

# ***THE PROBLEM OF WRESTLING “STYLES” IN THE MODERN OLYMPIC GAMES - A FAILURE OF OLYMPIC PHILOSOPHY***

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## **I. Introduction**

When the Modern Olympic Games were revived in 1896, wrestling was included in the program as a foregone conclusion, largely because hand-to-hand fighting sports had been an important part of the Ancient Hellenic Games. Coubertin himself was either non-committal or else was not entirely enthusiastic about including wrestling or any of the modern hand-to-hand fighting sports. The Athens organizers, however, arranged their program with intent to have the wrestling contest as a sort of *grande finale*, because it was well-known that this was what had been done with the schedule of events at Olympia 1,500 years earlier.

Part of the wrestling “styles” dilemma which the 1896 organizers had to confront was the prior existence of a well-established series of world championships, both in wrestling (using French Rules) and in boxing (using British rules) as strongman contests linked to allied activities in weightlifting and gymnastics. These events had existed for decades in Europe prior to Coubertin’s call for a Congress in 1893. The Baron was fully aware of these, and he did allude to what he called “l’esprit mercantile” of earlier championships as being one of the negative aspects of the situation when he was writing his report on the concept of the successful revival of the Games. A secondary part of the problem for wrestling was that the basic French Rules for the World Wrestling Championships had not been fully accepted in either the United Kingdom or in the United States as of 1893, two nations which formed an important part of the Olympic revival effort. [Coubertin, 1896].

Coubertin was steadfast against monetary compensation for athletes because as he put it: “dans le desir de vaincre il entrait souvent tout autre chose que l’ambition et le sentiment de l’honneur.” Today, however, we find that it is something much more mercenary than “ambition” or a “sense of honor” which is in reality the primary driving force in all of our most successful large-scale athletic programs around the world. One consequence of his puristic attitudes about compensated athletes was the creation of an image in 1893 that caused the world’s best wrestlers to ignore the 1896 Athens Games. Only five men entered, despite the fact that there were hundreds of exceptional European amateur wrestling competitors then active.

In 1900, the Paris Games organizers didn’t even bother to place wrestling matches on the program, thereby tacitly acknowledging the well-established World Championships taking place nearby in the same era. Yet despite Coubertin’s ambivalent attitudes, the Games of 1904 and 1908 firmly embedded wrestling along with boxing as sports to be permanently included in the Olympic revival. These two hand-to-hand sports have been scheduled in all Modern Olympic Games from 1920 onward.

## **II. Contrast with the Ancient Olympics**

Apart from the adoption of Coubertin’s emotional ideas about “amateurism,” our modern Olympic hand-to-hand fighting contests differ, philosophically, from those of the Ancient Hellenic Games in three significant ways:

(a) Larger, stronger men most often have a big advantage in hand-to-hand sports (a fact ignored in ancient times), which has been over-corrected in our modern contests by devising an excessive number of weight classifications. Some of the weight classes vary by only a few kilograms between them, which is ridiculous. In the ancient games there were six championships for all hand-to-hand sports without any weight classes; three for men and three for boys. At present in the Modern Games, 46 gold medals are being given for hand-to-hand fighting sports, and an expansion is being planned. This constitutes an irrationally high percentage of individual champions, considering there are currently only about 270 total events for all sports.

(b) In hand-to-hand fighting sports, unlike most other individual sports, the two competitors have the power to maim each other. Use of this power was recognized and permitted, by ancient standards. Our modern attempts to create controls or limit violence with our lists of humane rules are largely failures. As a result, virtually every one of the Modern Olympic Games has been the scene of one (or more) acrimonious rules disputes during the hand-to-hand fighting sports.

(c) Because there were no clocks in ancient times, there were no time limits. Despite an old saying "*he who is thrown would ever wrestle*" it is generally true that a beaten fighter in a contest with no time limit is often the first to declare his defeat. By imposing strict time limits in order to multiply the number of possible contests, we have mandated a need for arbitrary judging systems to select a winner. This is a very unsatisfactory remedy because it takes the decision away from the athletes themselves. Today's contests are so brief that the endurance factor, formerly an important element of hand-to-hand fighting, has disappeared entirely.

### III. Origin

The hand-to-hand fighting sports are the oldest of all sports. There is abundant and definite archaeological evidence displaying these sports in remote antiquity. Logically, the weaponless hand-to-hand styles would seem to be older than their near cousin, stick-fighting, but this cannot be proven. One verification of the antiquity of this kind of sport is the universal distribution of very sophisticated forms among primitive cultures all over the world at the beginning of recorded history. Another proof is the similarity of styles found in widely separated cultures with no known contact in recorded history. Wrestling traditions exist within cultures in which primitive weapons are unknown.

The oldest known artistic representation of what can be clearly and obviously identified as a recreational athletic sport is the bas relief in Egypt at the Tomb Of The Vizier Ptah-hotep, dated as 5th Dynasty (*ca* 2,300 BC), which displays six pairs of boys wrestling together. Five of the six wrestling holds displayed in the Egyptian carvings are easily recognizable because they are still used by modern wrestlers today, all over the world, more than 4,000 years later! No other modern sport shows such clear and graphic evidence of advanced sophistication in antiquity. The implication is that the sport was brought to final refinement in remote prehistoric times.

The oldest known artistic representation of what can be clearly and obviously identified as a spectator sport is the Pharaoh Tournament Frieze at Medinet Habu in Egypt, dated as the 20th Dynasty (*ca* 1,200 BC). Ten pairs of male contestants are carved there, half of them are wrestling and half are stick-fighting with canes, all viewed by a royal audience. Photographs of wrestling action at the Modern Olympic Games can be matched exactly against the wrestling figures displayed in the 3,000 year-old carvings at Medinet Habu. No other modern sport has such evidence. [Wilsdorf, 1939]

#### IV. Classifying the Hand-to-Hand Fighting Sports

Everywhere around the world, all the traditional and synthetic hand-to-hand fighting sports can be grouped into three very broad categories as follows:

(a) Those that restrict the attacks to striking, punching, kicking, etc. with the hands, feet, elbows, knees, etc. usually without coming to grips. Modern examples: Queensbury boxing, Thai boxing, Olympic boxing, karate, savate, taekwondo.

(b) Those that restrict the attacks to gripping or twisting the opponent's limbs, joint pressure points, and/or lifting and throwing the opponent's body, etc. usually without hitting blows. Modern examples: sumo, judo, sombo, schwingen, Olympic wrestling, USA collegiate wrestling.

(c) Violent unrestricted sports placing few (if any) constraints on the form of attacks, including grips, locks, throws, punches, kicks, and forcing against joints or pressure points. Modern examples: London prize-fighting, "Kung-Fu," kempo.

#### V. Hand-to-Hand Contests of the Ancient Hellenic Games

The Ancient Games included championships in all three categories of fighting. Also, the three fighting sports apparently were considered the premier events at the four "crown festivals" (Nemea, Delphi [Pythian], Olympia and Corinth [Isthmian]). Most of the Hellenic Games celebrated in other cities seem to have followed the same agenda as the crown festivals. Many modern authors have called these the "heavy events" because they appealed to larger, stronger men. Surviving written accounts describing those ancient fighting contests all make it clear that they seemed to have been grouped together as the final and most popular part of the program at the conclusion of the "crown festivals." All three contests were conducted on the same day, in sequence.

Despite the popularity of the contests, very little factual information about these sports has come down to us. We do know that competitors in the fighting sports protected their exposed skin by coating themselves with a mixture of olive oil and a special dusty powder. Afterward, that coating was scraped off with a special sickle-shaped tool. In all three events, a referee, armed with a stick, was placed in control of the fight, which was conducted outdoors, in any kind of weather, in an area of dug-up earth. He had the power and duty to enforce penalties for rules infractions by beating the offender with his stick.

In all three fights, victory by forfeit was common. Apparently forfeits were an acceptable result for competitors and spectators alike. In a few cases, athletes showed their strength and skill by competing in more than one of the events. At Olympia, a special section of the sports complex was reserved for the display of statues of famous athletes erected by admirers. A catalog of the statues has survived, revealing that the majority were representative of hand-to-hand fighters, which apparently certifies the great popularity.

Most popular with spectators was the unrestricted fight. The names of this sport, *pankration*, is almost perfectly translated by the English phrase *no holds barred*. The historian Thucydides, (writing without benefit of a calendar) dated his political events by naming the *pankration* victor at Olympia, apparently because this fight was so easily recognized as the grand finale of the Ancient Games. Some modern wrestlers improperly refer to the unrestricted fight as a "combination of boxing and wrestling" an inaccurate analogy that completely misses the point of this violent contest; *pankration* also involved kicking with knees and feet, strangling, and other mayhem. We have no real modern comparisons. Athletes could be killed in *pankration*; several deaths are recorded. The referee watched until one contestant signaled a willingness to yield, at which time he stopped the fight with blows of his

stick.

The boxing-like contest in the Ancient Games was restricted to directed punches delivered by the fingers, palms and fists of the assailants. Hands were wrapped with coverings over the knuckles and palms. Facial lacerations seem to have been very common in this sport. Blows by the knees and feet were not allowed. All available evidence implies great similarity of the sport to modern Olympic Boxing except that the contest was not interrupted into “rounds.” Also, in this fight (as with *pankration*) the loser had to actually admit defeat by giving a specified signal to the referee. The ancient sport is always called “*boxing*” by modern writers.

The gripping-and-twisting fight is usually called “*wrestling*” by modern writers. Not only was this one of the three premier events by itself, but it doubled also as the final event of the pentathlon. Unlike *the* other two heavy events, *pali* winners were not required to cause their opponents to concede. The referee, with his stick, signaled the end of this contest when one of the combatants had been forced into a specified position on the ground. There are no surviving descriptions of that exact position, but it seems to have been a supine posture. Some evidence implies the required position had to be attained three times by the victor. Many kinds of attacks were prohibited in *pali* fights. [Robinson, 1955]

It is my personal belief that *pali* of the Ancient Games was nearly identical to modern oil wrestling seen today at places such as the Kirkpinar Festival in Turkey. I further believe that the *pali* was assimilated directly from Hellenic culture into Turkish culture as part of the “janizery” mobilization of the 14th century. If so, it represents a portion of the Ancient Games, perhaps the only portion, which has survived until modern times. Evidence of this infusion of Hellenization also can be seen in many specific words in modern languages, (all of them meaning *wrestler*) such as: *pelevan* (Turkish), *palewani* (Persian) and *pulwan* (Hindi).

## VI. The Different “Styles” of Wrestling

In the English language, almost all gripping-and-twisting sports like *pali* are called *wrestling*, (a very old root word meaning “twisting”) to which a modifying adjective is added as a way of distinguishing differing styles, e.g., “Mongolian wrestling.” The Romance Languages utilize the Latin *lucta* (= *pali*) in various spellings, e.g., *lutte* in French, *lucha* in Spanish, etc. Numerous folkloric styles of wrestling have survived until modern times all over the world. The exact number of all these ethnic styles never has been catalogued. There seem to be hundreds of variants. All of the existing styles can be assigned to one of three broad groupings:

**(a) Catch Hold Styles.** These require the fighters to seize each other with a prescribed grip at the beginning, known as the “catch hold.” Often the wrestlers must maintain the same grip or position throughout the contest. The best example is the *Cumbrian style of the UK*, also called *North Country style* or *Cumberland & Westmoreland style*, where a basic hug is used. The similar *Collar & Elbow style* was once very popular in the USA. These are the simplest styles because the total number of maneuvers that come into action is limited by the specified starting grip. There is no Catch Hold example in the Modern Olympics.

**(b) Belt/Jacket Styles.** Many styles make use of special jackets or belts (or both) to provide additional gripping points which adds much variety to the action. The Belt/Jacket styles are widespread and the costume is varied. Sometimes the Catch Hold starting concept is applied, requiring specific grips on the costume. In the simplest format, only one added grip is involved; *Korean Ssirem style*, for example, uses a single narrow sash around one thigh.

The *Icelandic Glima style* requires a special leather harness around waist and both thighs (this was a demonstration sport at the 1912 Stockholm Olympics). The noteworthy example of the Modern Olympics is *Japanese judo style* which involves a thigh-length belted jacket.

(c) **Loose Styles.** Wrestling sports that allow fighters to seize almost any grip they can find, are known as *Loose* or *Free styles* (also called *Catch-As-Catch-Can styles* because you may catch hold anywhere you can). At this time there are two examples in the Modern Olympics: *International Freestyle* where almost any holds are allowed except choking and forcing against joints, and *International Greco-Roman style* which is essentially identical to *International Freestyle* except that any holds below the waist are forbidden in addition to the other prohibited grips and attacks.

## VII. Some Efforts to Create a Universal Wrestling “Style”

Obviously, any popular sport with newly-invented rules can be spread quickly all over the world which is exactly what has happened in the case of volleyball and basketball. Conversely, any older sport with hundreds of variants, all deeply rooted in ethnic cultures, creates total chaos in rulesmaking at the international level, which is what has happened in the case of wrestling. Nevertheless, there have been several noteworthy attempts during the last three centuries to devise uniform international wrestling rules, many of which have obtained limited success. Those that antedate Coubertin’s 1894 effort to revive the Olympics, particularly the French Classic Rules devised in the 1840’s, are in part responsible for the assimilation of three different styles in the Modern Olympics (with a fourth style proposed from time to time). The most important attempts to devise a universal style prior to 1893 were:

**Tokyo, Japan - 1684:** Ikazuke Gondaiyu listed 48 acceptable grips, plus a defined ring area, which led to identification of a single Japanese national champion (Akashi Shiganosuke) in a style of Belt/Jacket wrestling which was evolved into the highly popular ritualistic professional sport called *Sumo*. Expansion of this easily-understood style is probably stifled by the bodyweight fad. The gigantic competitors are rigidly restricted by the rules requiring specific dress and mannerism. [Cuyler, 1979]

**Central Switzerland - 1700’s:** Traditional Belt/Jacket styles were merged into a single style - *Schwingen* - leading to the naming of a best performer, known as the “king.” First to be named “king” was probably Johann Vogel of Entlebuch in the 1700’s. Beginning with the 1805 festival at Unspunnen, the “king” (Johannes Stahli) was recognized as a sort of Swiss national champion. Official Rules for *Schwingen* were codified by 1895. Like the Japanese version, this style has not gained much international appeal, perhaps because it is an outdoor event. Enthusiasts are divided into two groups, those from cities and those from farms, identified by the different styles of costume. [Weibel, 1930]

**Berlin, Germany - 1811:** Friedrich L. Jahn opened the first *Turnverein society* where standardized exercises, included many wrestling holds, were taught to youths as a form of physical training discipline. The *turner* movement became international during the following century, evolving into the sport that is now called *gymnastics*. The *Czech Sokols* are a notable example. In the process of internationalization, the discipline known as *Swedish gymnastics* has been adopted into the *turner*-apparatus exercises, but the wrestling segment has been discarded in the process. The first wrestling champion of the Modern Olympics Games, Carl Schuhmann of Germany, was a *turner* athlete of relatively small stature who also won a gymnastics gold medal. [Diem, 1967]

**Southern France - 1840's:** Led by Jean Broyasse, nicknamed "Exbroyat," a very early attempt was made to codify a Catch Hold style directly imitating the Ancient Greek & Roman Games. Rules were published, creating a synthetic form which at first was called *French Classical Style wrestling*. The style is now called *Greco-Roman wrestling*. This sport became extremely popular on a professional basis throughout Europe from 1860 to 1890. Evangelized by Francophiles, it was adopted in the UK and USA. Liberalization of the rules led to profiteering, which was anathema to reactionary purists such as Coubertin. The professional success of this style, involving large numbers of amateurs plus a system of World Championships, specifically that held at Paris in 1889, was a main factor stimulating revival of the Modern Olympics on a "purified" amateur basis in 1893. [Desbonnet, 1910]

**New York City, USA - 1876:** A group of amateur athletic clubs formed a national association, intending to codify and publish the rules for all forms of all sports. Their effort was partly in response to similar movements among amateur oarsmen, college footballers, and other groups. The *National Association of Amateur Athletes of America (NAAAA)* created the "official amateur rules" for several styles of wrestling. The most popular styles were *Greco-Roman* and a loose style known as *Catch-as-Catch-Can*. The latter had already become a professional sport in the USA and UK; thus, the rules were imitative of those being used professionally at the time. In 1888, a splinter group broke away from the NAAAA, forming *the Amateur Athletic Union*. The AAU, in turn, created a nucleus of support for *Catch-as-Catch-Can* wrestling specifically, which was, in turn, adopted as a sport by the colleges and universities, (afterward by high schools) leading to the creation of a modification known as *American Collegiate Style, or Folk-style*. In 1904, the USA national championships in this style were designated as 1904 Olympic wrestling events. The sport did not gain much popularity outside of North America until after World War II when the government of the Soviet Union realized that traditional Russian freestyles could be adapted to it. [Sapora, 1940]

**Tokyo, Japan - 1882:** A gifted educator, Jigoro Kano, noted the decline of highly specialized schools of *yawara* style belt/jacket wrestling during the Meiji Restoration era. He synthesized a sporting form by extracting a few dozen grips from several kinds of *yawara* which he combined into a new simplified training method he called *Kodokan judo*. *Kano's judo* format soon dominated *yawara* competition in Japan. The style began to spread into other countries after the Russo-Japanese War. It is likely that it would have been used as a demonstration sport in the 1940 Tokyo Olympics had they not been canceled. During the occupation of Japan by US troops in the 1950's, large numbers of Westerners were able to obtain Kodokan judo instruction for the first time, greatly enlarging its popularity. Also, because it is suitable for women, it has quickly spread all over the world. [Koyabayashi & Sharp, 1956]

In addition to the efforts of internationalists to create a single synthetic style for the Modern Olympic Games, one additional post-1893 attempt at universality should be cited:

**Moscow, Soviet Union - 1938:** In the 1930's Anatoly Kharlampiyev and others synthesized a universal self-defense regimen which became adopted as a sport throughout the USSR. It came to be called *sambo* (from an acronym in the Russian language meaning "*self-defense without a weapon*"). The format requires jackets like those used in Central Asian and Caucasian jacket wrestling, combined with most of the gripping, twisting, locking, and leverage techniques of Greco Roman and Freestyle wrestling. [Kharlampiyev, 1939]

## VII. Adaptability of the Various Traditional Styles

Unfortunately, ethnographers have made very little effort to identify similarities in wrestling styles used by various folkloric cultures around the world. As a result, their scholarly publications tend to be barren of analytic sports references. It seems very obvious that some of the world's traditional ethnic styles are, in fact, identical, despite the artificial divisions of modern geography and politics. As an example: the Loose wrestling practiced by the Chuckchi and Pacific InnuIt (Eskimo) peoples living near the Arctic Circle is virtually identical to that found within the Atlantic InnuIt cultures. Also, when English seafarers encountered the Atlantic InnuIt for the first time in the 1500's, the cultural heritage of Cornwall (where there is a strong wrestling tradition) permitted the Cornish seamen to wrestle with the InnuIt at first contact even though they couldn't even communicate verbally.

The entire series Belt/Jacket styles noted along the Western edge of Europe, which hypothetically could be collectively called "*Keltic Styles*" all seem to derive from the same prehistoric nomadic Kelt movements. There is very little difference between *Lucha Canaria* in the Canary Islands, *Lucha Leonesa* in Spain, *Breton wrestling* in Brittany, and *Cornish wrestling* in England. Furthermore, these four styles seem to parallel the surviving styles of the Alpine region in a way which cannot be coincidental. Likewise, the festive wrestling matches seen in Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tibet and Mongolia are nearly identical. They can be specifically linked to contact with the Mongol horsemen who ranged over so much of Asia in the Middle Ages.

The most obvious example of interchangeability is demonstrated by an examination of the synthetic judo of Japan, developed by Dr. Kano out of existing Japanese *Yawara styles* which thrived at a time of total isolationism. An identical tradition of ethnic belt-and-jacket styles in the Caucasus region, called *chadoba* in the Gruzian language, and *kokh* in the Armenian language, is adaptable to judo almost without changes. The list of Modern Olympic judo victors includes many names from the Caucasus due to this interchangeability.

## IX. The Creation of Synthetic "Olympic Style Wrestling"

As we move toward the 1996 Games, there are many discussions about reducing the size and number of the Olympic contests. Wrestling presents one of the most obvious cases where simplification is desirable, yet our inability to devise a simple single universal style of wrestling which could become popular with spectators all over the world, displays one of the most glaring failures of the Modern Olympic movement. The 100-year story of the creation of the synthetic Olympic style wrestling that will be used in 1996 is a tale marred by a century of fraud, deceit, and acrimony, despite the strenuous efforts of dedicated international arbiters with the best of intentions.

### 1896 - 1906

The problem of universal styles began with the rules adopted for 1896. The intent was to nearly duplicate the ancient outdoor event. The organizers clearly expected a grand finale with a Greek winner. Their hopes for a surviving Greek finalist were buoyed because the really skillful European wrestlers had largely ignored the Games, but spectator reaction to a Greek victor in the run from Marathon delayed the wrestling final. Wrestling was carried over to the following morning, so that few spectators were present when the best of the Greeks was defeated by Carl Schuhmann of Germany. Launceston Elliot of England, considered the favorite by many experts, was upset by Schuhmann in the first round. Under these conditions,

it was not possible to publicize and popularize the idea of a single champion in an outdoor summer wrestling sport.

Lacking the establishment of a new tradition, the 1900 Paris organizers had no incentive to schedule a repeat of the outdoor single-champion contest. The 1904 St. Louis organizers found it easiest to adopt the existing American concept of multiple champions plus place winners. To adapt to American conventional rules governing an indoor wintertime sport, the wrestling was scheduled outdoors in October, long after the rest of the Games had been concluded. In 1906, the Greeks attempted to restore the single-champion concept by dividing the numerous contenders into three groups by weight, with the best man from each group to participate in an outdoor three-man finale. The rules favored bigger, stronger men with the result that the best of the big men, Jensen of Denmark, became the champion, whereas the two best Greeks from 1896 and also Niflot, one of the smaller American 1904 winners, were luckless, and unable to defeat anyone. Jensen, and his final opponent Veckman of Finland, however were actually the reigning world champions in the French styles at that time. This outcome placed a significant imprimatur on the French style, so that there was every reason to believe that a merger of French rules with Olympic Rules could have been attained.

One of the more negative aspects of historical record keeping for those initial Olympic championships has been that the American tradition of naming three place-winners has been applied retroactively to the contests of 1896 and 1906, even though there is little evidence to support giving such credit. As a result, a Greek named Christopoulos is often listed in "third place" for 1896 even though he did not win a single match, and an Austrian named Watzl is likewise shown as "third place" in 1906 even though he doesn't seem to have participated in the finals at all. Also, weight-class place winners are now listed for 1906 as well. In 1906, there was also an attempt to revive the ancient pentathlon contest with a wrestling finale between the two best performers. Another unfortunate outcome of this conventionality has been to list these earlier matches as if they were all part of the sequence with later contests that made use of entirely different rules. This is equivalent to listing shot put, hammer throw, and discus throw winners in sequence because they all involve tossing a weight.

### **London, England - 1908 and Stockholm, Sweden - 1912**

The Games at London were scheduled with the intent to conduct French wrestling ("Greco-Roman" style) with four weight class championships and fixed time limits, including consolation matches for "third prize" in each class. As the opening of the Games neared, some protest arose among a small group of English wrestling enthusiasts with the results that another separate set of contests using Anglo-American loose rules with five weight class champions was scheduled. Both kinds of wrestling were conducted side-by-side in two rings also used for boxing, with time limits so as to reduce the length of the competition. Thus, nine individual champions at London received "first" prizes, along with eighteen place winners who received "second" and "third" awards. No attempt was made to establish a single universal champion. Scandinavians won most of the places in the French, or Greco-Roman, style. Veckman was one of the winners. In the Catch-as-Catch-Can style, a majority of the fifteen prizes were won by the United Kingdom, but USA champions competed with some success.

At Stockholm, no one urged a duplicate contest in a second style, although the concept of weight classes was endorsed under French rules. The question of time-limits was addressed in a unique, appalling way: no fixed limits were set. The judges compared notes at half-hour intervals. If they were unable to agree upon a victor, action was continued for another half-hour! Under such bizarre and unreasonable conditions, a few of the contests involving evenly-matched fighters became simply interminable! The longest of the championships matches was



continued by the judges for more than nine hours before being stopped without naming any victor! Another match ended after eleven hours with the victor so exhausted that he had to drop out of the tournament. A majority of prizes were won by Swedes and Finns. Rivalry between those two nations, Sverige vs. Suomi, was intense. A large number of the fights were marred by complaints about actions and decisions of the local Swedish officials.

### **1913 - 1920**

Protests against biased officials at Stockholm stimulated creation of an international rules making body. The group, called Internationaler Amateur Verband fur Schwerathletik, was organized during a general athletics congress held in June 1913 at Berlin by German and Hungarian leaders. At the beginning, it was planned that all international events for "heavier" men (wrestling, boxing, weightlifting, etc.) would be governed by this body. The consensus view was to standardize a single style of wrestling, i.e., the French wrestling rules. German was to become the official language. No progress was attained by this IAVS organization due to the war in Europe which broke out between France and Germany a few months later. The revival at Antwerp in 1920 was marked by a revival of the same rules disputes. The situation was worsened in 1920 when German athletes were barred from competition. Boxing was again introduced as an Olympic event for the first time since 1904. In one of the Catch-as-Catch-Can matches for "third" prize, a draw was declared between a Swede and a USA wrestler because there was no victory gained by either man.

### **Lausanne, Switzerland - 1921**

A wrestling rules meeting was reconvened in the summer of 1921 as part of a large international sports congress. Rechristened FILA/IAWF with French and English as the new official languages, the organization hastily adopted two official wrestling styles for Olympic events, thereafter to be known as *Greco-Roman style* and *freestyle* in English. These synthetic rules have been used in all Olympic Games starting in 1924, with continual and extensive modifications during the last seventy years. [Stromback, 1987]

### **1922 - 1952**

For three decades, internationalists attempted to achieve adoption of the basic Lausanne *freestyle* and *Greco-Roman style* rules agreement with mixed success. In Japan, for example, the use of the international rules was very simply and easily decreed. It was ignored by *Sumo style* enthusiasts but otherwise adopted through the nation with the gradual result that Japanese wrestlers became medalists after 1936. Contrastingly, in Switzerland and in the USA, resistance to adoption of FILA/IAWF rules created two camps. Disputes between warring factions in those nations raged for years. Both countries lost what had been a dominant position in wrestling.

Several modifications of the FILA international rules were adopted from time to time, hoping to improve the sport. Most of the changes made things worse. For example, a flawed demerit system was instituted to systematically eliminate non-finalists. In 1932 at Los Angeles, a "first" medal was awarded to a Swede who had been defeated by the Finn who was awarded the "second" medal. Also, a dispute over the demerit system caused a match won by an American to be re-wrestled with the same result, but demerits awarded by judges caused the American winner to be eliminated, while the Hungarian loser went on to gain "second" medal. In 1936 at Berlin, a USA wrestler was awarded "first" medal although he had been defeated by the Swede who was awarded the "second" medal.

During those years of endless rules disputes and modifications, a proposal for a World Championship series in non-Olympic years was revived by the Swedes in 1938. It became

established firmly at Stockholm in 1950. During the same era, the original bilingual rulesbooks gradually assumed a tendency for the French text., not English, to be dominant. As a result, a special seminar had to be conducted in London in 1948 to “explain” the English-language rules to the English-speaking wrestlers! A dramatic change in the deteriorating situation was brought about in 1952 at Helsinki when the USSR ended their boycott of the Modern Olympic Games. Wrestlers from the Soviet Union, who had been trained methodically in the two FILA international styles, dominated all nations in 1952 Olympic wrestling. The superior work of the USSR wrestlers continued unchallenged during the next forty years! Domination by the wrestlers from this one single nation became the most important driving force in the international effort to adopt synthetic “Olympic” rules. [Coulon et al, 1962]

### **1952 - 1992**

Reacting to the achievements of the USSR programs, more and more nations responded with similar methodic training of international teams. The annual World Championship series became a testing laboratory for rules improvements. During this period, leadership was exerted by several international personalities including Pierre Coulon of France, Ichiro Hatta of Japan, and Milan Ercegan of Yugoslavia. Japanese organizational leadership in all sports of the Olympic Movement was accompanied by internationalization of *judo style* wrestling, allowing it to be brought to the Games as a demonstration at Tokyo in 1964. Next, in 1972, *judo style* was added as a third wrestling form. In 1992, *judo style* was expanded to include women.

Sweeping alterations to the rules were adopted progressively to create judo and wrestling contests unlike those seen in the years prior to 1952. Contests were shortened so that they last only a few minutes. The number of weight classes was increased, and a maximum weight was enforced in both *freestyle* and *Greco-Roman style*. The “open” or grand champion concept was dropped in *judo style*. Contenders were divided into pools as a technique for achieving a final fight between the two best entrants. A color-coding system for continuous point-awards, the introduction of visible scoreboards, and a new institutionalized method for training judges and referees, all were devised as ways to surmount language barriers. Despite these strenuous efforts, response was mixed. Disputes continued. [Leyshon, 1994]

### **X. Conclusion - “Beyond 1992”**

Some nations, such as Turkey, Germany and the USA, have succeeded in the establishment of systematic programs like the USSR and Japan, with a resultant increase in medal winners. Other nations, such as Greece and the United Kingdom, have more or less dropped out of the picture. As we move toward the 1996 Games, a few nations continue to send their ethnic-style champions to compete, with widely varied results. Those from Mongolia, for example, have been relatively successful in the FILA styles, but not many from Ghana, or any of the African nations with traditional styles, have ever advanced very far in the elimination pools in any of the three wrestling styles.

Proponents of other international wrestling styles, *Sombo style* in particular, have been seeking to have their contests added to the Modern Olympic Games. As of 1994, a survey conducted among 50 international sports personalities (reported in *Sport Intern: the International Inside Sports Newsletter* - 27 August 1994) revealed their sense of 16 “essential” sports of the possible 32 sports listed for a modern Olympic program, included “wrestling” (tied for 8th) and “boxing” (tied for 11th). In addition, many of the survey respondents

named additional Oriental hand-to-hand sports such as judo, taekwondo and karate to their lists of essential sports. The proposals for additional hand-to-hand sports varieties, and the constant disputes over the existing varieties now on the program, demonstrate vividly the failure of Olympic philosophy as seen in the disciplines of the hand-to-hand sports.

## **XI. Sources/Further Reading**

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