



Exclusive: Wrestling boosts out-of-competition testing as survival priority accelerates pace of change

Saturday, 20 July 2013

By David Owen in Olympia



July 20 - Nenad Lalovic, President of the International Federation of Associated Wrestling Styles (FILA), has authorised a sharp increase in the budget for out-of-competition anti-doping tests, as the sport presses on with a period of rapid change in an effort eventually to reclaim its status as an Olympic core sport.

"I raised the budget for out of competition tests by five times," Lalovic, interviewed here in the cradle of the Olympic Movement where an international wrestling event is taking place told *insidethegames*.

"It is now €100,000 (£86,000/\$131,000."

Although doping in wrestling is what he termed "a very moderate problem", he explained his organisation "would like it to be even smaller".

Lalovic also intimated that he might resign if wrestling does not win a place on the 2020 Olympic programme, against competition from squash and baseball-softball, when International Olympic Committee (IOC) members vote on the matter on September 8 in Buenos Aires.

"I will reconsider my position if wrestling doesn't pass," he said.

"We cannot afford to lose our Olympic position because we would be killing our athletes' dreams.

"The dream of every wrestler is the Olympics because from ancient times this was the main goal of every wrestler."



Wrestling will learn its Olympic fate later on this year at the 125th IOC Session

The long-term aim, he emphasised, was to "get back as a core sport".

Lalovic, who took over as FILA President this year after wrestling was dropped from the list of 25 Summer Olympic core sports, will face re-election in any event in Tashkent in September 2014.

This rather shocking move by the IOC, which sets so much store by the Movement's unique near-3,000-year history, has galvanised wrestling into a burst of activity – not least the installation of a new leader – in a bid to save the Olympic place it has held for so long.

Other changes that have already been, or may soon be, made include a higher proportion of women's events at the Olympics; the adoption of measures to help non-specialists to distinguish between male Greco-Roman and freestyle wrestlers; changing the colour of wrestling mats from the usual yellow, as part of a drive, in consultation with broadcast experts to improve the sport's visual impact; and adjusting the rules so as to encourage more exciting matches.

Lalovic alludes to a game of "cat and mouse" between coaches and regulators.

"Coaches want their athletes to win without taking risks; we want them to take competitive risks because it makes the sport more spectacular for the spectator," he says.

"We want wrestlers to stay on their feet, so we awarded higher point levels to standing techniques."

He also explained the reasoning behind a change in format from three two-minute rounds to two of three minutes.

"Different techniques cannot be developed in two minutes, especially in Greco-Roman wrestling," he told me.

"The better wrestler needs more time to show his technical superiority."

Talking to this direct 55-year-old Serbian construction executive and importer of Suzuki motorcars, who got involved in the sport when his son became a wrestler, you get a clear sense that this is just the beginning.

"Everything is open," he says.

"This is not the Bible we wrote.

"We are ready to change as often as needed to have in a few years a very spectacular sport."



Nenad Lalovic was officially elected as the new President of FILA in May

While it is doubtless true that there are, for now, more pressing issues on the sport's agenda, Lalovic does not rule out the eventual reintroduction of Greco-Roman matches for women.

Explaining that it was felt when this was tried before in the past that "Greco-Roman wrestling might be too dangerous for the physiology of women", he acknowledges: "I don't have the courage to assume the responsibility to bring women

back immediately."

He gives me to understand, however, that a new study of the concept might be undertaken once wrestling's immediate storm has subsided.

Given Lalovic's relaxed demeanour – which conceals, nonetheless, a sharp, practical mind – I think it is even possible that the days of the bright yellow ties sported in Olympia by the match referees might be numbered.

First, though, comes the serious business of getting the sport onto that 2020 Olympic programme.