

= Wojdan Shahekani =

Wojdan Ali Seraj Abdulrahim Shahrkhani (or " Shahekani ") (Arabic : ????? ???? ???? ?????) (born 1 February 1996 in Mecca) is a Saudi judo competitor who was one of two women selected to represent the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at the 2012 Summer Olympics . Her inclusion in the games came after the International Olympic Committee put pressure on the Saudi Arabian Olympic Committee to include women on their team . The Saudi Arabian Olympic Committee imposed special rules on Shahekani related to how to behave while representing Saudi Arabia at the 2012 Games . At the time of the competition , she had only attained a blue belt , having practised judo for just two years .

= = Career = =

Wojdan Shahekani studied judo , a sport connected to her family , as her father is a judo referee . By 2012 , she had attained a blue belt . Her first competition was in 2012 , the 2012 London Olympics .

= = = 2012 Summer Olympics = = =

Shahrkhani was one of two Saudi Arabian women selected to compete in the 2012 Summer Olympics held in London , United Kingdom . She competed in judo in the above 78kg event . The other Saudi woman selected was Pepperdine University @-@ based runner Sarah Attar .

Shahrkhani was invited to compete by specific invitation of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) as she was not eligible based on international and regional ranking criteria . The top 14 women in each weight class based on international rankings automatically qualified , while 8 women across all classes from Asia qualified based on the continental rankings , with 20 total additional spots available through special invitation of the IOC , ANOC and the IJF . Unlike most Olympic competitors , she did not win her spot through a national competition because Saudi Arabia strongly discourages women from participating in sport , and thus no such competitions for women exist in the country . Other judoka in the competition had attained black belts in the sport ; Shahekani only had a blue belt .

There was opposition within Saudi Arabia to the concept of women representing the country at the Olympics . Ultimately the Saudi government gave in to international pressure from sport and women 's rights activists to include women or face possible sanctions . The IOC president Jacques Rogge said of Shahrkhani 's and Attar 's inclusion , " The I.O.C. has been working very closely with the Saudi Arabian Olympic Committee and I am pleased to see that our continued dialogue has come to fruition . "

The Saudi Arabian Olympic Committee chose not to promote Shahrkhani 's participation . They also required that she " dress modestly , be accompanied by a male guardian and not mix with men " while in London for the 2012 Games . Additionally , her competition clothing had to comply with Sharia law . On 30 July 2012 , Shahrkhani said that she would withdraw from the event if she was not permitted to wear her hijab during bouts . Her father (who often speaks for her , partially because she does not know English) clarified that he wanted his daughter to compete , and that they wanted to make " new history for Saudi 's women " , but that she would not participate without a hijab . The next day the IOC and the International Judo Federation announced that agreement had been reached on a hijab that she could wear . The design agreed upon was a tight @-@ fitting , cap @-@ style covering , rather than the more common headscarf which drapes around the neck and under the chin . Despite this , she was still labeled a prostitute by religious clerics inside in the country .

Her first match was in the Round of 32 , which was an elimination round , on 3 August , the seventh day of competition at the Olympics . Wearing white , she lost to Puerto Rican Melissa Mojica in 82 seconds , lasting longer than the shortest match in her weight class , which lasted 48 seconds where Mika Sugimoto of Japan beat Maria Suelen Altheman of Brazil . The match was refereed by

Wiliam Rosquet , and judged by Young Chun Jeon and Cathy Mouette . There were no penalties awarded in the match . After the match , she said to the press (in Arabic) : " I am happy to be at the Olympics . Unfortunately , we did not win a medal , but in the future we will and I will be a star for women 's participation . " She also stated that , because she was not accustomed to fighting in such large tournaments and because of the debate over the hijab , it had been difficult for her to focus on the competition . Despite this , she clarified that she was happy to have participated and planned to continue to practise judo in the future . Although her fight was not televised live on any local Saudi television channels , it was available within the Kingdom on several satellite networks broadcasting from other parts of the Arab world .