The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

U.S., Russia and Iran Tangle to Save Olympic Wrestling

May 16, 2013

Russia's Saba Khubetzhty, left, and David Taylor of the U.S. flipping over at the "Rumble on the Rails" event. **Lucas Jackson**

NEW YORK — Russia, Iran and the United States — rivals on the world stage — joined together in an unlikely alliance Wednesday inside New York's Grand Central Terminal train station for a wrestling exhibition to try to save their sport from being dropped in the Olympics.

The athletes competed against each other on the mat Wednesday, but were united against a common foe: the International Olympic Committee (IOC), whose executive board has recommended that wrestling be eliminated beginning with the 2020 Summer Olympics.

The "Rumble on the Rails" event served as a fundraiser for New York-area youth wrestling programs, but it was also meant to put an international spotlight on the IOC's proposal, which shocked the wrestling world when it was made public in February.

"There are millions of kids all over the world who are involved in wrestling," said Russian

Federation team member Soslan Ramonov, who took part in one of the matches.

"And in any type of sport the ultimate goal is to reach the Olympic Games. That's a dream for so many kids. And to deprive them of having that dream come true, that's a crime," Ramonov said.

U.S. team member Kyle Dake said he was not surprised by the camaraderie on display. "We're a brotherhood," he said. "We know what each other goes through to get where we are. I know those Iranians are working their tails off just like I am, and those Russians are doing the same."

Iran beat the U.S. 6-1 in the exhibition matches, and the U.S. prevailed against Russia 8-1.

But the result everyone's focused on comes in two weeks, when the IOC, meeting in Russia, narrows down the list of eight sports including wrestling that are vying for a single open spot in the 2020 Summer Olympics. Then a final decision on wrestling's fate as an Olympic sport will be made in September.

Original url:
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