

# Wrestling – antique lineage of modern form of combat sports

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## Abstract

In Ancient Greece, agonistics was supported by philosophy and science's arguments, ethical regulations, ideological and political rights and religious norms. Each of these forms of collective consciousness emphasized various qualities of physical culture, it even obliged to care for physical efficiency. Widespread intellectual and emotional acceptance made sport an attribute of Hellenic lifestyle: naked, gleaming with olive oil, well-build body distinguished Greek from barbarian, as much as language and religion. Heracles is a mythical patron of wrestling, and sportsmen who were successful in wrestling and pankration were called "ones from Heracles". Pausanias states that "Theseus discovered the art of Wrestling" because he conquered Kerkuon thanks to his intelligence. Kalina made the research of philosophical-humanistic aspects of combat sports and martial arts influence on modern society, by formulating rules of theory of combat sports (assuming that: "every combat sport is martial arts but not vice versa"). Empirical rationale of cognitive-behavioural prophylactic and therapeutic agonology (innovative agonology) were developed by Kalina.

From the young people's interest in physical education point of view, wrestling – as a gentle form of combat (being also form of self-defence) – seems to be ideal way of influencing. Teachers, using entertaining elements of wrestling matches during physical education classes, have enormous educational opportunities. Implementing adherence to these basic rules of fight ethic – especially in relation to newcomers – as well as introducing and forming young adepts with regard to such values, like courage, well-established pride, fidelity, loyalty, and above all honour, should determine one of main goals of educational and instructional work for teachers and coaches.

**Keywords:** antic wrestling • innovative agonology • martial arts • theory of combat sports

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## INTRODUCTION

**Palé (πάλη)** – Greek word defining wrestling fight, according to Plato it literally means „passing through gate to truth”. PALE – where P means (YLI) + ALE means (THEIA); so WRESTLING = GATE + TRUTH.

**Tactics** – plural noun the art of finding and implementing means to achieve immediate or short-term aims [33].

**Technique** – noun a way of performing an action [33].

**Pentathlon** noun 1. Same as modern pentathlon 2. an athletics competition in which the contestants compete in five different events, usually sprint, hurdles, long jump, discus and javelin. ⇒ **triathlon, heptathlon, decathlon** [33].

**Aggression** (in praxeology) – is to initiate destructive fight or move in a verbal dispute from material arguments to those causing distress to the opponent [34].

**Aggressiveness** – a human characteristic manifesting itself in inclinations to hurt others, to destructive behaviour.  
**Aggressive** = virulent, truculent, attacking [34].

**Praxiology (praxeology)** – science about good work. *A Treatise on Good Work*, a fundamental lecture of praxiology by T. Kotarbinski (the first edition in 1955) has been translated into majority of the so-called congress languages (English, German, Russian) and as well: Czech, Japanese, and Serbo-Croatian.

**Bravery** – means efficiency in good deeds, efficiency combined with estimable aspirations [34, 35].

**Courage** – a skill in a fair matter. In the case of courage to a praxiological evaluation one adds the moral evaluation [34, p. 59].

Plato determines wrestling as “the most technical and cunning sport of all”. Since ancient times, a lot of remarkable philosophers, authors, scientists, painters etc. practiced various forms of wrestling in order to improve their health, and to develop their willpower, suggesting it simultaneously as activity which has a high educational meaning for children.

According to Heraclitus, cosmos is exceptional and endless. Two elements, which determine its existence, are constant changing and unity of opposites. Heraclitus determines this phenomenon as “enantiodromia” (counter course) or “enantiotropia” (opposite) and describes as: “wrestling fight, in which one wrestler wins at the same time, and other wrestler wins at different time” [1, 2].

In Ancient Greece, agonistics was supported by philosophy and science's arguments, ethical regulations, ideological and political rights and religious norms. Each of these forms of collective consciousness emphasized various qualities of physical culture, it even obliged to care for physical efficiency. Widespread intellectual and emotional acceptance made sport an attribute of Hellenic lifestyle: naked, gleaming with olive oil, well-build body distinguished Greek from barbarian, as much as language and religion.

### Greek mythology

Greek mythology is full of heroic individuals who were good in wrestling, such as Zeus, Theseus and Odysseus. According to Philostratus, first „sportsmen” who created old sports training, were in fact Greek mythical heroes – Peleus, Theseus and Heracles. From sporty point of view, each of these characters is famous for its wrestling skills. Heracles is a mythical patron of wrestling, and sportsmen who were successful in wrestling and pankration were called “ones from Heracles”. However, despite Heracles' close links with wrestling, Pausanias states that “Theseus discovered the art of Wrestling” because he conquered Kerkuon thanks to his intelligence. Therefore Pausanias points Theseus as father of wrestling and defining wrestling training as a knowledge [3, 4].

Theological imagery of this sports activity is more than ancient, and one of its characteristic versions is story, which concerns the fight between Peleus and goddess Thetis. The goddess, in order

to win the fight, took shape of ancient monsters, for the sake of attacking Peleus. After receiving advice from Gods, Peleus stops beautiful goddess by the use of special grip around her waist, which transformed Thetis into her original form, and at the end she succumbed to Peleus' erotic impulse. From this relationship Achilles is born, the bravest warrior and hero of the Trojan War. Symbolic meaning of Peleus' fight with Thetis' transformations represents the fight between Noble Men and this primitive and brutal instincts [2].

History proves, that human was interested in various aspects of fight which consists of direct clash of sides (hand-to-hand fight). Signs of descriptions of earliest Olympic Games, in which wrestling fight belonged to dominant elements, can be found in “Iliad”, where the main character – Achilles – organized Olympic Games during the funeral of his friend Patroclus. The bloom of idea of Olympic Games occurred in ancient Greece, where the most appreciated competition was pentathlon, which introduced into Olympic Games programme in 708 B.C. Wrestling was the most important element of pentathlon. The winner of pentathlon was chosen probably through the multiple eliminations – in order to win, one of participants had to win in at least three out of five competitions, including wrestling. The winners of wrestling competition were specially notorious for their achievement, and their performances were told as legends. The most famous wrestler from Olympic Games was Milon of Croton, who supposedly lifted 4-year-old bull, killed him with a one punch, and then ate it in one day.

Philostratos, in order to point out the usefulness of wrestling in war, wrote that military achievement in Marathon (citizens of Athens versus Persians, 490 B.C.) was practically a big wrestling fight. In Thermopylae (Leonidas with his three hundred warriors versus Persians, 480 B.C.) Spartans, when their swords and spears were broken, fought their enemies with bare hands [5].

From 688 B.C., there was another combat sports added to Olympic Games programme – fist fight. Fighters wrapped their hands with soft, leather hand covers, and they had to fight until they defeat their opponent. Famous Melancomas of Caria (first century of C.E.) was able to win fights without throwing punches, but leading his opponents to exhaustion. The most brutal competition of earliest Olympic Games was pankration (a kind

of combination of box and wrestling). Fights of pankration's often ended with mutilation, or even with death of one of participants, nevertheless, or maybe thanks to it, Greeks loved it.

The evidence of extreme fascination of fist fights, dominated with most brutal forms, including killing of one of fighters, are gladiators fights in Rome. In the consciousness of many people, gladiators fights in the areas of ancient Rome are associated with sport, or rather with its abomination. Gladiators were recruited mostly from prisoners of war, slaves, over time criminals convicted of murder started to appear in the arena [6-9].

Even though we are the inheritors and continuators of Greek culture, sometimes we are still having doubts, which are born as a result of untranslatability of some situations, phenomena, or even concepts on current conditions. They are significantly lower than in case of exotic Far Eastern civilizations.

Modern physical culture offers comprehensive, relatively well-structured set of values, patterns and views, which describes, evaluates and indicates main functions and tasks of this system, and also methods and measures of realization of desired objectives. System, which we call ideology of physical culture, is theoretical basis of activity, sanctions existing standards, formulates directives, and motivates society to desired behaviours.

Contemporary forms of combat sports and martial arts are being constantly changed and modified, new ways of rivalry are being created, which are more or less popular. Undoubtedly, some examples of such forms are MMA (mixed martial arts), pride, K1 etc. Elements of wrestling techniques form an essential part of activities used in these sports. Terms which determine fight tactics according to fighter's nature of activities (catcher or ground floorer) also appear there. In this environment, the ability to apply such elements is highly valued [10].

Sports form of wrestling is a part of many propositions, however uniqueness of this form consists of combining its ancient beginnings with modern requirements of contemporary culture.

In light of global demoralization, moral decay and increase in aggressive behaviours, especially among children and young people, the task

becomes extremely hard to achieve, but simultaneously very important. Extensive research indicates clear positive impact of practicing combat sports on reduction in aggressive behaviours [11].

Wrestling, in its essence, can also be a reason of reduction in aggressive behaviours, thanks to direct combat in wrestling fights. Complexity of that sort of interactions leads many researchers to carry out more detailed analysis. It has to be noted, that aggressiveness is not a stable characteristic, and it is not possible to specify distinction between woman and man in similar age, with similar work qualifications and socio-occupational activity. Circumstances of fierce interpersonal conflict have significant impact on exposure or damping of aggression.

Empirical rationale of prophylactic and therapeutic innovative agonology were developed by Kalina. He defined two main phenomena – bravery/courage and aggression – which are related to functioning of person in situations which involve interpersonal aggression on micro level, as well as potential lack of action, indicating flexibility of necessary treatment and prophylaxis [12-14].

Referencing the term "ideology" to such specific sphere of human activity like physical culture can raise certain objections. There is no doubt that theoretical grounds of physical culture functioned and are still realistically functioning, and its existence is essential condition of development of physical education, sports and recreation. Physical activity itself, is not an activity which leads to overall human development, it gains significance and meaning only when it is combined with social, political and cultural background. Moreover, nowadays a lot is being said not only about physical culture ideology as a whole, but also – thanks to polarization of its individual components – about physical culture as a ideology of sports, physical education and recreation [3].

The problem of wrestling may therefore have philosophical character. This suggests the question – does wrestling does not have a philosophy nowadays? Does contemporary forms of sport are somehow condemned to one-sided development focused only on achieving sports success? Essence of rivalry in sports depends on direct competition between two competing sportsmen, whereby it relates to disciplines, which are

organized in national and international sports organizations, which run tournaments and players (athletes) classification [15].

Enormous progress in training technology is noticeable, which elements are being specified, in order to lead to the best player's sports form at specific time, or even day. Spectacular development has occurred, but unfortunately only on the technical side [16, 17].

Kalina made the research of philosophical-humanistic aspects of sports and martial arts influence on modern society, by formulating rules of empirical theory of combat sports [15].

His classification of combat sports, which took cognisance of acceptable ways of interacting with opponent's body, puts wrestling in group of disciplines with subtle form of used technical activities, using throws and holding tight opponent's moves. So, accepting basic principles of contemporary theory of combat sports and its ancient references, wrestling sport for sure finds its place in group of combat sports. However, currently the most important question is: can wrestling meet criteria of combat sports identification suggested by Kalina?

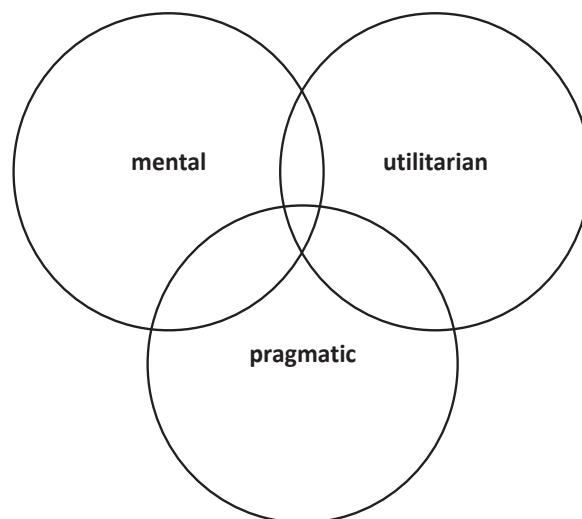
Three main groups of combat sports identification suggested by the author are: pragmatic, functional and mentally equal with pointing out criteria of these sports' identity (Figure 1). These

complex factors determine the identity of combat sports together (cf. wrestling), which in practice indicates the possibility optimal, biological, mental and moral development of human.

Scientific studies have shown that in Poland, young people are interested in doing combat sports and martial arts. For 40 per cent practitioners, the theme which encouraged them to take up these disciplines was tendency to develop theirs physical efficiency, and for 35 per cent of them – prospect of learning some fighting skills (as well as development of special skills with clearly utilitarian character) [18]. However, current opinion on motives behind doing combat sports and martial arts is wrongly associated with ability to fist fight. It is partially justified, because fight between two men, who demonstrate incredible effectiveness of actions taken, is basic form of encouraging people to taking up such kind of activity (it can be seen on street posters, martial arts demonstrations, TV reports and various action movies).

Scientific research indicates, that most of experts, scientists, and coaches works in unobservant way, by targeting only on show, neglecting enormous historic and philosophical background of this sport, and its pedagogical value [19, 20].

However, the power of impact of combat sports' elements on practicing people becomes more distinct mostly in physical prowess sphere, moral



**Figure 1.** Factors which determine the specific sports of fight identity as criterions of identification of these sports [15].

values, self-esteem, as well as "holiness", including "religious holiness". The diversity of this impact in relation to men and women is noticeable. For women, aesthetical values and truth is more important than for men [21, 22].

### Wrestling as preparation for self-defence

The possibility of using wrestling as a way of self-defences proves its utilitarian character, but keep in mind that it is classified as relatively mild form of defence (Figure 2). Main use of wrestling elements as a form of self-defences, due to the way of using techniques in training conditions, consisting in capturing and limiting opponents' moves, guarantees such mil form of self-defences in non-sport confrontation.

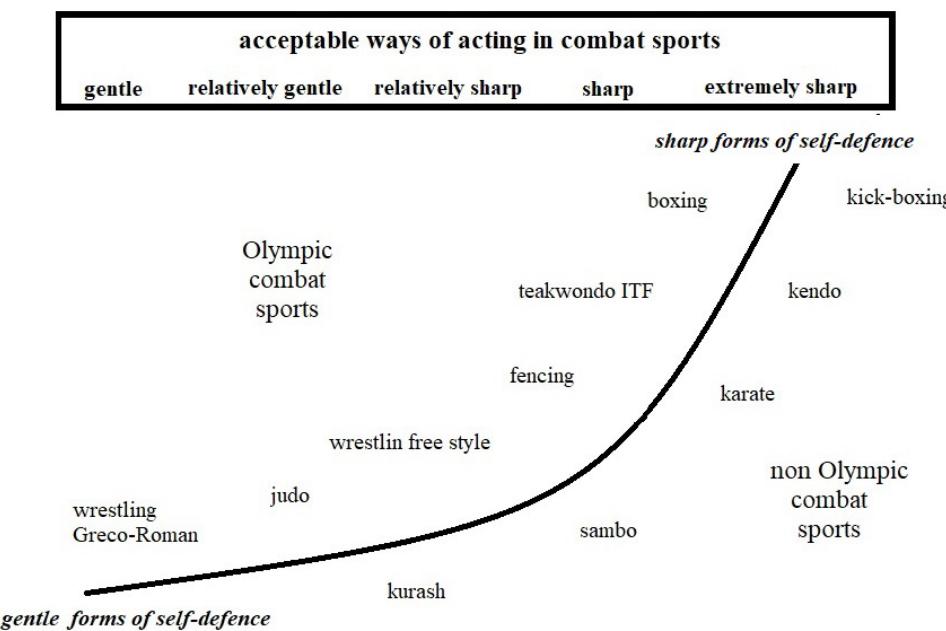
Undoubtedly, self-defence is often associated with some kind of combat operations of nation. Typically, eclectic attitude is applied while designing self-defence systems. It means, that they come from different types of martial arts, combat sports and other sports disciplines. Simultaneously, they have to be flexible, to meet all individual requirements, in accordance with their physicality, characteristic features and psychologically. In reality, the way of its application is much more important than the technique itself [23, 24].

In essence, self-defence training can be realized on only by able-bodied people, implemented scientific publications make it possible also for disabled people [25]. Self-defence training develops mental toughness, boosts self-esteem and confidence, and generally leads to changes in life attitudes. Mental toughness and body posture can also be improved by doing combat sports and martial arts [26, 27].

Physical education, especially self-defence training and many extreme forms of physical activity (including combat sports) is an integral part of defensive education [28-30].

With a high degree of possibility it can be accepted, that average advanced wrestler is going to apply similar technical and tactical solutions during wrestling fights on tournaments or during trainings, as in case of non-sport fight. The fact of using delicate forms of self-defence (such as hip headlock throw or arm throw) in such cases, would constitute a protection against possible legal consequences for exceeding required intervention [23].

European Wrestling Championships 1984, which took place in Jonkoping, Sweden, are famous not only for the silver medal for Poland, won by Jan



**Figure 2.** Permissible ways practising in sports of fight and report of probability of using them by athletes during a defensive fight (not athletic confrontation) [15].

Szymański. During the tournament, the coach of Polish national team, Stanisław Krześniński, single-handedly stopped and overpowered an armed hostile, who breached onto wrestling mat.

During tournament in Jonkoping, Sweden, during a wrestling match, a man with a suit entered the wrestling mat, pulled out a gun and threatened that he is going to shoot. In addition, he had a bag, which according to him had a bomb inside. When the hostile started to wave his gun, most of people started to run away, but not everyone was scared of him. Stanisław Krześniński, the coach of Polish national team, went on the hostile and crippled him, by using wrestling holds. The hostile got quickly handcuffed and taken by the police.

Positive character of combat sports' influence is also noticed other sports disciplines. Application of combat sports and martial arts as an complementary element of proper training is becoming more common. Such activities are effect of searching for new stimuli triggering additional capabilities of athletes, and consequently raising theirs sports level [31, 32].

## CONCLUSIONS

From the young people's interest in physical education point of view, wrestling – as a gentle form of combat (being also form of self-defence) – seems to be ideal way of influencing. Fact, that sports disciplines regulations forbid using all punches (in contrast to such sports disciplines like box, kick-boxing or karate), triangulation or using joint lock (like in judo or aikido), causes that such activities can be, or even should be introduced already at primary school level.

Teachers, using entertaining elements of wrestling matches during physical education classes, have enormous educational opportunities. It should be pointed out, that achieving such effect is only possible, when teachers also introduce rules of fair and noble fighting and respecting moral code.

Implementing adherence to these basic rules of fight ethic – especially in relation to newcomers – as well as introducing and forming young adepts with regard to such values, like courage, well-established pride, fidelity, loyalty, and above all honour, should determine one of main goals of educational and instructional work for teachers and coaches.

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