



Commentary POSITION OF WRESTLING IN MODERN REALITIES

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Published online: June 2019.

To cite this article:

Christos Kollias (2019) Commentary
POSITION OF WRESTLING IN MODERN REALITIES.
International Journal of Wrestling Science, 9:1, 29-33.



INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF WRESTLING RESEARCHERS (INWR)

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POSITION OF WRESTLING IN MODERN REALITIES

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I have been committed to wrestling for more than fifty years, on both practical and theoretical levels. I was a member of the national team, belonged to the national coaching team as well as professor of the chair of wrestling at the University of Athens. From all this long commitment with Olympic wrestling and the perennial tradition found here in the country where it was born, I believe, gives us the special opportunity to contribute to its redevelopment, so that it can acquire the position which it used to have in Ancient Greece, and that it deserves today as the crown of sports.

The potentials of this sport are enormous, as I hope to establish based on my arguments I will develop further below. Wrestling is not just a sport, as the definition has inappropriately been prevailed. It was and continues to be one of the best pedagogical means for the perfection of the individual's personality. Its pedagogical role was underscored and promoted by the late President of the International Wrestling Federation (FILA) Milan Ercegan in many of his writings.

Wrestling is not a martial art like the eastern-type duel sports which are indispensably connected with the central religious target of the Asian culture as far as Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism are concerned. In other words, the accomplishment of the human divineness in an inefficient and arbitrary way, relative to the "as gods you shall be" quotation, mentioned by the Serpent in the Holy Bible, and not in a way with which western societies have been raised. The original disposition of many Asian martial arts teachers was to have the secrets of self-divining "wisdom" unattainable for other cultures. However, the defeat of Japan during the Second World War obliged the country to include the "athletification" of martial arts in part, and their conversion into an exported good, under "Japan's new beginning as a pacifying nation". At the same time, the prevalence of the communistic regimen in China made a lot of martial arts teachers to resort to other adjacent or and western countries, where they came in contact with many thirsty-for-wisdom –and-strength Westerners. The inevitable ending was the expansion of teaching to Westerners, for livelihood reasons, or even for "missionary" reasons.

Athletic wrestling, as a fundamental cultural component of Western civilization, reacted to this attack passively. As a result, millions of young people flock to Judo, Taekwondo classes, etc. and are nurtured under principles totally opposed to those of the Greek-Orthodox traditions of the Western world. Duel sports of eastern origin virtually represent the eastern, static kind of philosophy. It is not incidental that so many by-product religions "fish" followers through martial arts schools or provide classes of "self-defense techniques".

The "vehicle" of martial arts has the advantage to be covered under the face of athleticism, offering not only some kind of physical education, but also placing the individual in some procedures with clear religious meaning, without his being able to understand. One such procedure is the bowing-greeting of the trainees honoring the picture-photo of the master, who is supposed to be spiritually present, checking and "protecting" the trainees with their spiritual power, either from kilometers away or from the "other world" (of the divined teachers).

I believe that the problem of wrestling is basically philosophical. Wrestling today has no philosophy. It's development has been one-sided. It improved spectacularly only the on technical side in a systematic-searching way. Most of the expert scientists and coaches are in an unperceptive way, only committed to the performance, and neglected the enormous, historical and philosophical background of the sport and its pedagogical value.

Argumentation Thesis Is wrestling indeed an awe-inspiring sport?

In order to give a well-documented response, we must go back in time, a lot, almost at the beginning of the universe. According to Heraclitus, the cosmos is unique and everlasting. The two elements that define its existence are the perpetual change and the constant battle and unity of the opposites. This phenomenon is referred to by Heraclitus as "enantiodromia" (=opposite running course) or "enantiotropia" (=opposite way) and he describes it as: "like a wrestling battle during which the one wrestler prevails at one time and the other at the other".

The Theology of ancient Greeks (for us today the Greek Mythology) teems with heroic individuals with a talent in wrestling like Zeus, Theseas, Odysseus, Pileas etc. The theological symbolism of this athletic activity is more

than ancient and one of its distinctive versions is the fable that deals with Pileas' fight and the goddess Thetis, during which fight, the goddess transformed into different monsters in order to ambush Pileas. He, after being advised by the gods, restrains the beautiful goddess by using a special hold around her waist and she returns to her original form, and finally succumbs to Pileas' erotic impulse. From this union, Achilles is born, the bravest fighter and Hero of the Trojan War. The symbolization of Pileas' fight along with Thetis' successive transformations into wild animals represents the wrestling of the Noble Man with his primitive and brutal instincts.



The above mentioned symbolization of Hold – Wrestling between Pileas and Thetis is imprinted artistically on the symbol of Meandrous, which is the most recognizable and used in the Ancient Greek Aesthetics of Art. The etymology of the word Meandrous (Maia + Andras) along with the symbol of Meandrous constitute an excellent sample of the Ancient Greek occultism and of the coded message of how Men should be born.

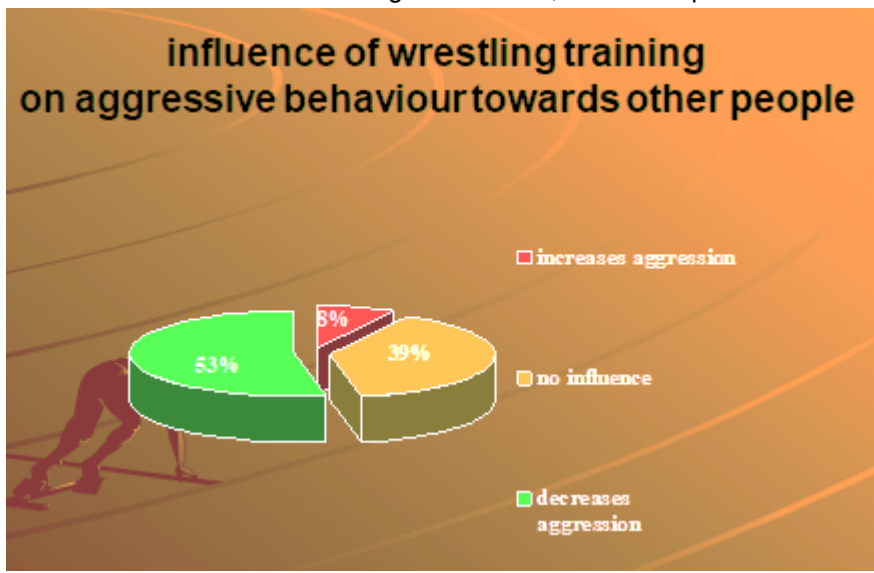


Every living organism is equipped with adapting mechanisms so as to be able to survive and to be able to sustain the abrupt changes of the environment. The same goes for man who, whenever confronts abrupt changes in his surroundings, either natural or psycho-intellectual ones, is said to be in a stressed condition. His adapting mechanisms are automatically activated and, as a result, we have: an increase in his pulse rate, an increase in his blood pressure, an increase in his respiration rate, a decrease in the capillary vessels' breadth, iridescence (the enlargement of the iris of the eye) sweating, limbs freeze, etc. These natural alterations have as a goal to prepare the human organism to come up against the imminent danger. The danger is confronted with two ways: either leaving or fighting. Man has always been meeting this dilemma throughout his lifetime: either to leave or fight.

This necessity is symbolized in the two basic sports in Olympia: Running and Wrestling (both of which took place for about 1200 years). These two sports symbols are the pillars of the Athletic Ideal, which, as one of the basic parameters (along with the other two Knowledge and Art), gave the strength to the Greek people to understand the classic meaning of life.

Wrestling depicts the perpetual confrontation of the opposites that compose Existence. In Ancient Olympia, the ring (the threshing floor, the open space where the fight of wrestling was carried out) is the Man himself, inside whom the eternal battle between good and evil, between spirit and matter, between the desiring (instinctive) and the logical parts of the soul

(according to Plato), between obligation and passion. The spectators and the athletes receive the mystic influence of this sport-symbol. Its intellect and the good sportsmanship are becoming little by little a second nature and offer man the capability and the strength that are required for great achievements in life. In other words, what an athlete does on the ring and what the spectators amazingly watch is the battle of the hero-man to combat his brutal nature. He sets human malignity on fire and reshapes Violence into Intellectual Merit. One of the



basic human instincts is the instinct of aggressiveness. In his effort to protect himself from this incredible instinct, the individual uses a defensive mechanism that is called TRANSUBSTANTIATION or IDEALISATION. With the activity of GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP, the man transubstantiates the aggressiveness into higher intellectual function, creating in this way the concept of IDEAL. The general human need for prominence and for prevalence

goes through our battle to defeat ourselves, in the first place, by making it better. The conquest of VICTORY seems to be impossible on our "interior" ring. And this common opponent is everyone's body, their restrictions and their stamina that are pushed to the limits by this enduring human passion. Whenever the face of this winged goddess (VICTORY) came between two people, the other's existence came to a halt and the collision became exhausting, with the swords in the old times and in the contemporary ones with the invisible blades of hypocrisy and of persiflage. Using "all the means", the man became cunning in order to achieve his goal and the society became sick. Until one day, ATHLETICISM and a great sport were born, which Philostratos praises: "Hermes's daughter, Ring, invented Wrestling and the whole earth celebrates for this discovery, because the iron, war weapons will be thrown far away from the hands of men and the stadiums will gain sweeter glory than the warlike military camps; and men will compete naked".

Every civilization of the global history includes the sport of wrestling as a mean of amusement or as a mean of practice for self-defense. Where, though, Wrestling appears for the first time as a SPORT (means of people's education) is the Revered location of Ancient Olympia and the special Civilization of the Ancient Greeks.

The greatest philosopher of all times, Socrates, wrestles until the age of 60 on the ring in Kynosagros, "not to become an Olympian Games winner", as he says. "But because wrestling exercises in proportion both arms and legs". Of course, the great philosopher does not only mean the arms and the legs of the body. Besides, he himself considers the body as the grave of the soul, because, according to Cratylus or according to words accuracy theory, the word grave (TAFOS) means the end or the stop of the light (TELOS / END + FAOS) where FAOS means light. He thinks that the enlightened soul is trapped inside our body throughout our lifetime. He means that he "struggles" to find the equilibrium between matter (legs) and spirit (arms), body and soul (he does not do fitness).

That's why the **Greco-Roman wrestling** is an artificially constructed sport-symbol that was devised by French intellectual people in the 18th century and was named "Greek-Roman" to honor the Greek-Roman spirit and culture, and its regulations are in such a way fashioned so that it can forbid the wrestler to use the lower part of his body (legs) to defend or to attack. It allows holds only above the waist to drop the opponent down or to immobilize him on the ground. Virtually, this sport represents the intellectual prevalence (holds only over the waist) over matter (the banning of legs' use). It also has enormous symbolic and educational value since the athlete can prevail over his opponent in a noble way, without using savage and painful holds that hurt and humiliate the opponent, like it is used to happening in other martial sports (particularly of eastern origin). It is



considered to be the kindest amongst Olympic and non-Olympic forms of self-defense (Kalina, 2000), as exactly the Greek-Roman spirit dominated over the instinctive part of humanity.

According to Pindar, "Theseus invented wrestling with hands, Kerkyon invented wrestling with legs" (Kerkyon was a mythical thief who strangled the passers-by in Elefsina, who was killed by Theseus after fighting with him, and represents the materialistic cares that suffocate the man).

The historic Histros reports that "the goddess Athina taught Theseus wrestling". This kind of symbolization means the man's

venture to prevail over Nature and Environment without causing any detrimental effects on it. And this constitutes the Greatest Pedagogical Virtue and one of the timeless purposes of Athleticism.

Philostratos, so as to point out the utility of wrestling in war, writes that the war achievement in Marathonas (Athenians against Persians 490 B.C.) was almost a battle of wrestling. In Thermopyles (Leonidas with his 300 against Persians in 480 B.C.), the Spartans, when their swords and spears broke, they stroke their enemies with bare hands without any weapons.

Plato characterizes wrestling as “the most technical and most cunning sport of all”. Plenty of distinguished politicians, philosophers, authors, scientists, painters etc used to exercise through different forms of wrestling with the view to improving their health and to developing strong will, suggesting it at the same time as an activity of great educational importance for kids. We refer to some of them: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras, Avicenne, Albrecht Durer, Lomonosof, Al.Pushkin, Garibaldi, F.Saliapin, Norbert Winner, G.Washington, B. Franklin, A.Lincoln, L.N.Tolstoy, J.B.Tito, V. Putin and many others.



The geneticist Norman Borlaug used to be a wrestler. He decided to devote his life to the extermination of hunger via the improvement of wheat production. In 1970 he was presented with the Nobel Prize! He was considered to have been as “the best human ever lived” because he saved over one billion people! He stated that “wrestling taught me to be stable against the powerful of this world; to be strong to confront every difficulty. Many a time I needed this strength”!

Another example is the following. Some years ago, the plane controlled by a Georgian pilot, crashed into the North Sea. The pilot fell off wearing a parachute in a lifeboat. He spent three days struggling against the cold waves, paddling with his bare arms towards the shore. His frozen skin was cut; so, in the end he was paddling with “his bare bones”. Three days later, he was rescued. When he got out of the hospital, the first question made to him by the reporters was: “How did you manage to survive?” “I used to be a wrestler” the pilot just replied.

Humans, since the time when they used to live on trees and inside caves, have never stopped playing as long as we exist as a species. On the contrary, athleticism is not an instinctive function, but it is a cultural manifestation, exclusively human, with the view to reaching idealization. Play aims to the relief of aggressiveness. In conclusion, athleticism does not have to do with playing, whose purpose is different.

Under philosophical perspective, the issue is more profound. A more careful approach to the meaning of “Athleticism” that has a premise the word “ATHLOS” (which means ACHIEVEMENT = KATORTHOMA, from KATO ORTHONOMAI = THE BOTTOM I RISE and requires labor and fight) demonstrates that the wise greek language uses exactly the same letters and for the word LATHOS (mistake). In other words, through achievement (KATORTHOMA, ATHLOS) the Athlete – Hero corrects his mistake (LATHOS), which he allowed him to be knocked over by his instinct and his animal nature, and he transforms it into an Idea; namely, into intellectual value, and by extension, into culture

ΑΘΛΗΤΙΣΜΟΣ = ΑΘΛΟΣ – ΛΑΘΟΣ
ATHLETISMOS = ATHLOS – LATHOS

How right Verner Heizenberg was: “My tenure in the ancient greek language has been my most important mental exercise. In this language, there is the ultimate matching between the word and its semantic content”.

Because Wrestling is not Playing, it is not entertainment. It is not even a sport. The word “sport”, according to the French dictionary mentions that this word was born in England in 1828 and comes from “desport”, which means enjoying oneself, letting off steam, having a great time. It was established in every country (was globalised), but it renders a totally different meaning. Entertainment (=diaskedasi) comes from the verb ‘entertain’ (diaskedamimi) and means “disperse”. Besides, when psychological pleasure comes from activities of an upper intellectual field (e.g. fine arts, athleticism etc.), then we talk about AMUSEMENT. A word that means the education of the soul from works of high ethical value, which teach and instruct the man, in contrast with the word ENTERTAINMENT that is nothing more than the superficial employment with everything that repels concerns and difficulties; namely, this that in one word is said “spend my time carefree”.

Wrestling is a sport. It is more than just a sport. It is participation, a mystic meeting with the “celestial virtue” that we all hide deep within the core of our existence. IT IS THE PASSAGE TO TRUTH according to Plato’s Cratylus:

PALI = P (YLI) + ALI (THEIA)
WRESTLING = GATE + TRUTH

“The Greek Language, with its mathematical structure, is the language of information technology and of the new generation of developed computers, because only in it there are no limits” (Bill Gates, Microsoft).

That's why the term "PALI (=Wrestling)" should automatically be established internationally, like the terms JUDO, BASKETBALL, BOXING, TAE KWO DO have already been established in the world over. Because, based on scientific documentation, in no other sport there is such deep linguistic and philosophical origin of a corresponding term that defines the sport. In most sports, the terms (words) that define these sports, are semantic, whereas the Greek term "pali" is conceptual.

I have tried to describe telegraphically the philosophical and historical background of our sport, as well as and its great pedagogical contribution that it has to the modern acquisitive society. I welcome continued dialogue on this subject.