

## Wrestling May Still Be an Olympic Sport

Hi again. Nice to have you with us on As It Is. I’m Kelly Jean Kelly.

People who like the sport of wrestling can breathe a sigh of relief – at least for now. Wrestling has passed the first test to get back on the schedule for the 2020 Olympic Games.

Wrestling was allowed to reapply, along with squash, sport climbing, karate, the Chinese martial art of wushu, roller sports, wakeboarding, and a combined application from baseball and softball.

Representatives from all eight sports made a presentation to a committee in St. Petersburg, Russia about why their sport should be included in the 2020 Olympic Games. The committee voted by secret ballot and decided that wrestling, squash, and baseball/softball would advance to the next level.

The International Olympic Committee will decide in September in Buenos Aires, Argentina which one of those three sports will remain in the Games.

Mario Ritter gives us the background on how wrestling was cut from the Olympics in the first place.

The International Olympic Committee, or IOC, decided last February to take wrestling out of the Olympics. VOA’s Ardita Dunellari spoke with a former wrestler to try to understand the IOC’s decision. Wade Schalles has won 15 national wrestling titles and one world wrestling title. He is also recognized by the Guinness Book of Records for the most pins in his career—in other words, wrestling his opponent to the floor and holding him there. Mr. Schalles says he thinks the sport is in trouble.

“We lost the sport primarily because we were arrogant. We were unwilling to follow the suggestion of the IOC. It was a very strong suggestion, but we overlooked it thinking we were immune from that, because we are wrestling.”

Wrestling has a long tradition in the Olympics. It was featured in the first modern Olympics in Athens, Greece, in 1896. But today’s Olympic Games are much more than tradition. The Olympics are a major television event. And for the IOC—a for-profit organization—the money a sport makes and how popular it is on TV are important considerations.

Mr. Schalles says wrestling has not kept people interested in the sport and has lost TV audiences.

“Wrestling internationally is not fun to watch, in my opinion. Some people would disagree with me. Today, wrestling is so slippery because of the perspiration. Half of your moves you can’t get because you slip off the guy, which then keeps the scoring low, takes away the excitement from the crowd.”

Mr. Schalles proposes major changes. They include adding long sleeves to uniforms and making point-scoring easier.

He also says one big lesson that came from February’s decision is the importance of promoting sports. That lesson is not lost on the sport’s governing organization. The International Wrestling Federation has already hired consultants to help make the sport more popular and more interesting to more people.

I’m Mario Ritter.

We also spoke to VOA’s Sonny Young about the future of wrestling. You may recognize Sonny from his show, “The Sonny Side of Sports.” He explains that the Olympics can support only about 25 sports. And even though wrestling has been around since ancient times, Olympic officials are trying to appeal to a younger audience with newer sports such as BMX cycling. So, Sonny says wrestling and Olympic officials are likely to make some changes.

“One of the changes, they say they want to make the Olympic rules for wrestling easier to understand – easier for offense, easier for a wrestler to score points. That’s basically how they judge a wrestling match.”

“Because right now, it’s very low-scoring, and it takes a long time for somebody to win, is that the deal?”

“Yes, yes, that’s part of it. Another change that they have made recently, they would like to see more women in wrestling. And in London last year when I was at the Games they did have female Olympic wrestling. That’s relatively new that we’ve had female wrestlers, including some from Africa.”

“So let me ask you this. Let’s say, let’s say wrestling doesn’t make it. Squash is also very popular, softball, baseball, also very popular. It’s a very real possibility that wrestling just does not make the cut. What’s at stake? What does that mean for the sport if it’s no longer an Olympic sport?”

“I think it would be a huge blow. To compare it with track and field, track and field is popular in Europe. The meets are broadcast on television and it has a pretty wide audience.

Here in the United States, many people watch track and field only every four years when the Olympics come around. It’s almost like a lull that these sports have prior to the Olympics. Wrestling gets much of its exposure at the Olympics. So I think it would be a huge blow if they take it out of the Games.”

“So it would just mean probably that fewer schools would offer it, fewer kids would start to pursue wrestling, there would be less interest even in community clubs or in cities or whatever it is.”

“In fact, on that note, I read an article recently, this was a local wrestler, from the Washington, DC, area. He’s a high school student, and he decided to forego his senior year of high school in order to go to this Olympic development center out in Colorado, where he would receive specific training in wrestling from the best American coaches, and he would be practicing against some of the best wrestlers in the United States. If they take wrestling out of the Olympics, that type of development will go away.”

“What do you think? Should wrestling stay in, especially given the other two sports that it’s up against?”

“Unquestionably I feel wrestling should remain in the Olympics. I think it’s a great sport. Just because of its Olympic legacy, going back to ancient times. I think it definitely belongs in the Olympics. And my feeling, just by the sports it’s going up against, squash and baseball/ softball, I think they will vote in September to keep it in the Games. That’s my early prediction.”

That was Sonny Young, talking to us about the future of Olympic wrestling. That’s our show for today. See you next time on “As It Is.” If you would like to reach us, send an email to [special@voanews.com](mailto:special@voanews.com). Or go to our website at [learningenglish.voanews.com](http://learningenglish.voanews.com) and click on “Contact Us.”

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