

Award committee grants direct financial support to four women representing Team USA at Tokyo Olympics & Paralympic Games

FOUR AMERICAN FEMALE ATHLETES AWARDED THE RUSTY KANOKOGI FUND FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF U.S. JUDO IN 2021 AFTER A YEARLONG PAUSE DUE TO THE 2020 COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Recipients

Angelica Delgado, Nina Cutro-Kelly and Nefeli Papadakis make up the Tokyo 2021 US Olympic Team, and Maria

Liana Mutia will represent the US on the Tokyo 2021 US Paralympic Team. All four women will receive a direct financial grant from the [Rusty Kanokogi](#) Fund to help financially support them to pursue their Olympic dreams in the 2021 Games this summer.



Rusty Kanokogi Fund for the Advancement of U.S. Judo 2021 award winners.

“

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Jean Kanokogi, PhD

The [Rusty Kanokogi Fund for the Advancement of U.S. Judo](#) grant was established in 2009 by the Richard and Pamela Ader Foundation and friends of Rusty, to honor and continue the legacy of the late Rena “Rusty” Kanokogi, known around the world as “the mother of women’s judo” for her immense contribution to the sport and her undeniable hand in bringing women’s judo to the Olympic stage for the very first time at the 1988 Seoul Olympics.

The fund, administered by the Women’s Sports Foundation (#TeamWSF), typically awards direct financial assistance to aspiring judo athletes currently in training for national and international competition with, amongst other things, a demonstrated financial need. Typically, the fund selection committee awards one grant of up to \$5,000 per calendar year—and a maximum of three in an athlete’s lifetime.

This year, however, after being unable to administer an award to an up-and-coming female judoka in 2020 due to the global coronavirus pandemic and the postponement of the 2020

Tokyo Olympic Games, the selection committee has decided to offer four grants of \$2,500 each, providing direct financial assistance to all four women on the USA Judo Olympic and Paralympic teams.

“These Olympic Games are historic for many reasons,” says Jean Kanokogi, PhD, daughter of the award’s namesake, Rusty Kanokogi, and member of the award selection committee. “Judo is returning to its homeland, and for the very first time men and women will be competing in a mixed event together. The sport has come so far, and yet our female athletes are still struggling to gain the financial backing for travel and training that they need to represent their country on the international stage.”

Jean asserted, “Rusty believed these athletes trained their guts out for the chance to represent the United States, so having the opportunity to help them is an honor”.

According to Kanokogi, the award committee was floored when heavyweight Nina Cutro-Kelly (Albany, N.Y./Selma, Texas/Universal Judo/Universite de Pennes - Pennes, France/over 78kg female) qualified for the Games last week and turned to crowdfunding to raise money she needed to offset her competition travel and training expenses so she can focus on Tokyo.

Cutro-Kelly, at the age of 36, will be the oldest American Judo Olympian in sports 57-year Olympic history. She’s juggled three jobs, working upwards of 70 hours a week, while training full-time to make it to the Olympics. In the first seven days her GoFundMe campaign, managed by former Team USA Teammate Carrie Chandler, has raised just shy of half of its \$10,000 goal to help support Cutro-Kelly as she heads to the Tokyo 2021 Games.



Rusty demonstrating a throw to a roomful of students.



Jean Kanokogi, PhD, daughter of Rusty Kanokogi and co-author of her memoir, *Get Up & Fight*.

Cutro-Kelly and 22-year-old Nefeli Papdakis were awarded spots on the Olympic team in the sport's reallocation process, joining the previously qualified 2016 Olympians Angelica Delgado, 52kg, and Colton Brown, 90kg. Maria Liana Mutia, 57 Kg, will represent Team USA in Paralympic Judo.

"Our athletes need financial support," Kanokogi says. "Other countries support their Olympians with training, travel—all expenses paid. These women need money. Rusty continuously raised money for the underfunded women athletes and now we have an opportunity to help give additional support. This is only possible through the generosity of the Richard and Pamela Ader Foundation and friends of Rusty—that Rusty's legacy of support of equality in judo that my mother dedicated her life to—breaking the glass ceiling for women in sports and life in America and around the world.

Rusty spent her fifty-year career devoted to the advancement and equality of women in judo. She rose to the level of seventh-degree black belt in her lifetime, making her the highest-ranking American woman in the sport. Her memoir, [Get Up & Fight](#), which she co-wrote with her daughter, Jean Kanokogi, PhD prior to her death in 2009, was published on June 1, 2021 and is currently available in hardcover and ebook formats from retailers worldwide.

Get Up & Fight: The Memoir of Rena "Rusty" Kanokogi, The Mother of Women's Judo

In 1959 Rusty's well-earned first place medal was ripped away from her because she was a woman. She fought in a judo championship against a man and won, but when the judges discovered her gender, they stripped her of her title. Women were not allowed. From that point on, Rusty had a new goal: to ensure that no woman would ever suffer such an indignity ever again! This vow sparked a fifty-year career fighting for equality—a tireless battle she would take all the way to the Olympics.

In her uniquely raw, unfiltered, humorous voice, Rusty recounts the tales of her remarkable life and journey from the rough streets of Coney Island, Brooklyn, to the offices of the political, powerful and persuasive, where she established herself as a major force in the world of women's rights and the sport of judo, securing women's inclusion on the international stage. Rusty's memoir is a love story filled with passion and righteousness—for her sport, her family, and her way of life as a judoka.

Often called a pioneer, Rusty was an unsung hero in the fight to give women voice and agency, in life and in sports. She did not see human limitations, only possibilities. The establishment told her "no," but "no" was not a part of her vocabulary. Instead, Rusty fought like hell, and won.

In her own words, Rusty decided to "be the hammer," not the nail.

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