

THE DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF NATIONAL AND BELT WRESTLING

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Abstract. National wrestling and belt wrestling are traditional forms of combat sports that have deep roots in various cultures and civilizations. These forms of wrestling have evolved over centuries, serving not only as a means of physical contest but also as a reflection of cultural identity, values, and social cohesion. This article examines the historical development of national wrestling and belt wrestling, tracing their origins, transformations, and their role in shaping the cultural and sporting landscapes of their respective regions. The research explores how these wrestling styles have been preserved, adapted, and institutionalized in modern times, and how they continue to influence both traditional and contemporary sports practices.

Keywords. National Wrestling, Belt Wrestling, Traditional Sports, History of Wrestling, Cultural Identity, Combat Sports, Evolution of Wrestling, Folklore.

Аннотация. Национальная борьба и борьба на поясах являются традиционными видами спортивных единоборств, имеющими глубокие корни в различных культурах и цивилизациях. Эти виды борьбы развивались на протяжении столетий, выступая не только средством физического состязания, но и отражением культурной идентичности, ценностей и социальной сплоченности. В этой статье рассматривается историческое развитие национальной борьбы и борьбы на поясах, прослеживаются их истоки, трансформации и их роль в формировании культурных и спортивных ландшафтов соответствующих регионов. Исследование изучает, как эти стили

борьбы были сохранены, адаптированы и институционализированы в современную эпоху, и как они продолжают влиять как на традиционные, так и на современные спортивные практики.

Ключевые слова. Национальная борьба, борьба на поясах, традиционные виды спорта, история борьбы, культурная идентичность, боевые виды спорта, эволюция борьбы, фольклор.

Wrestling has a rich and diverse history that spans across various cultures and regions. As one of the oldest forms of combat, wrestling has evolved from ancient rituals and contests into organized sports, deeply intertwined with the social, cultural, and national identities of different societies. National wrestling and belt wrestling, as traditional forms of grappling, are prime examples of how sports can reflect the unique characteristics and values of a culture.

This article focuses on the historical development of these two types of wrestling, highlighting their origins, the factors influencing their growth, and their relevance today. By exploring their cultural significance and tracing their evolution, we can gain a deeper understanding of how wrestling has shaped and been shaped by the societies in which it developed.

National wrestling, often referred to as "folk wrestling" or "traditional wrestling," varies widely across regions but generally shares common elements of physical strength, technique, and the use of the body to overpower an opponent. It often emerged in rural and warrior societies where physical contests were not only a form of entertainment but also a means of preparing for battle.

The earliest forms of national wrestling can be traced to ancient civilizations. Historical records suggest that various forms of wrestling were practiced in Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt, and Greece. Over time, these traditions were passed down through generations, with each region developing its unique variations and rules based on local customs and needs. In countries like Turkey, Iran, Japan, and Mongolia, wrestling became more formalized and embedded in the culture, with competitions being held at religious festivals and social gatherings.

Belt wrestling, or "Kuresh," is a distinctive form of wrestling where participants wear a belt or sash that they use to control and manipulate their opponent. The roots of belt wrestling can be traced back to Central Asia, particularly among Turkic and Mongol peoples. This wrestling style was not only a form of physical contest but also a way to demonstrate strength, skill, and honor.

Belt wrestling's significance can be seen in the historical records of nomadic tribes who practiced the sport as part of their cultural rituals. It was often part of the rites of passage for young men, signifying their transition into adulthood and readiness for battle. As with national wrestling, belt wrestling played a crucial role in military training, as it developed both physical strength and strategic thinking.

Both national wrestling and belt wrestling served a broader social and cultural purpose beyond mere competition. They were integral to community life, acting as a tool for teaching values such as bravery, resilience, and respect for tradition. In many societies, wrestling contests were held during important cultural celebrations, festivals, and religious observances. These events not only reinforced social bonds but also acted as a form of storytelling, where the history, myths, and legends of a community were passed down through generations.

In the context of belt wrestling, the sport was often seen as a demonstration of strength and valor, particularly in nomadic societies where physical prowess was highly valued. Wrestlers were seen as heroes, and their victories in the arena symbolized their personal honor and the strength of their community.

Over time, national wrestling began to evolve from informal contests to organized competitions. The codification of rules, the establishment of weight categories, and the organization of national and international championships played a significant role in the development of modern wrestling as a recognized sport. In countries like Turkey, the practice of Greco-Roman and freestyle wrestling can trace their origins to traditional forms of national wrestling, which were formalized in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

As modern sports organizations like the International Wrestling Federation (FILA) began to oversee international competitions, national wrestling traditions were adapted to fit into the global sporting framework. However, many of these traditional forms of wrestling, such as Turkish "Yağlı Güreş" (oil wrestling) and Russian "Sambo," have retained their cultural significance and continue to be practiced in their traditional forms alongside modern variations.

Belt wrestling, particularly in Central Asia, also underwent a transformation with the advent of modern sport. Initially a part of nomadic rituals and warrior training, belt wrestling has been institutionalized in various countries, especially in the former Soviet Union and Turkey. In recent years, organizations such as the International Kuresh Federation have been established to promote and standardize the sport, organizing world championships and preserving its cultural heritage.

Despite its evolution into a more structured form, belt wrestling remains deeply connected to its traditional roots. In many regions, it is still practiced as a way to maintain cultural identity and celebrate ancestral practices. It has also gained popularity internationally, with many countries outside of Central Asia recognizing its unique qualities and integrating it into their own sporting cultures.

Both national wrestling and belt wrestling continue to be practiced in their traditional forms while adapting to modern trends. In countries like Turkey, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, traditional wrestling festivals and competitions remain popular, attracting large audiences and providing a platform for young wrestlers to showcase their skills. At the same time, international recognition and the establishment of formalized competitions ensure that these sports remain relevant in the global sporting arena.

Efforts to preserve these forms of wrestling have led to the creation of cultural preservation programs, where young people are taught not only the physical techniques of wrestling but also the history and traditions behind these sports. These initiatives ensure that the cultural heritage associated with wrestling is maintained, even as modern sports continue to evolve.

The historical development of national wrestling and belt wrestling is a testament to the enduring importance of physical contests in shaping the cultural, social, and historical identities of various societies. From their origins in ancient rituals to their evolution into modern sports, these wrestling traditions have remained deeply rooted in the values of strength, honor, and community. As they continue to evolve, they offer a unique window into the cultural landscapes of the regions where they originated, providing both a physical and symbolic connection to the past. The ongoing preservation and promotion of these wrestling forms will ensure their relevance for future generations, maintaining their place in the broader history of combat sports.

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