinions. So it is Leadership role to provide the BOD a full account of the situation in a un-biased manner and provide the information necessary for the BOD to make its determination as to what is best for the organization. This diligence is ongoing and will take time and effort. The goal is to discuss the options and their supporting information at the August Annual General Meeting to the BOD. The available choices and information will be provided at least one month prior to the AGM. This will provide time for the BOD to review and consider the options and even influence them. It is important to recognize that it will be the Nanka Board of Directors that will make any decisions. The AGM will be an in-person meeting and shall conform to our by-laws.

Per his request, I am happy to host Mitchell at our upcoming BOD meeting and give him a platform to present the USJF perspective and what has been transpiring, while being given opportunity to take Q&A directly from our members.