STANDARDS IN SPORT: WRESTLING

Last year was something of an *annus horribilis* for the ancient and noble sport of wrestling. Its status as a core Olympic sport ended (after almost 3,000 years). Now wrestling has incorporated enough changes to continue as a non-core Olympic sport for the time being, but these changes have come at a price.



The sport that was happy to say goodbye to 2013

The ruling authority for the sport of golf modestly calls itself the R&A, deriving its name from the Royal & Ancient golf club in St Andrews. The 'ancient' reference is because the club, undoubtedly one of the oldest in the sport, was founded in 1754 and will, therefore, celebrate its 260th anniversary this year. Call that ancient? Compared to the genuinely ancient sport of wrestling, golf is a baby. There is no comparison between the two.

With documentation on tombs in Egypt from around 2300 BC depicting most of the holds still in use today (and cave paintings showing wrestling from, possibly, nine centuries before that), there is no comparison between wrestling and practically any sport you care to name (with the possible exception of athletics). Throughout its fantastically long history, however, wrestling has probably never had such a turbulent year as it had in 2013.

The big hammer-blow fell in February when the International Olympic Committee dropped

Amid all the upheaval of 2013, specifications for wrestling apparel and footwear have remained unchanged. Wrestlers always wear red or blue.

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One of the IOC's criticisms of wrestling was the need for greater "gender equity", even though women's freestyle wrestling became an Olympic event in Athens in 2004.

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wrestling from its list of core sports for the summer Olympic Games for 2020. The world of wrestling reacted with consternation: not only had wrestling featured in the first modern Olympics in Athens in 1896 and at every summer Olympics since St Louis in 1904, wrestling was one of the sports included in the Ancient Olympic Games, at least as early as 708 BC. By 2013, the modern-day International Olympic Committee (IOC) had made it clear it wanted a smaller list of core sports after Rio in 2016, cutting it to 25 from 26 to make room on the schedules for 'guest' events. When the IOC had spoken before the decision of the criteria it held to be important—television ratings, ticket sales, anti-doping policy and global participation and popularity—were all included. Wrestling's governing body, FILA (Fédération Internationale des Luttes Associées), was confident it would outscore other Olympic sports, notably modern pentathlon, in many of these categories. And it did, with 178 member nations forming part of FILA, while pentathlon's equivalent, UIPM, has only 108. Wrestling also registered higher ticket sales and bigger television audiences at the most recent summer games in London in 2012.

Nevertheless, on February 12, 2013, when the IOC's 15-member executive board announced its new list of core sports, modern pentathlon was included and wrestling was not. Specific criticisms seemed to be aimed more at FILA than at the sport of wrestling itself. For example, FILA had no athletes on its decision-making bodies, no women's commission, no ethics rules for technical officials and no medical official on its executive board.

Closed door, half-open window

It's true that the IOC left a window half-open when it slammed the door shut in wrestling's face. With seven other sports, wrestling was given six months to prepare a case for inclusion as a non-core sport in the 2020 and 2024 Olympic games; its rivals for a single spot were squash, baseball-softball (together), karate, roller sports, climbing, wakeboarding and wushu. In May, following presentations by all of these sports, the IOC decided that wrestling, baseball-softball and squash had earned the right to make final presentations at its formal 'session' meeting in



Pain free. Wrestlers have to make sure their shoes cannot hurt an opponent. This adizero wrestling boot features a lace-cover for smoothness, a mesh upper and hook-and-loop ankle strap.

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Buenos Aires on September 8. And to cut a long story short, wrestling was a clear winner on the day and will feature at the 2020 summer games in Tokyo and in 2024, for which the venue will be decided next year. Wrestling received 49 votes, with 24 going to baseball-softball and 22 to squash. FILA, so flat in February, celebrated September's news joyously. Its president, Nenad Lalovic, said after the Buenos Aires meeting: "To the millions of wrestlers and fans around the world that came together to save Olympic wrestling, I offer a very big thank you. Every one of you fought very hard for this victory. The sport and its passion are the winners here. Everyone rose up and fought: fans, wrestlers, coaches, mums and dads and a lot of passionate people who stood by this sport." This plays down his own hard work throughout 2013 and much of the drama that went on in the background.

Change at the top

A few days after its exclusion from the core group of Olympic sports, influential figures in wrestling laid the blame at the door of Mr Lalovic's predecessor, Raphael Martinetti. On February 16, Mr Martinetti resigned. Nenad Lalovic, then a vice-president, stepped in right away as acting president before being appointed formally to the position in May 2013. But at this point, Raphael Martinetti made it clear that he had no intention of stepping quietly into the shadows. He presented a formal complaint to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in Lausanne saying he should be allowed to continue on FILA's board, that Mr Lalovic's appointment should be declared null and void and that FILA should be prevented from holding an extraordinary congress in Moscow in May. CAS found in his favour on the first point only; the Moscow meeting went ahead, with Mr Lalovic in charge.

It was a critically important meeting. New rules were created, presented, discussed and agreed, mostly focusing on areas in which the IOC had asked for improvement: the rules of the sport, internal governance and gender equality. The changes included introducing two new weight classes for women's wrestling to give six categories in each of the three formats in which wrestlers compete: Greco-Roman, men's freestyle and women's freestyle. By way of contrast, the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich had ten weight categories for Greco-Roman.

In Greco-Roman, wrestlers use only their arms and upper bodies to attack, and can only hold those same parts of their opponents. As the name suggests, freestyle is a much more open form in which wrestlers also use their legs and may hold opponents above or below the waist. As an aside, it is this distinction between freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling that gave



Weight categories

The new weight classes for wrestling from 2014 onwards are as follows (all weights in kilogrammes).

Men's freestyle	57, 65, 74, 86, 97, 125
Greco-Roman	59, 66, 75, 85, 98, 130
Women's Freestyle	48, 53, 58, 63, 69, 75

For FILA's own competitions, including world and continental championships, World Cups and Golden Grand Prix championships, the governing body will add 61 and 70 kg classes to the men's freestyle, 71 and 80 kg to the Greco-Roman field and 55 and 60 kg to the women's freestyle competition.

Scoring system

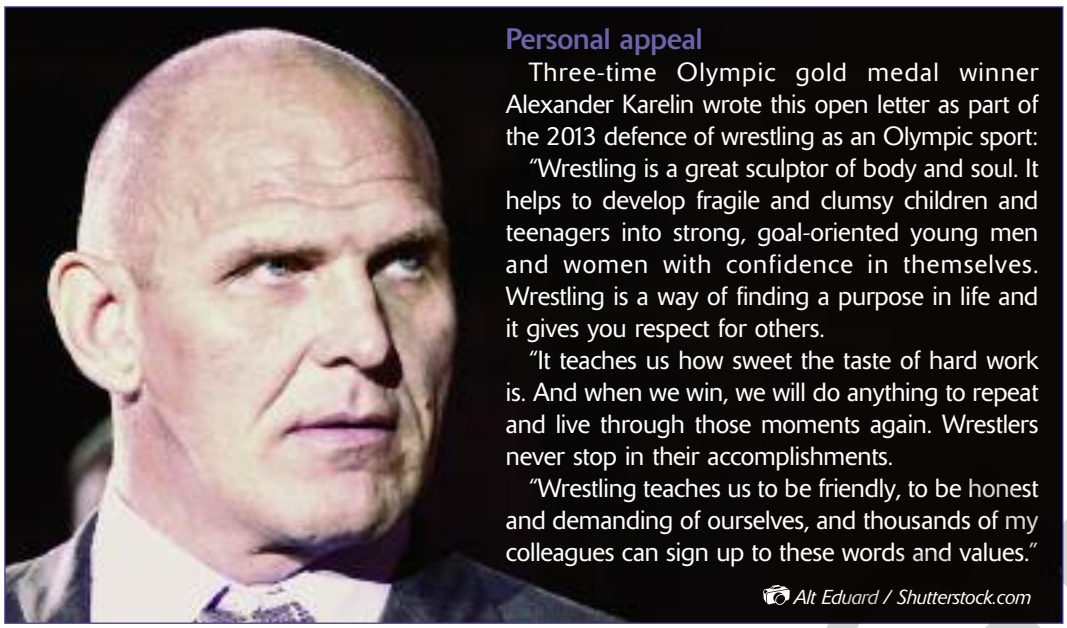
The judge in a wrestling bout marks on a score sheet points for actions and holds executed by the wrestlers, noting them down as each action is performed (because in the event of a tie, the last wrestler to score can claim the bout). Executing a hold or throw from a standing position can be worth extra points if your opponent loses all contact with the ground, describes a "broadly sweeping curve in the air" or comes to ground in a "direct and immediate danger position" (wrestling applies the elegant phrase 'grande amplitude' to these moves). A 'danger position' is when the line of a wrestler's back or shoulders is parallel with the mat or at an angle of less than 90 degrees to the mat. It can also be if the judge decides a wrestler is using the upper part of the body to resist a fall.

Extra points can also be earned from the "par terre" position (on the mat) if you can lift your opponent from the ground and bring him back down onto the mat on his front or in a danger position. Bouts last for three periods of two minutes each. At the end of each period, a wrestler is declared the winner. A wrestler winning two periods is declared the match winner. If this happens after only two periods, the third period does not take place, and a fall stops the match automatically, no matter when it comes.

FILA has adopted the following amendments to this system, from 2014.

- A match will end at 10 points advantage in freestyle and eight points in Greco-Roman.
- Four points will be awarded for all throws in freestyle. In Greco-Roman four points will be awarded for throws that are "followed and controlled" and five points will be awarded for 'grand amplitude' throws.
- Two three-point throws and one five-point throw, used to end a match, no longer applies.
- FILA has also eliminated a rule that allowed wrestlers to earn an extra point for a five-second count while exposing an opponent's back.
- There used to be a two-point penalty for a false start, but this has been cut to one point.

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Personal appeal

Three-time Olympic gold medal winner Alexander Karelin wrote this open letter as part of the 2013 defence of wrestling as an Olympic sport:

"Wrestling is a great sculptor of body and soul. It helps to develop fragile and clumsy children and teenagers into strong, goal-oriented young men and women with confidence in themselves. Wrestling is a way of finding a purpose in life and it gives you respect for others.

"It teaches us how sweet the taste of hard work is. And when we win, we will do anything to repeat and live through those moments again. Wrestlers never stop in their accomplishments.

"Wrestling teaches us to be friendly, to be honest and demanding of ourselves, and thousands of my colleagues can sign up to these words and values."

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the English language the phrase 'no holds barred', used in many contexts to mean 'without restrictions'.

What to wear

In spite of all the upheaval in 2013, regulations surrounding what competitors wear on their feet and bodies during bouts remain reassuringly unchanged. Modern wrestling singlets must be made of fabrics that present no danger of irritation to the wearer or his or her opponent and must allow opponents to execute holds. In the Greco-Roman format, the garment must be held at the shoulders with braces and leave 10 centimetres of the upper part of the chest and shoulders exposed and 20 centimetres of the back exposed. The legs of the singlet can either cover the thigh and stop above the knee, or go down to the ankle, entirely covering the leg, like tights or leggings. In this case the leg of the singlet must be fixed with elastic going under the foot of the wrestler and stay within the shoe. In freestyle wrestling, the legs of the garment must leave the lower leg (below the knee) exposed, with 25 centimetres above the knee the minimum length for the 'shorts' part of the uniform. There is another difference for women (who only compete in the freestyle category): the cut-out part on the front of the garment must not be more than 15 centimetres. Each wrestler (man and woman) must turn up to any competition with one predominantly red garment and another predominantly blue. Each bout has one competitor in blue and one in red, so you have to be able to wear either colour. Adidas and ASICS are among the big sports brands that make wrestling singlets, as is the wonderfully named Pennsylvania-based company Brute Wrestling. The ASICS Conquest garment, for example, is made from 84% polyester and 16% spandex. It features flatlock stitching for comfort in seam areas, and elastic at the legs to stop them from riding up. It features anti-odour and antimicrobial technologies to keep wrestlers fresh.

Softness is the key attribute of wrestling shoes. These were traditionally made of soft leather (and many of the shoes still are), but can now also be made of soft fabric. Any seams go from edge to edge and present no roughness that could hurt an opponent. Eyelet holes must have no hard material and laces can have no hard tip, for the same reason.

Changes to rules and competition formats that came into force on January 1, 2014, mainly centre on adjustments to the weight categories. Maximum weights in men's freestyle of 57, 65, 74, 86, 97, 125 kilos have proved controversial because they leave some prominent athletes, including India's Sushil Kumar, a silver medal winner in London, and Yogeshwar Dutt, who won bronze in his class at the last summer Olympics, needing to move up or down in weight.

FILA has emphasised that its technical commission worked with its medical, scientific, referee and athlete commissions to decide on these and all the changes that have come into the sport of wrestling. It is the way the IOC wants governing bodies to work.



The ASICS Conquest singlet with flatlock stitching, muscle-supporting gradient design and anti-odour fabric.
ASICS

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