

Piontek improve his ranking with 5 positions after Worlds

After winning one fight during last week's World Championships in Astana, Kazakhstan, South Africa's Commonwealth judo champion, Zack Piontek, is a little bit closer to qualifying for the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio.

In his first encounter Piontek managed to beat his friend from Sweden, Joakim Dvarby (19th in the world), but in the second round he was beaten by Japan's Mashu Baker (3rd in the world). The Japanese went on to win the bronze medal in the under-90kg. Korea's Han Don Gwak won gold by beating Russia's Kirill Denisov in the final.

The South African gained 72 valuable points for his performance at the World Championships. This means that he has improved his international ranking in the under-90kg category with five positions. On the International Judo Federation's latest rankings that came out on Tuesday he is ranked 28th. To be able to qualify for the Games Piontek needs to be among the top 22 judokas in his weight category.

The Tuks/HPC judoka is quite upbeat about his performance at the World Championships.

"I had a good fight against Joakim. Beating him at the World Championships is definitely a confidence booster, especially considering that he is ranked nine positions higher than I am. But I am actually more excited about the way I was able to hold my own against Baker. In the first three minutes of the fight I was able to give as good as I got from him. Unfortunately my concentration then slipped for a brief moment. Baker made the most of it by throwing me for an ippon to win the fight."

An ippon is awarded for a technique which is judged as decisive. This is usually a move which connects cleanly, with good form and with little opportunity for the opponent to defend against it.

Piontek said the most important lesson he had learned from his participation at the World Championships is that the rest of the world's judokas are not really better than South Africa's best.

"The great advantage of the international judokas is that they have much more opportunities to compete internationally. This enables them to gain valuable experience which stands them to good stead when they compete in the bigger tournaments. I am now even more motivated than before to compete in more international tournaments. If everything goes according to plan I will compete in three more international tournaments before the end of the year," the Tuks/HPC judoka said.

Piontek's immediate goal is to win a gold medal at the African Games in Brazzaville. This will be followed by the biggest challenge of his life so far when he gets married on 2 October.