



**TAS / CAS**  
TRIBUNAL ARBITRAL DU SPORT  
COURT OF ARBITRATION FOR SPORT  
TRIBUNAL ARBITRAL DEL DEPORTE

## MEDIA RELEASE

### TAEKWONDO

#### THE COURT OF ARBITRATION FOR SPORT (CAS) ISSUES ITS DECISION IN THE APPEAL FILED BY FORMER TAEKWONDO ATHLETE STEVEN LOPEZ AND COACH JEAN LOPEZ (USA)

Lausanne, 7 December 2022 - The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) has issued its decision in the arbitration proceedings between the former US taekwondo athlete Steven Lopez, the US taekwondo coach Jean Lopez, and World Taekwondo (WT).

The CAS Panel upheld the appeal filed by brothers Steven Lopez and Jean Lopez and all suspensions issued against them (temporary or otherwise) are lifted with immediate effect. Furthermore, the WT Global Membership System Licenses (GMS License) of Steven Lopez and Jean Lopez are reinstated with immediate effect.

Steven Lopez and Jean Lopez were provisionally suspended and their GMS Licenses were revoked during an investigation by the United States Center for SafeSport (SafeSport) which concluded with a ruling that they had violated the SafeSport Code for the US Olympic and Paralympic Movement (sexual harassment) and sanctioned them with permanent ineligibility.

In December 2018, respectively January 2019, that finding was overturned on appeal and the sanctions imposed on Steven and Jean Lopez by SafeSport were vacated. However, WT determined that it was appropriate to maintain their preliminary suspensions and to proceed with disciplinary actions against both of them. Steven and Jean Lopez challenged these provisional suspensions but WT did not entertain their appeals.

In June 2022, Steven Lopez and Jean Lopez (the appellants) filed a statement of appeal at the CAS against their provisional suspensions seeking a ruling that all suspensions issued against them be immediately lifted, and that their GMS licenses be reinstated with immediate effect. The CAS arbitration procedure was referred to a panel of arbitrators who, following an exchange of written submissions, held a hearing on 10 and 11 October 2022.

The CAS Panel heard evidence and legal submissions related to sexual harassment allegations involving the appellants between 1997 and 2013. However, in application of the fundamental legal principle that one cannot be punished for doing something that is not prohibited by law (*nulla poena sine lege*), and in the absence of any relevant applicable disciplinary or ethics rules implemented or published by WT at the time of the alleged violations, the CAS Panel was not in a position to sanction the appellants, even if the Panel was to assume that they had committed an infraction.

Indeed, the Panel observed that WT charged the appellants based on its 2011 Code of Ethics, which entered into force on 15 September 2011, but that all relevant incidents for which the appellants were charged allegedly occurred before 15 September 2011 and were therefore not sanctionable on the basis of the 2011 Code of Ethics.

At the hearing, WT submitted for the first time that a Code of Ethics had been implemented in 2008, a submission that the Panel considered to be inadmissibly, and impermissibly, late. In any event, the Panel found that WT failed to provide convincing evidence that the 2008 Code of Ethics was either published or made available to the appellants. As a consequence, the CAS Panel decided to uphold the appeal.