

Every Problem Has a Solution

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Athlete Article



During her 40-year career in the sport of karate Norma Foster has had a number of victories in the field of competition as well as in breaking through barriers in judging and refereeing for the sport. Foster took up karate in her native Scotland when she was just seven years old. She had been a competitive swimmer until she was told she wasn't good enough for that sport.

It was the "nice looking boys" in karate that first drew her to the sport. And right from the beginning, she had her work cut out for her. As the only female in her class in a male-dominated sport, she had to prove herself in order to get the instructor to notice and acknowledge her.

It was her talent and determination to succeed that allowed her to earn her black belt in karate, becoming the first woman to do so in Aberdeen, Scotland. Today, after living and competing in Canada, Japan and Scotland, she holds a seventh degree black belt in Wado-kai, which is a specific style of Okinawan karate. Foster has always been an advocate for equal rights in her sport. There was a lot of resistance in the early 1980s in Canada to the formation of women's team divisions of karate and to getting qualified referees for women's matches. With Foster's help, women's team events were established in 1983 for the first time, just the same as men.

Foster spent much of her career working to give women the opportunity to judge internationally for both female and male events. Her work paid off, as she was the first woman to be recognized with judging status by the World Karate Federation (WKF), the international governing body for the sport. She was the first woman in the world to become certified as an international referee. Her instructors throughout her career influenced Foster.

In particular, her Japanese instructor Hideho Takagi helped bring out her full potential as an athlete. He taught her that any obstacle is possible to overcome, as long as you want to do it. It was this valuable lesson that Foster used as she worked to change the sport of karate for women.