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David G. Curby & Guillaume Jomand

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The Evolution of Women's Wrestling: History, Issues and Future

David G. Curby¹ and Guillaume Jomand²

ABSTRACT. The growth of modern women's wrestling around the world has been rapid. From the first world championships held in 1987, with eight countries participating, it has grown to be recognized as an Olympic sport with over 100 countries having registered competitors. This has been accompanied with new social definitions of perceived gender roles. The participation of women in sport has followed a path of inclusion in those activities that have been culturally deemed as "appropriate for women," to participation in all of the combative Olympic sports. This has radically changed the perceptions of what are held as universally inherent gender differences, as well as labeling of certain sports themselves as masculine or feminine. Women played a large role in the struggle to keep wrestling in the Olympic program. Issues that are still present include the identification of promotion strategies to reach more women, as well as enlisting advocates to deal with cultural and religious barriers to women's participation in wrestling.

Keywords: gender roles, Olympics, history of sport, United World Wrestling

In the overall history of wrestling, the development of modern women's wrestling has been dramatic. In roughly one generation, it has developed from the novelty of a small number of young girls competing in a handful of countries, to women from over 100 countries striving for Olympic medals. The year 2015 is proving to be an historic one in the development and promotion of women's wrestling due to many important worldwide events. United World Wrestling (UWW), the international governing body for wrestling, initiated a "Super 8" campaign at the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Museum in Lausanne in January. This promotional program brought together eight outstanding women from the sport of wrestling to help create increased female participation in the sport. IOC President Thomas Bach attended the event, at the IOC Museum in Lausanne. "We're committed to matching the IOC and President Bach's pledge to ensure more opportunities for female athletes around the world. This event is only the beginning of our progress," said UWW President Nenad Lalovic (United World Wrestling Press, 2015). The

Super 8 ambassadors are Edith Docsa (Italy), United World Wrestling referee; Fanny Echeverry (Colombia), president of the Colombian Wrestling Federation; Carol Huynh (Canada), 2008 Olympic champion, United World Wrestling bureau member; Helen Maroulis (United States), 2012 world silver medalist; Sofia Mattson (Sweden), 2012 world champion, Olympic bronze medalist; Isabella Sambou (Senegal), 2012 Olympian; Natalia Vorobeyva (Russia), 2012 Olympic champion; and Saori Yoshida (Japan), three-time Olympic champion, 12-time world champion.

The International Network of Wrestling Researchers (INWR) named 2015 as the year of women's wrestling; the Greece Wrestling Federation and their annual scientific forum at Olympia in May will have the theme of women's Olympic wrestling; and the National Wrestling Hall of Fame in the US will focus its educational outreach exhibit on women's wrestling for 2015 (National Wrestling Hall of Fame, 2014).

Tracing the growth of women's wrestling around the world with an actual number of participants has proven difficult. One indicator of the growth of worldwide interest is to trace the number of countries that participate in the world championships. The first official world championship for women that was sanctioned by wrestling's international governing body was held in 1987. At that time the governing body was known as the International Federation of Amateur Wrestling, known as FILA from the French, *Fédération Internationale de Lutte Amateur*. In 2014 the name was changed to United

¹International Network of Wrestling Researchers

²Centre de Recherche et d'Innovation sur le Sport, Université Claude Bernard Lyon, France

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Correspondence should be addressed to David G. Curby, International Network of Wrestling Researchers, 1719 W. 60th St., La Grange, IL 60525. E-mail: davcurb@gmail.com

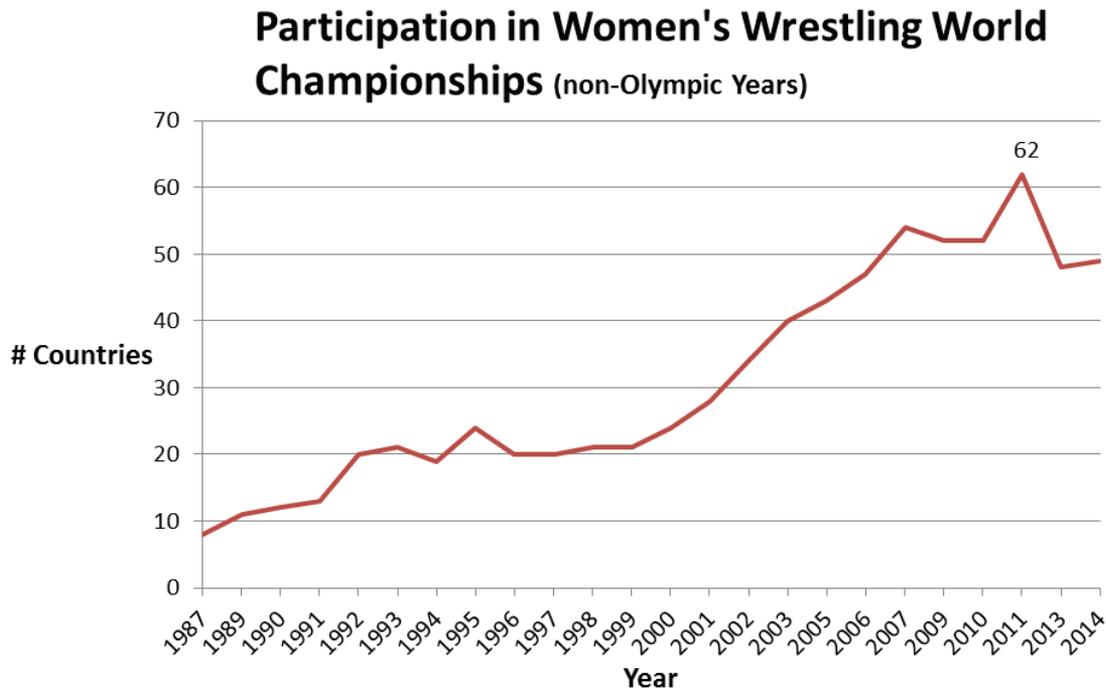


FIGURE 1 The number of countries participating in women's world wrestling championships.

World Wrestling (UWW). There were eight countries in that first world championship in 1987, which has grown to a high of 62 countries in 2011. The need to qualify the weight class for a country causes the participation to peak in the year preceding the Olympics. This growth is shown in Figure 1. Another useful indicator is the number of countries that have ever sent competitors to the world championships. Listed in Table 1 is a record of all countries that have had a representative participating, as well as a record of whether medals were won, an indicator of achievement. Since the world championships for women have been held, 85 countries have been represented, 39 countries have had an athlete win a medal, and 21 countries have had a world champion.

In order to gain a more thorough appreciation for the emergence of modern women's wrestling, it is useful to review the involvement of women in the sport throughout the span of history. Sports historian Allen Guttmann (1991) asserts that it is historically correct to say that sports have been usually been more important to men than women, but there have been times and places where women's involvement was just as extensive and intensive as men's. This holds true for the sport of wrestling. From the myths of ancient Greece Atalanta is described as a very skilled wrestler. She is shown on a Chalcidian black-figured hydria vase wrestling the hero Peleus (see Figure 2). The females in Sparta were different from the rest of Greece, because they valued the physical fitness and courage in girls as well as the boys. Xenophon and Plutarch have both described the upbringing of Spartan girls as including running and wrestling (Guttmann, 1991).

Plutarch wrote that Spartan women, "unlike all the other Greek women, they lived outdoors, were training for the race and wrestling, and competed on this with men" (Mosse, 1991).

INDIGENOUS AND PRIMITIVE WRESTLING

There are numerous examples of women wrestling among various tribes in Africa. Ritual wrestling existed (and still exists) in some tribal societies where pubescent girls often wrestled as part of their ritual initiation into mature womanhood. Some of the countries where wrestling among women exists are Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, and the Congo. Among the Diola tribe of Gambia adolescent boys and girls wrestled (but not against one another) and the male champion often married the female champion. In other tribes, such as the Yala of Nigeria, men and women wrestled one another. In the Congo, women's wrestling is present in the Igbo and Njabi tribes. The Igbo women would wrestle women from other villages to be considered more desirable for marriage (Guttmann, 1991; Paul, 1987). In South America, Huka-huka is the Brazilian folk wrestling style practiced by the indigenous people of Xingu and is performed by both men and women (Mandzyak & Artemenko, 2010).

The late 19th century and early 20th century was the age of wrestling and displays of strength in circuses, music halls, and fairs. Throughout Europe and the United States crowds came to watch both the strongmen and strongwomen perform. These shows also included wrestling. It seems clear that many of these exhibitions of strength and wrestling skill

TABLE 1 Participation in Women's World Wrestling Championships by Country

Country	1987	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014		
Algeria																			P									
Argentina				M																	P	P	P			P	P	
Armenia																											P	
Australia					P	P	P		P	P	P	P		P	P	P			P	P	P	P						
Austria					P	C	C	C	M	P	C	P	C		P	P			P	P	P	P	P			P		
Azerbaijan									P	P										P	M	C	M	M	P	M	M	
Belarus															P	P	P	M	M	P	M	M	P	M	C	P	M	
Belgium	C																											
Brazil												P		P		P				P	P	P	P	P	P	P	M	
Bulgaria							M	P	M	P	P	P	P	P	P	P		C	C	C	M	C	C	M	M	M		
Cambodia																				P								
Cameroon																				P	P	P	P			P	P	
Canada						M	C	P	C	C	C	M	C	C	P	M	M	M	M	M	C	C	M	C	M	C	M	
Central African Republic																											P	
China				C	C	C	P	M	C	C	P	M			C	M	M	C	C	C	M	C	M	C	C	C	M	
Colombia																				P	P			P	P	P	P	
Congo, Dem Republic																					P							
Cuba																							P	P			P	
Czech Republic					M	P	M	P	P	P	P		P	P	P	P						P	P	P	P	P		
Denmark	M		P							P												P						
Dominican Republic																						P						
Ecuador																						P		P	P		P	
Egypt																					P		P	P			P	
El Salvador													P									P	P				P	
Estonia																								P	P	P	P	
Finland	P											P	P	P					P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
France	C	C	C	C	M	C	M	C	C	C	M	C	P	P	M	P	M	P	C	M	P	M	P	P	P	P	P	
Georgia																				P								
Germany		P	P		P	P	P	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	C	P	M	M	M			P	P	P	M	P	C	
Great Britain							P	P													P	P	P			M	P	P
Greece		P	M	P	P	P	P	P		P	P	P	P	P	C	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	M	P	P	
Guam																											P	
Guatemala																											P	
Guinea																											P	
Guinea-Bissau																											P	
Hungary																P	P	M	P	P	P	M	P	M		C	P	
India																P	P	P	M	P	P	P	P	P	M	P	P	
Israel																											P	
Italy					P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	M	P	P	P	M	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
Ivory Coast																											P	
Japan	M	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	
Kazakhstan							P	P	P							P	P	P	P	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	P	
Korea, People's Republic									M	P												M	M	M	M	M	M	
Korea, Republic of				M											P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
Kyrgyzstan						P						P			P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
Latvia					P	P		P			P	P			P	P	P					P	P	P	P	P	M	
Lithuania																												
Luxemburg						P																						
Madagascar																						P	P	P	P			
Mauritius																											P	
Mexico																												
Moldova																											P	
Mongolia															P	P	P	M	P	M	M	M	C	C	M	M	C	
Montenegro																											P	
Morocco																						P						
Netherlands		M	P	P	P	P																					P	
New Zealand																											P	
Nicaragua																											P	
Nigeria																												
Norway	C	C	C	M	C	C	C	M	M	M	C	M	P	M	M	P	M	P	P			P	P	P				
Peru																P	P	P									P	
Philippines																												
Poland							P	P	P	C	M	P	M	C	M	M	P	M	M	M	M	M	P	P	P	P	M	
Portugal					P																						P	
Puerto Rico																												
Romania																											P	
Russian Federation					M	M	M	C	C	P	M	M	M	M	C	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	C		M	M	
Senegal																											P	
Singapore																											P	
Slovak Republic																											P	
South Africa																											P	
Soviet Union				M																								
Spain											P		P	P	P	P	P	P	M	P			M	P	P		P	
Sweden	P	P	C	P	P	P	M	C	C	M	M	M	M	P	M	P	P	P	M	M			C	M	M	C	M	M
Switzerland		M			P																						P	
Taipei		C	M	P	M	M	P	P	M	P																	P	
Tajikistan																												
Thailand																												
Tunisia																											P	
Turkey																											P	
Ukraine					P	P	M	P	P	P	P	P	C	C	C	C	C	M	M	M	M	M	C	C	P	C	C	
United States		M	M	M	C	M	M	M	C	M	C	C	C	M	M	C	M	M	M	C	P	M	C	M	C	M	C	
Uzbekistan																											P	
Venezuela		P	M	C	C	M		M		P		P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	M	P	
Vietnam																											P	
# Countries-Participants Only	2	5	3	5	11	11	8	13	8	11	11	12	15	18	22	33	31	33	40	28	36	39	49	14	34	32		
# Countries-Win Silver or Bronze	3	2	5	4	4	5	7	6	5	4	5	6	4	5	7	4	9	11	10	9	11	8	7	7	7	10	12	
# Countries w/a Champion	3	4	4	4	5	5	4	5	7	5	5	3	5	5	5	3	3	3	4	4	5	5	6	6	4	5		
#Total Countries Participating	8	11	12	13	20	21	19	24	20	20	21	21	24	28	34	40	43	47	54	41	52	52	62	27	48	49		
# of Weight Classes	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	6	6	6	6	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	8		

Note. C = country with champion; M = country with silver or bronze; P = participants only.



FIGURE 2 Peleus and Atalanta wrestling, black-figured hydria, ca. 550 BC, Staatliche Antikensammlungen. PD Courtesy of Bibi Saint-Pol at Wikipedia. http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AAtalanta_Peleus_Staatliche_Antikensammlungen_596.jpg

were legitimate, but in some cases declined into more of a spectacle. In the famous cabaret music halls of Paris, such as the Folies Bergeres and Moulin Rouge, women wrestled other women, but also put out challenges to the men in the audience to come onstage to face them in a match (Laget, Laget, & Mazot, 1982). One of the most famous performers was Masha (Maria) Poddubny from Russia, who six times between 1889 and 1910 was crowned the “lady world wrestling champion.” She was the sister of the great wrestler Ivan Poddubny (Khromov, 2003).

Internationally, the birthplace of modern women’s wrestling is in France. The atmosphere in France in the late 1960s and early 1970s was conducive to changes in the opportunities for women in society. This was a part of the feminist movement of the time that advocated for equality between men and women in all of society. In many French sports, this was expressed in an increase in the number of licenses applied for by women (Chantelat & Tétart, 2007). The beginnings of women’s wrestling appear in the 1960s in some experimental schools where boys and girls participated together in wrestling class, which was a part the required course in school physical education. Boys and girls also trained on the same mat at the International Sports Camps

run by the *Fédération Sportive et Gymnique du Travail* (FSGT, Gymnastic and Sport Federation of Labor) for almost 30 years (Joly, 1974, 2004, 2014).

The first women’s wrestling in an established sports club in France took place in Cercle Calonnais de Lutte Hercule located in Calonnes Ricouart in September 1971. Pierre Burmer, a former miner and coach, began wrestling training for 20 girls, 15 to 26 years old. Girls first practiced with the boys, but because the number of girls grew very quickly, one session per week was devoted to them. He was assisted by Theodule Toulotte, a two-time Olympian for France, and François Jacob, who were wrestlers at the club (Ballery, 1988; Kaminsky, 1992a, 1992b). Pierre Burmer (1931–2009) was a champion wrestler as well as a respected coach. In 2003 he received the FILA gold medal (Burmer, 2009). The son of François Jacob, Daniel Jacob, eventually took over the training of the girls division, which produced world champion Martine Poupon, and the club is still in existence today (Daniel Jacob, personal communication, January 24, 2015). In another city in Northern France, Denise Picavet heard of the wrestling that Burmer was conducting and became involved as a competitor. In 1974, Denise and her husband Claude Picavet founded the first all-female wres-

ting club, the Tourcoing Wrestling Union, which in 1977 merged with the Tourcoing Wrestling Club. This dynamic couple helped establish the great reputation of this club. The Tourcoing Wrestling Club is still a leading club in France. It can claim credit for producing 12 women world champions, among them Anna Gomis, a member of the UWW Hall of Fame. It annually hosts an international women's tournament (Miquel, 2003). Another person of note from the Tourcoing Wrestling Club is Régine Le Gleut, who was four-time champion of France and who has officiated at the past four Olympic Games (personal communication, February 16, 2015).

These developments in France forced the *Fédération Française de Lutte* (FFL, French Wrestling Federation) to approve licenses for women in 1975, but for practice only. This was quickly changed in response to the rapid growth of licensed women, from 51 in 1976, 84 in 1977, 296 in 1981, and over 1,000 by 1984 (Louveau, 1986). The FFL began promoting female participation with the establishment of a National Women's Commission, and its first meeting was held in February of 1978. It was chaired by Michel Dusson, and one of the members was Denise Picavet, who was still competing. The first championship of France, organized by the FFL, was held in Montauban in 1980. According to the FFL results database, the following year, more than 40 competitors in all categories (junior to senior) competed in Cenon. Many of the wrestlers were from the Cercle Calonnais de Lutte Hercule and Tourcoing Wrestling Club.

Both Denise Picavet and her husband Claude were at the heart of the internationalization of women's wrestling. Denise Picavet was an excellent wrestler and remained unbeaten in competitions from 1976 to 1983, but also served in some key positions: she was a member of the FFL Women's Commission (1977/1987), the director of FFL Women's Commission 1981–1987, and member of the FILA Commission on Women's Wrestling (1985–1987). Their creation of an international wrestling tournament in Tourcoing in 1982 involving teams from France, Belgium, and Norway was a pivotal event in the advancement of women's wrestling (Poinsot, 2000). Claude received the gold medal of the French Wrestling Federation and the gold medal of FILA.

While France seems to be the birthplace for modern women's wrestling, Norway also played an important role. The leader in Norway was Ove Gundersen who an active wrestler on the Norwegian national team and general secretary of the Norwegian Wrestling Federation. Gundersen recounts the development of women's wrestling in Norway, from the first time he witnessed women on the mat to the first women's world championships that were held in Norway (personal communication, October 5, 2014). The first time he saw female wrestling in Norway was at the Kolbotn Cup in 1972, when two young Danish girls had an exhibition match, but because it was of poor quality no one gave it much attention. In 1975 there was a successful clinic in held in Narvik for girls, but there was no follow-up. In January 1979 two girls

applied to the federation for a wrestling license. Torill Degerstrøm and Tone-Lise Forbergskog were the two first girls to officially wrestle in a competition in Norway.

In the autumn of 1979 Marit Foss, a young girl 15 years of age, asked Ove Gundersen to coach her in wrestling. Gundersen agreed, but only if she could bring at least five other girls that wanted to wrestle. Following that first season the group of women grew to 20 girls, along with a large interest from the media. News spread about the girls wrestling in the club at Kolbotn and soon other clubs followed with their own programs.

The political history in Norway also influenced the development of sport. The Worker's Confederation of Sports had a history of allowing women in many sports. This was a position that was supported by the Labor Party, which following World War II emphasized socialist values and giving all people equal possibilities. When women's participation in sports grew in the '70s, there was no question that women should be allowed.

For the 1980 season, Bjørn Eilert Eriksen, the director of the Kolbotn Cup (he was also a FILA bureau member) added female wrestling to the program. Ten girls from three clubs attended the competition in three weight categories. This experiment was a huge success and subsequently, nearly all clubs in Norway included girls wrestling in their competitions. In August 1981 the world championship for Greco-Roman wrestling was held in Oslo and women's wrestling was included in the opening ceremony. This was vital, for it led to an exchange of information between the people from France, Belgium, and Norway. Six months later, in February 1982, Norway attended a competition in Tourcoing with 32 girls from 11 to 22 years of age and won the team trophy. This was the first competition for the Norwegian girls in freestyle, since they trained only in Greco-Roman. In 1983 Norway travelled to Sweden for a competition. During the 1984 European Championship in Sweden they included a national team competition for females in Greco-Roman (Gundersen, 1996).

An important factor in gaining acceptance by FILA was the high level of wrestling shown by the young girls during the Greco-Roman wrestling world championships in Oslo in 1981. Another occurred during the aforementioned Tourcoing Wrestling Club international competition in February 1982. It was at this tournament that the president of the French Wrestling Federation, Michel Dusson, who was member of the FILA bureau, and Georges Ballery, a national coach from the FFL, both attended and were impressed by the female wrestler's level of skill. Ballery would later become the women's national coach in France. It was also during this competition that the idea came forth to organize a competition of national teams for female wrestlers (Michel Dusson, personal communication, July 11, 2014).

At the FILA Congress held on August 10, 1982, in Edmonton, Canada, Dusson presented the advantage to be found by the federation's acceptance of wrestling by women. This presentation provided both a practical and philosophi-

cal rationale for what wrestling can do for women, as well as what women would bring to wrestling (Michel Dusson, personal communication, January 23, 2015). FILA president Milan Ercegan proposed that wrestling for women be accepted as a discipline practiced within FILA; however there would be no continental and world championships at this time. This proposal was adopted. At the FILA bureau meeting in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, on May 1983 the technical committee reported that: "Wrestling for women must be studied, for there are differences of opinion on the age, weight, dress, and illegal holds." At the same meeting they established Michel Dusson as president of the Commission for Wrestling for Women. In a meeting in Kiev in September 1983, there was extensive discussion with the medical commission and technical department regarding weight classes. After that, women wrestling was a theme in most of the FILA congresses and reports.

The International Commission for Female Wrestling first met in Rome in December 1984 to adopt rules and procedures for women's wrestling (Strömbäck, 1987). The commission was comprised of: Dusson (France), president; Denise Picavet (France), secretary; Christer Persson (Sweden); Ove Gundersen (Norway); Joseph Raeymaekers (Belgium); Tomiaki Fukuda (Japan); and Mohamad Benslimane (Morocco). At a meeting of the commission held in Roubaix (France) on March 30, 1985, it was decided to include women's wrestling in FILA's program and to combine a Women's World Wrestling Festival with the continental and world championship. In 1985 and 1986 the first international competitions were organized by FILA. In 1985, the first of these Women's World Wrestling Festivals was held in Kolbotn, Norway, for seniors, in conjunction with the senior world championships in Greco-Roman; then in Clermont-Ferrand, France, for cadets; and in 1986, Mechelen, Belgium, hosted a festival for cadets, juniors, and seniors (Michel Dusson, personal communication, January 23, 2015).

These first years the commission worked extensively on the rules for women's wrestling. There were no major differences between the members because Norway and Sweden had based their national rules for women on the French rules. More controversial were suggestions that the women should not have typical wrestling matches, but should be evaluated by the performance of different holds in terms of grace and femininity. These considerations were set aside by the commission when the women became adamant that they wanted the same rules as the men, which they had used for years. During this period, we note the arrival of new countries such as Hungary and Japan.

The two styles then practiced were freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling. The Scandinavian countries specialized in Greco-Roman wrestling, while the French and Belgians practice more freestyle wrestling. In order to consolidate the rather small numbers into one style, FILA president Ercegan announced in 1987 that a unique style would be employed, entitled "Female Wrestling." The decision to use freestyle

was supported by evidence provided by Michel Dusson, who stated that doctors and other experts he consulted with pointed out that the Greco-Roman style relied more on force generated by and towards the upper body. This is where women have proportionally less strength (Michel Dusson, personal communication, July 11, 2014).

At a commission meeting in Norway on January 31, 1987 it was decided that the full-nelson be prohibited, that the matches were of shorter duration than men's freestyle, and that there was a shorter time to work on the mat, in par terre position. Following these decisions, there was no disagreement when Ove Gundersen and Svein Haanshuus of Norway proposed a Women's World Wrestling Championship be held in Norway on October of that same year. The commission was unanimous in their support for Norway. France requested the year 1989 and Tokyo, Japan, requested 1991. The European championships had already been planned for 1988 in Dijon, France. Michel Dusson obtained official confirmation from FILA president Milan Ercegan shortly after the meeting (Ove Gundersen, personal communication, October 5, 2014).

INCLUSION IN THE OLYMPICS

Michel Dusson was an enthusiastic supporter of women's wrestling and knew from the successes of the first several world championships that it was on a developmental path to its inclusion in the Olympics. He also knew that it would require more than the 19 national federations recognizing women's wrestling in 1991 (Kaminsky, 1993). By 2000, that number had more than doubled and it was decided to begin discussions that would lead to women's wrestling inclusion in the Olympic program (Michel Dusson, personal communication, January 23, 2015). The decision to include women wrestling in the Olympic program was made in September 2001 during its meeting held in Lausanne, when the IOC executive board approved the recommendations made by the Olympic Program Working Group regarding sport-specific quotas and events for Games in Athens in 2004. (Stéphanie Moreno, Olympic Studies Center, personal communication, February 9, 2015). Women's wrestling made its Olympic debut in Athens in 2004 with competition in four weight classes.

WOMEN IN THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT

With the addition of women's wrestling in 2004 and women's boxing in 2012 at the London Games, women were now represented in all of the combative sports on the Olympic program. The growth of women's participation in the Olympics has been dramatic. In the first modern Olympic Games in 1896, women were not allowed to participate. This reflected the views of the father of the modern Olympics,

TABLE 2 Women's Participation in the Summer Olympic Games

<i>Year</i>	<i>Sports</i>	<i>Women's Events*</i>	<i>Total Events</i>	<i>% Women's Events</i>	<i>Women Participants</i>	<i>% Women Participants</i>
1900	2	2	95	2.1	22	2.2
1904	1	3	91	3.3	6	0.9
1908	2	4	110	3.6	37	1.8
1912	2	5	102	4.9	48	2
1920	2	8	154	5.2	63	2.4
1924	3	10	126	7.9	135	4.4
1928	4	14	109	12.8	277	9.6
1932	3	14	117	12	126	9
1936	4	15	129	11.6	331	8.3
1948	5	19	136	14	390	9.5
1952	6	25	149	16.8	519	10.5
1956	6	26	151	17.2	376	13.3
1960	6	29	150	19.3	611	11.4
1964	7	33	163	20.2	678	13.2
1968	7	39	172	22.7	781	14.2
1972	8	43	195	22.1	1,059	14.6
1976	11	49	198	24.7	1,260	20.7
1980	12	50	203	24.6	1,115	21.5
1984	14	62	221	28.1	1,566	23
1988	17	72	237	30.4	2,194	26.1
1992	19	86	257	33.5	2,704	28.8
1996	21	97	271	35.8	3,512	34
2000	25	120	300	40	4,069	38.2
2004	26	125	301	41.5	4,329	40.7
2008	26	127	302	42.1	4,637	42.4
2012	26	140	302	46.4	4,676	44.2

*including mixed events

Pierre de Coubertin (1912), as he described the Olympics as the “. . . solemn and periodic exaltation of male athleticism, with internationalism at a base, loyalty as a means, art for its setting, and female applause as reward.” However, in 1900 in Paris women participated in lawn tennis and golf, but these 22 women out of 997 total athletes only made up 2% of the total. Thus began the slow struggle for gender equity in the Olympic Games and is documented in Table 2. This struggle is not yet complete, as women made up 44.2% of Olympians in the 2012 London Games (IOC, 2014a).

In recent years, the growth of women's participation in the Olympic movement has gained major importance. The IOC (2014b) lists in its Olympic charter under the fundamental principles of Olympism, “6. The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Olympic charter shall be secured without discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status;” and under Mission and Role of the IOC, “7. to encourage and support the promotion of women in sport at all levels and in all structures with a view to implementing the principle of equality of men and women.” The need to continue the work for gender equity is also included in the Olympic Agenda 2020 as reform recommendation 11: Foster gender equality, “The IOC to work with the International Federations to achieve 50 per cent female participation in the Olympic Games and to stimulate women's participation

and involvement in sport by creating more participation opportunities at the Olympic Games” (International Olympic Committee, 2014c).

This progress has been monitored by a process called the Sydney Scoreboard. It is an online tool through which women in leadership roles within sport organizations are tracked both nationally and internationally and is aimed at driving increased female representation on sport boards and in leadership positions. It is sponsored by the International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG) whose mission is to be a catalyst for the advancement and empowerment of women and sport globally. UWW is a signatory to the Sydney Scoreboard and the records from 2014 show that 19% of the leadership positions in this organization are held by women (Sydney Scoreboard, 2014). An analysis of the listed scores from the 33 international federations for Olympic sports range from 45% to 0% of board members as women (the average was 16%). The International Skating Union was the federation with the highest female representation in their board of directors, while five federations had scores of zero.

COMBATIVE SPORTS AND CHANGING GENDER ROLES

In the not too distant past it was common to read of wrestling's value as a sport favorable to the development of young

boys. This position was often reflected in different works related to wrestling. For example, the following quotes from two textbooks on wrestling: "It is a sport which develops harmoniously our boys . . . It is, moreover, manly and not brutal activity: a man's sport!" (Ballery et al., 1979, p. 12); and ". . . the historical and traditional role of wrestling to make a man a man." (Petrov, 1975, p. 8). It was even found in the title of a book describing the history of wrestling in the Soviet Union, *Wrestling is a Man's Game* (Preobrazhenskii, 1981). These cultural norms notwithstanding, some girls tried wrestling with great results. Louveau and Davis (1988) provide advice to these pioneers by describing that the challenge will be for women to defy these prohibitions and practice these so-called manly sports, which are conducive to the development of young people. In addition, they will have to take the risk of being stigmatized in their practice, and have to take pride in their choice to practice wrestling.

As we go through history, we see that we have come from a time when gender roles were rather strictly defined as masculine and feminine. Certainly there is a biological basis for this definition, but today the question becomes how much of the differences between men and women are inherent and universal differences, and how much of the differences are culturally and socially defined. This has been accompanied with new social definitions of perceived gender roles. The participation of women in sport has followed a path of inclusion in those activities that have been paternalistically deemed as "appropriate for women," to participation in all of the combative sports Olympic sports. This has radically changed the false perceptions of what are held as universally inherent gender differences, as well as labeling of certain sports themselves as masculine or feminine.

Patricia Vertinsky (1994), in her book *The Eternally Wounded Woman: Women, Doctors and Exercise in the Late Nineteenth Century* describes how science and medicine adapted themselves to the traditional notions that intense and competitive activity would have negative consequences on their potential for motherhood. A review of this history provides a framework for a more accurate understanding of medical knowledge and its relationship to gender issues and provides the foundation for women's expansion into the sport of their choice. The concern of the medical community for the effects of intense training and sport competition on girls and women extended well into the 20th century. While conceding that certain forms of exercise were beneficial, the prevailing approach was to impose limits on women. This is expressed in both the forward and preface to a 1939 book entitled *Sport, Physical Training and Womanhood*. The author, Dr. Stephan Westmann, states in the preface, "Competitive sports are alien to the characteristics of the female constitution and are useless as well as harmful in relation to the primary task of a woman's life, maternity." (1939, p. ix) The foreword (p. vi), written by Dr. Kaye Le Fleming, states, "All will agree that recreations such as swimming and lawn tennis are eminently suitable activities for women, and

it will be equally accepted that wrestling, boxing, and Rugby football are the reverse."

The performance of athletes who defied these warnings has helped to slowly change the views of the scientific and medical fields regarding women and their athletic capabilities. It was only in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games that women were allowed to run in events longer than 1,500 meters, with the addition of the 3,000 meters and the marathon. The sporting opportunities for women in combative sports began with fencing in 1924, and continued with women's judo, which was added to the 1992 Games in Barcelona, taekwondo in 2000 in Sydney, women's freestyle wrestling in 2004 in four weight classes (this was increased to six weight classes in London 2012), and in London, boxing for women was contested in three weight classes, thus completing the successful inclusion of women in all of the Olympic combative sports. Yet the perceptions of many people still view wrestling and other combative sports as masculine or male sports (Sisjord, 1997; Sisjord & Kristiansen, 2008) with the associated masculine values of strength, toughness, and courage. The solution to this dilemma may require those in the world of sport to regard sports and their associated values not as masculine or feminine, but as human values (Guttman, 1991). In addition, sport and particularly combative sports, will move away from their origins as preparation for war and move to an even more noble view of victory emphasizing civility, sportsmanship, and skill (Lopiano, 2000).

WOMEN'S WRESTLING, GENDER EQUITY, AND THE FIGHT TO REESTABLISH WRESTLING IN THE OLYMPIC PROGRAM

On February 12, 2013, in Lausanne, Switzerland, the IOC executive board voted to drop wrestling from core sport status in the Olympic program. The sport would have no Olympic status past 2016. Wrestling would be among the eight sports that are scheduled to make presentations to the executive board at its meeting in St. Petersburg, Russia, in May. From there, the executive board will select which of the eight sports they would recommend to the 125th IOC session in Buenos Aires for inclusion as an additional sport on the 2020 program (IOC, February 12, 2013).

This caused a massive undertaking of changes within FILA in this challenge to its survival in the Olympic Games, and women's wrestling played an important role in the subsequent activities. It began on February 16 with the resignation of FILA president Raphael Martinetti. The FILA bureau then nominated Nenad Lalovic from Serbia as acting president. Wall Street Journal reporter Mark Futterman described the task facing the new president: "Lalovic and the federation has undertaken an ambitious effort to 'modernize and democratize' the sport and its governing body quickly, making it more inclusive of women and changing its rules to make it more spectator- and television-friendly." (Futterman, 2013).

The campaign for reinstatement included women's wrestling as one of its central themes. Lalovic demonstrated humility, rather than outrage in focusing on the needed changes. In an interview with Greek press he stated,

First we must clean our own backyard, by democratizing our federation, to introduce more women in governance. Then we improve our sport. We have voted a new constitution with at least one woman as a vice president, and will have a new athletes' commission formed, which along with the president should be chosen by their peers—that will be done on the occasion of the world championship of 2013” (Georgakopoulos & Spanea, July 26, 2013).

Natalia Yariguina of Russia was that woman named a vice president, and in rapid succession, there were more actions and events with women's wrestling at the center. These were summarized in a FILA press release by Robert Condrón (Condrón, 2014). On May 22, 2013, FILA announced the names of the five panelists that will participate in its presentation to the IOC executive board in St. Petersburg, Russia. In addition to Lalovic, there were four former wrestlers, two men and two women. The women were Carol Huynh, a Canadian wrestler who won a gold medal at the 2008 Olympics and a bronze in the 2012 Games, and Lise Legrand, vice president of the French Wrestling Federation and a bronze medal winner in the 2004 Olympics. On May 29, this panel helped wrestling win a spot in the final IOC vote along with squash and baseball-softball. The same five members of the presentation team would also represent FILA at the September 8 full IOC session in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

On May 31, women's teams from Canada, Ukraine, and the United States competed in Niagara Falls. Women's wrestling was highlighted in this impressive setting. Women wrestlers were also featured in July, when they competed at Olympia, Greece, in a senior international tournament. They made history as the first wrestlers to compete in the area since the end of the ancient Olympic Games era in 393 AD, as well as being the first ever female athletes to wrestle in ancient Olympia.

In August, FILA responded to the IOC's request for more gender equity by adding two weight classes to women's freestyle. The change, which comes at the expense of one weight class in men's freestyle and Greco-Roman, will go into effect for the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games. This results in six weight categories for each of the three wrestling styles—men's freestyle, women's freestyle, and Greco-Roman.

On September 8, 2013, the decision was made at the 125th session of the IOC in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to add wrestling to the Olympic program for 2020 and 2024. The full membership of the IOC voted on the 25 sports that will form the core for the 2020 and 2024 games following presentations from the competing sports for the single spot. Carol Huynh and Lise Legrand again made flawless and impassioned speeches as part of FILA's presentation (Condrón, 2013).

“I would like to offer my congratulations to the International Federation of Associated Wrestling Styles,” said IOC President Jacques Rogge. “Wrestling has shown great passion and resilience in the last few months. They have taken a number of steps to modernize and improve their sport, including the addition of more women and athletes in decision-making positions,” (IOC, September 8, 2013).

Later in September, at the world championships in Budapest, seven wrestlers were named to serve on the newly formed FILA Athlete Commission. The commission, which was part of the organization's commitment to involve athletes, included three women: Carol Huynh of Canada, Kaori Icho of Japan, and Maria Prevolaraki of Greece. On October 21, Huynh was elected chair of the athlete commission and would represent the sport's athletes on the FILA bureau. She became the third woman on the organization's governing body. The other women on the 26-member FILA bureau are Rodica Yaksi of Turkey and Natalia Yariguina of Russia (in September 2014 Marina Pellicone Marina of Italy was elected as a bureau member). The Women and Sport Commission was formed with Rodica Yaksi (Turkey) president, Omar Murtuzaliev (Russia) vice president, Sylvia Bakalova (Bulgaria), Lale Elmacioglu (Turkey), Lise Legrand (France), Esther Mangwende (Zimbabwe), Tamara Medwidsky (Canada), Yayoi Odagaki Urano (Japan), Ibrahim Sahin (Turkey), Tricia Saunders (United States), Stavroula Zygouri (Greece), and Dina Kharenko (Ukraine).

HALL OF FAME AND OTHER NOTABLE PERFORMERS

Women's wrestling has already added greatly to the history of our sport. Fourteen women have been inducted into the UWW Hall of Fame and are listed in Table 3. Saori Yosida and Kaori Icho of Japan are among the all-time icons of wrestling, both having won three Olympic titles.

We are seeing a great emergence of participants in the countries of South America and Africa who are without a great heritage in international wrestling. India is reemerging as a wrestling nation with both men and women gaining honors. The 2012 World Championships for Women included two medalists from India, signaling a welcome resurgence of wrestling in this country with such a vast population. The emergence of women's wrestling in South America is demonstrated by the two bronze medals earned by Renteria of Colombia. Another noteworthy achievement was Ifeoma Iheanacho of Nigeria winning a bronze medal in Women's Freestyle in 2010 in Moscow. Wrestler Annabelle Ali of Cameroon was the nation's first woman flagbearer at the opening ceremony. Three other women wrestlers given this extraordinary honor are Kyoko Hamaguchi of Japan in 2004, Maria McQueen Dunn of Guam, and Saori Yoshida of Japan, both in 2012.

TABLE 3 Women in the United World Wrestling Hall of Fame

<i>Year Inducted</i>	<i>Inductee</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Accomplishments</i>
2006	Christine Nordhagen	Canada	6× world champion
2007	Yayoi Urano	Japan	6× world champion
2008	Xiue Zhong	China	5× world champion
2008	Dong Feng Liu	China	5× world champion
2009	Shoko Yoshimura	Japan	5× world champion
2010	Anna Gomis	France	4× world champion and Olympic bronze
2010	Nikola Hartmann-Duenser	Austria	5× world champion
2011	Patricia Saunders	US	4× world champion
2012	Gudrun Hoeie	Norway	4× world champion
2013	Marianne Nobs	Switzerland	Official from 1988–2012
2013	Carol Huynh	Canada	Olympic gold and bronze
2013	Irina Merleni	Ukraine	3× world champion won the first Olympic gold medal
2014	Sara Eriksson	Sweden	2× world champion
2014	Lise Golliot-Legrand	France	2× world champion and Olympic bronze

THE ROLE OF JAPAN

Japan has been a dominant force in women's wrestling since 1989 when they won their first team world championship. Japan has had a world champion at every world championship since 1989 and has won the team championship 19 times. They have won 136 world championship medals (see Table 4).

A Japanese journalist who covers wrestling, Ikuo Higuchi, described the beginning of women's wrestling in Japan in the book *Born in Athens, Born to be in Athens: Past, Present and Future in Women's Wrestling* (Sugiyama and Miwa, 2000). It was at the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles that they first heard of the existence of women's wrestling in France and northern Europe. Tomiaki Fukuda, a former world champion wrestler and a leader in the Japanese Wrestling Federation proposed that Japan take up women's wrestling (Fukuda has been a bureau member and is presently president of the Japanese Wrestling Federation) Their first efforts utilized former judo athletes and were not successful; however following these initial setbacks, they began training women in wrestling exclusively, and in 1986 "national trials" were held to send a team to the women's world wrestling festival in Belgium. In June 1987, the first women's national championships were held and a team was sent to the first world championships in Norway with unspectacular results. The spread and development of women's wrestling showed continued progress under coach Shigeo Kinase, and by the second world championships in Switzerland in 1989, Shoko Yoshimura and Miyako Shimizu won titles with the team winning five additional medals. The current coach is Kazuhito Sakae.

BARRIERS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND ADVOCATES

As the growth of women's sports has progressed, we are finding that there are more similarities in the sports training and performance between men and women than there are

TABLE 4 World Championship Medal Winners by Country

<i>Country</i>	<i>Gold</i>	<i>Silver</i>	<i>Bronze</i>	<i>Total</i>
Japan	74	32	30	136
United States	12	29	22	63
Russian Federation	4	24	32	60
China	24	15	20	59
France	22	15	14	51
Norway	11	12	20	43
Canada	10	12	17	39
Sweden	5	8	14	27
Ukraine	8	4	14	26
Mongolia	2	5	10	17
Germany	2	4	10	16
Poland	2	4	7	13
Taipei	1	5	6	12
Venezuela	3	4	5	12
Azerbaijan	2	4	5	11
Bulgaria	5	3	3	11
Belarus	1	3	5	9
Kazakhstan		4	5	9
Austria	5	1		6
Korea, People's Republic of		1	4	5
Hungary	1	2	2	5
Greece	1		2	3
India			3	3
Denmark		1	1	2
Italy		1	1	2
Latvia			2	2
Nigeria			2	2
Spain			2	2
Argentina			1	1
Belgium	1			1
Brazil		1		1
Czech Republic			1	1
Great Britain			1	1
Korea, Republic of		1		1
Netherlands		1		1
Puerto Rico			1	1
Soviet Union			1	1
Switzerland			1	1
Turkey			1	1

differences. Women from all around the world wrestle and aspire to train and develop as athletes to compete at the highest level. Wrestling has the opportunity to grow even more, but it needs advocates to build in areas not yet exposed to wrestling. Barriers that keep women away from sports must be eliminated. UWW must work to solve the problems some Muslim women face in order to access wrestling. This could possibly mean a change in the rules regarding the uniform, to allow for a head covering and a looser garment around the torso. The history of women's wrestling is trending up.

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