

Wrestling Wins IOC Vote for Place in 2020 Olympics

By [The Moscow Times](#)

September 09, 2013

The  Moscow Times

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina — Wrestling, a sport as ancient as the games themselves, is back in the Olympics after seven months in limbo and even more determined to keep its place for centuries to come.

The International Olympic Committee fixed what it admits was a big mistake Sunday, voting wrestling back onto the program for the 2020 and 2024 Games.

Presenting new leadership and a revamped sport, wrestling easily defeated bids from baseball-softball and squash to regain its Olympic status.

The result capped a frantic six-month campaign by the wrestling body FILA to save its Olympic status after the IOC executive board surprisingly cut it from the list of core sports in February.

"We are aware of our mistakes and they will not happen again," FILA president Nenad Lalovic said. "This crisis gave us the strength to change, and we finally found out that we can change. This was the most valuable experience of all of this journey."

Wrestling received 49 votes to win in the first round of the secret balloting by the International Olympic Committee. Baseball-softball got 24 votes and squash got 22 votes.

"Wrestling has shown great passion and resilience in the last few months," IOC president Jacques Rogge said. "They have taken a number of steps to modernize and improve their sport."

Wrestling's reinstatement appeared virtually assured for months after IOC members acknowledged that the executive board erred by cutting the sport in the first place.

"I think what happened was what most people thought, that the previous decision was wrong," Puerto Rican member and presidential candidate Richard Carrion said.

Wrestling goes back to the ancient Olympics in Greece and has been on the program of every modern games except 1900. The sport was caught off guard when it was axed by the board, a decision that surprised even most IOC members.

Raphael Martinetti resigned as FILA president within days of the IOC vote and was replaced by Lalovic.

FILA reworked its structure, giving women and athletes a role in decision making. It added two weight classes for women. It adopted rule changes to make the sport easier to understand and more fun to watch, and reward more aggressive wrestling.

Powerful countries and unlikely political allies like the U.S., Iran and Russia threw their weight behind the campaign.

"Wrestling is not a new sport," Lalovic said. "But the wrestling we are presenting now is a new wrestling."

Wrestling was approved by the IOC on Sunday as an "additional sport" for 2020 and 2024. FILA's goal now is to win back a place in the list of 25 "core" sports.

"We have to understand that in four years we will have to compete again to become a core sport," Lalovic said. "So we can't stop now. What we have to do in four years is more difficult, maybe."

Wrestling's reinstatement was cheered by some of the biggest names in the sport.

Russian great Alexander Karelin called it a "big result for us and for the new guys who are coming [into the sport]."

"I think we have a great story, great history and Olympic traditions," Karelin said.

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