

WRESTLING – SERBIAN OLYMPIC VALUE

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Abstract

Wrestling in Serbia has a long tradition and has had considerable accomplishments. According to the number of medals won at the Olympic Games, wrestling is the most successful sport in Serbia. The continuity of medal winning at big wrestling competitions was interrupted with the imposition of sanctions to SR Yugoslavia (1992). After the crisis that was conditioned by sport sanctions, a new 'golden age of wrestling' in Serbia started in 2007. Since then wrestlers have won 30 medals in senior category and 17 in pioneer, cadet, junior and young senior categories, at the major international championships. The wrestling club 'Partizan' triumphed in the Champion League. The key factors to the success were young talented wrestlers, development of coaching structure, organization of international competitions, financing the highest results by the state and the national Olympic committee, but also the activity and leadership of a sport official Nenad Lalović. It is natural to expect the continuity of success to be maintained, and one priority in the following period ought to be a construction of a national wrestling training centre, which would enable continuous practice, expansion of the wrestling base, implementation of scientific monitoring methods, formulation and dissemination of training methods.

Key words: WRESTLING / DEVELOPMENT / COMPETITIVE RESULT / NENAD LALOVIC / SERBIA /

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WRESTLING –A TRADEMARK OF SERBIAN CULTURE AND NATIONAL ETHOS

Wrestling has a long tradition and is very popular in Serbia. Various varieties of national forms of wrestling, for centuries, were practised on occasions such as fairs, holiday celebrations, birth of a child, weddings, christenings, successful sowing, harvesting, reaping... (Kasum, Ćirković, Jovanović, 2012). In armed groups and bands of *hajduks* (rebels), wrestling was highly respected, and each new member had to show his wrestling ability (Milošević, 1989). Modern wrestling was accepted from the beginning, so at the very first modern Olympic Games (1896), Momčilo Tapavica, from a village Nadalja in Banat region, was one of only five wrestling competitors who played as a competitor from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and officially took the fourth place (Kolundzija, 1988). First official performances of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia wrestlers at big competitions were by Nikola Grbić and Ištvan Nada from Sombor who performed at the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris, Grbić and Hofman Frideš from Novi Sad at 1927 European Championship in Budapest and the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam. Milorad Arsić won the first medal in 1955, who won the third place at the World Wrestling Championships in Karlsruhe.

At major competitions, namely the Olympic Games and European championships, the SFRY wrestlers (original the FNRJ until 1963) won 96 medals in total, 76 of which in Greco-Roman style and 20 in freestyle. The freestyle medals were won by the competitors from Southern Macedonia, while only 5 medals were won by the competitors who are citizens of today's Croatia in Greco-Roman style, that is, 71 medals were won by the citizens of the Republic of Serbia (64 medals were won by wrestlers, members of clubs from Serbia). It is interesting to mention that the last medal of SFRY was won by the author of this paper, who, on 26 April 1992, won the bronze medal at the European Championship in Copenhagen, one day before the official establishment of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). That was followed by a difficult 12- year period for Serbian wrestling, during which, from imposing sport sanctions on the FR Yugoslavia in May 1992 until 2004, at the biggest senior competitions, only one medal was won, and that was bronze, by Aleksandar Jovančević at the 1997 European Championship.

Having in mind that Montenegro, which comprised the FRY together with Serbia and later the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, had no wrestlers of international competence, all the international success was achieved by the wrestlers from Serbia. Since the disintegration of SFRY, Serbian wrestlers have won 32 medals at major competitions, so that the total number of medals is 128, out of which 96 won by the wrestlers who were at the moment members of Serbian wrestling clubs, whilst 103 medals were won by the wrestlers who were Serbian citizens (Milovan Nenadić won 7 medals as a member of 'Gavrilović' from Petrinja, national recognition holder of the Republic of Serbia with permanent residence in Zrenjanin). Such successful results speak a lot of the tradition and quality of wrestling in Yugoslavia and, especially in Serbia. A particularly striking fact that stands out is the number of Olympic Games medals. Namely, the SFRY wrestlers won 17 medals, out of which 11 won by the citizens of today's Serbia (10 were members of the Serbian wrestling clubs), four and two by the athletes of Southern Macedonia and the Republic of Croatia respectively. For the sake of comparison, water polo and archery are on the second and third place of that everlasting list of the most successful SFRY sports, both with 12 medals (Table 1).

The medal winning continuity at major wrestling competitions was interrupted by the introduction of sanctions, which, among other things, included the limited or total ban of the FRY athletes' participation at international competitions. In addition to this ban, a grave financial situation of sport clubs and the National Wrestling Federation affected negatively **sport results**. From the imposition of sanctions (30 May 1992), and until their lifting (23 September 1994), the SFRY wrestlers did not win a single medal. Norbert Futo won the first medal after the lifting of sport sanctions at the Cadet World Championship (1995). The sport sanctions had passed, but extremely unfavourable circumstances for sport and athletes development lasted for 15 more years. The first sign of better days finally occurred in 2006, when sport and physical culture found their place in the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, which preconditioned the investment of much more attention to sports in Serbia. The number of wrestlers that qualified for the Olympic Games shows how

difficult the years of international performance crisis for wrestling in Serbia were. Although the OG in Barcelona (1992) were held when the sanctions had already been imposed, and when the SFRY national teams were not allowed to compete, eight wrestlers, who fulfilled the qualification norms competed in the team of the national Olympic Committee as the so-called 'Independent participants'. Two wrestlers participated in the Atlanta Games (1996), while no wrestlers fulfilled the qualification criterion for the OG in Sydney (2000). This failure to qualify interrupted the continuity of Serbian wrestler participation at the Olympic Games, which, besides three participations prior to World War Two, lasted continually from the OG in Helsinki (Jovanović, 1996). After the result crisis, returning to the path of success was extremely difficult. During the next eleven years, following the sanctions, from 1995 to 2006, two medals were won at the European Senior Championships, and at the OG in Athens (2004), the Olympic status of national wrestling was restored, with one participant, which, in those circumstances, was in line with sport quality and expectations of the National Wrestling Federation. Nevertheless, during the crisis of senior results, 9 medals at Junior World and European Championships were won, two at European Cadet Championships, as well as one at the World University Championship. Principally, these results of young wrestlers have shown that wrestling in Serbia has not manifested a discontinuity of results, that the quality and genuineness, as well as the popularity were preserved, because the youth still wanted to engage in this beautiful sport. Since a substantial financial investment was not necessary for achieving results in age categories, that unequivocally meant that the training methodology and competition practice were preserved. Majority of the youth training process occurred in clubs, there was no need for a large number of days for collective practice and high-quality sparring, training and monitoring competitions, and limited conditions were close to those that could be assessed as satisfactory (Dokmanac, 2003). **The results of age categories** indicated a new successful period, and a total revival of wrestling in Serbia, after the 12-year crisis, was announced in 2004, when Davor Štefanek, then an eighteen-year-old, won a silver medal at the European Senior Championship. That success, as well as the series of successes at age category competitions, introduced a new golden age of Serbian wrestling, that started in 2007. Since then, wrestlers have achieved great results and, after a short break, restored the continuity of splendid successes that has lasted for over 65 years.

Table 1. Individual and team medals from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians - Yugoslavia, SFRY, FRY, independent team players, Serbia and Montenegro, to the Republic of Serbia grouped by sports, won at the summer Olympic Games

| SPORT | Official name of the state | GOLD | SILVER | BRONZE | TOTAL |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|---------------|--------|-----------|----------|
| Athletics | FNRY | / | 2 | | 2 |
| | Serbia | | | 1 f | 1 f |
| | Σ | | 2 | 1 f | 3 (1 f) |
| Boxing | SFRY | 3 | 2 | 6 | 11 |
| Water polo | FNRY/SFRY | 3 | 4 | | 7 |
| | FRY | | | 1 | 1 |
| | Serbia and Montenegro | | 1 | | 1 |
| | Serbia | 1 | | 2 | 3 |
| | Σ | 4 | 5 | 3 | 12 |
| Rowing | FNRY/SFRY | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 |
| Gymnastics | Kingdom of Yug. (SCS) | 3 | 2 | 3 | 8 |
| | SFRY | 2 | | 1 | 3 |
| | Σ | 5 | 2 | 4 | 11 |
| Kayaking and canoeing | SFRY | 2 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| | Serbia | | 1 | | 1 |
| | Σ | 2 | 3 | 1 | 6 |
| Basketball | SFRY | 1 | 4 (1f) | 2 (1 f) | 7 (2 f) |
| | FRY | | 1 | | 1 |
| | Serbia | | | | 2 (1ж)) |
| | Σ | 1 | 6(1f) | 3 (2 f) | 10 (3 f) |
| Volleyball | FRY | 1 | | 1 | 2 |
| | Serbia | | 1 f | | 1 |
| | Σ | 1 | 1 f | 1 | 3 (1 f) |
| Swimming | SFRY | 1 f | 1f | / | 2 f |
| | Serbia | | 1 | | 1 |
| | Σ | 1 f | 2 (1f) | | 3 (2 f) |
| Wrestling | FNRY/SFRY | 4 | 6 | 6 | 16 |
| | Serbia | 1 | | | 1 |
| | Σ | 5 | 6 | 6 | 17 |
| Handball | SFRY | 3 (2 m+ 1 f) | 1 f | 1 | 5 (2 f) |
| Table tennis | SFRY | / | 1 | 1 f | 2 (1 f) |
| | SFRY | 2 (1 f + 1 m) | | 1 f | 12 (9 f) |
| | Independent team | | 1 f | 2 (1m+1f) | |

| | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Archery | FRY | 1 f | 1 f | 1 f | |
| | Serbia and Montenegro | | 1 f | | |
| | Serbia | | 1 f | 1 m | |
| | Σ | 3 (2 f + 1 m) | 4 f | 5 (2m + 3 f) | 12 (9 f) |
| Taekwondo | Serbia | 1 f | 1 f | / | 2 f |
| Tennis | Serbia | / | / | 1 | 1 |
| Football | FNRY/SFRY | 1 | 3 | 1 | 5 |
| Judo | SFRY | / | / | 2 | 2 |
| | TOTAL | 31 (26m +5f) | 40 (31m + 9f) | 39 (32m + 7f) | 110 (89m + 21f) |

WRESTLING IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA FORM 2007 TO 2020

After the period of seniors' result discontinuity on the international scene during the sport sanctions and the decades of social changes in Serbia, with the successes of the upcoming young wrestlers in junior category, a decade of great successes ensued and the return of wrestling in Serbia back to the position it had in the second half of the 20th century. A successful decade of success began in 2007, when Kristijan Fris won the bronze medal at the World and European Senior Championships, and Aleksandar Maksimović became a European junior champion. The very next year Davor Štefanek won the bronze medal at the European Senior Championship, while Maksimović became the European junior champion and the runner-up at the World Junior Championship. Our wrestlers once again became regular competitors at the Olympic Games, with two competitors in Beijing (2008), one in London (2012) and three in Rio (2016).

Since 2007 our wrestlers won 3- medals in senior categories (Table 2) and 17 in pioneer, cadet, junior, younger senior and student categories, at major international competitions (Table 3). Moreover, a historical success has been achieved in the club competitions, since the Wrestling club "Partizan" triumphed in the Champions League (2009 season), which is an unprecedented success of club wrestling in the former SFRY territories.

Table 2. Medals won by year at major competitions in senior category

| Year | Athlete | Olympic games | | | World Championships | | | European Championships | | | Σ |
|----------|--------------------|---------------|--------|--------|---------------------|----------|----------|------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| | | Gold | Silver | Bronze | Gold | Silver. | Bronze | Gold | Silver. | Bronze | |
| 2007 | Fris, K. | | | | | | 1 | | | 1 | 2 |
| 2008 | Štefanek, D. | | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 |
| 2010 | Petković, R. | | | | | | | 1 | | | 1 |
| 2011 | Maksimović, A. | | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 |
| 2012 | Štefanek, D. | | | | | | | | | 1 | 2 |
| | Maksimović, A. | | | | | | | | | 1 | |
| 2014 | Štefanek, D. | | | | 1 | | | | | | 1 |
| 2015 | Štefanek, D.. | | | | | | 1 | | | | 2 |
| | Nemeš V. | | | | | | | | | 1 (EG)* | |
| 2016 | Štefanek, D. | 1 | | | | | | | 1 | | 4 |
| | Nemeš V. | | | | | | | | 1 | | |
| | Maksimović, A. | | | | | | | | 1 | | |
| 2017 | Nemeš V. | | | | 1 | | | | | | 4 |
| | Fris, K. | | | | | | | 1 | | | |
| | Štefanek, D.. | | | | | | | | 1 | | |
| | Maksimović, A.. | | | | | | | | | 1 | |
| 2018 | Kadžaja, M | | | | | 1 | | | 1 | | 6 |
| | Nemeš V. | | | | | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| | Mićić, S- | | | | | | | | | 1 | |
| | Štefanek, D. | | | | | 1 | | | | | |
| 2019 | Nemeš V. | | | | | | | | | 1 | 5 |
| | Nemeš M. | | | | | | 1 | | | 1 - EG | |
| | Kadžaja, M | | | | | | 1 | | | | |
| | Mićić, S. | | | | | | | | 1 - EG | | |
| 2020 | Mićić, S. | | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 |
| Σ | 7 wrestlers | 1 | | | 2 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 9 | 10 | 30 |

Legend: * EG – European Games (Games governed by the European Olympic committee)

This number of medals in the last decade is the result of years of working on the revival of wrestling and its return to the path of success. Successes were many, and the most significant one was certainly the gold medal won by Davor Štefanek at the Olympic Games in Rio (2016). This medal is the crown of sports career and the result of years of planned work in wrestling. The Olympic wrestling tournament is the best place for an affirmation of an athlete's performance. This success brought Davor Štefanek the title of the best world wrestler in 2016. Two world champion titles of Štefanek and Nemeš, as well as Fris's title of European champion, were applauded by the sports public and the Serbian society, and Davor Štefanek was selected by the daily "Sport", as the best Serbian athlete (2014). Calendar and competitive 2018-2019, was filled with new successes of wrestlers at World and Continental championship with six medals in total. This success becomes even more significant when compared to 27 medals that Serbian athletes won in 2018 in the Olympic and Paralympic sports. The aforementioned, as well as other successes, have contributed to the comeback of Serbian wrestling to its place in "sports constellation". Outstanding results are one of the ways for wrestling and other similar sports to attract the attention of children and the youth, sports and general public. Increased activity and influx of new members, observed after these great successes, are not a coincidence. A similar phenomenon has been noticed in other national wrestling systems (Montoya, Landolfi, Winkleman, Chamberlain, Fisch, Wright, 2013).

Stefan Mičić's bronze medal won at the European Championship in Russia (2018) is particularly important for the development of wrestling in Serbia. That is the first medal wrestlers from Serbia won in freestyle at a very important competition. Mičić confirmed his great potential for competing in 2019 by winning the silver medal at the European Games, the bronze medal at the European championship (2020), as well as winning the fifth place at the World Championship in Kazakhstan (2019) and qualifying for the Tokyo OG. Mičić's successes, alongside with winning the fifth place twice and the bronze medal by Zaur Efendiev at the 2013 Universiade, then three medals at the Mediteranian games (2018) and more than 20 at the Mediterian championships (cadets, juniors and seniors), eliminated all dilemmas from the beginning of this century, in regards to the justification of free style orientation in Serbia (Kasum and Ćirković, 2006).

Table 3. Age category medals in both competitions

| Year | Athlete | WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS | | | EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIPS | | | Σ |
|-------|----------------|---------------------|----------|--------------|------------------------|----------|----------|----|
| | | Gold | Silver | Bronze | Gold | Silver | Bronze | |
| 2007 | Maksimović, A. | | | | 1 (U-20)) | | | 1 |
| 2008 | Maksimović, A. | | 1 | | 1 | | 1 (U-20) | 2 |
| 2010 | Tuba, U. (f) | | | | | | 1 (U-17) | 1 |
| 2011 | Tuba, U. (f) | | | | | | 1 (U-17) | 2 |
| | Tuba, U. (f) | | | | | | 1 (U-20) | |
| 2013 | Živanović, B. | | 1 (U-17) | | | 1 (U-17) | | 5 |
| | Nemeš M. | | | | | | 1 (U-20) | |
| | Horti, M. | | | 1 (U-17) | | | | |
| | Efendijev, Z. | | | 1Universiade | | | | |
| 2015 | Nemeš V. | | | | 1 (U-23) | | | 2 |
| | Stankić, V. | | | | | 1 (U-23) | | |
| 2016 | Nemeš M. | | | | | | 1 (U-23) | 1 |
| 2017 | Nadž, S. | | | | | | 1 (U-23) | 2 |
| | Gajić, U. | | | | | 1 (U-15) | | |
| 2019 | Nadž, S. | | | | | 1 (U-23) | | 1 |
| TOTAL | 10 wrestlers | | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 7 | 17 |

Female wrestling has also accomplished great successes. Bronze medals won by Una Tuba at two Cadet and one junior European Championship (Table 3), are the first in the history of female wrestling in Serbia. These medals, as well fifth places won by Ana Randelović and Merima Galetin at the European Senior Championship (2017) confirmed that our coaches, throughout the last decade, have successfully overcome the challenges and problems which were evident in the initial development phases of female wrestling (Kasum, 2016). Everything mentioned allows us to hope for good results in this category as well (female wrestling is an Olympic wrestling discipline), although Una Tuba's decision to focus during her full

competitive maturity on non-Olympic wrestling disciplines remains disappointing. (Kasum i Radović, 2007b).

In the overview of the most significant results it is necessary to mention the success in non-Olympic wrestling disciplines. At the Third World Wrestling games (2008) Serbian wrestlers won the first medal in grappling. The successes of this and other non-Olympic disciplines (sand wrestling, pankration, belt wrestling, Kazakh wrestling, gurash), have become regular. As early as 2012, 55 medals were won in these disciplines (Kasum, Ćirković, Jovanović, 2012), and the total number of these medals in the last 13 years surpassed 120. For instance, at the European Championship 2018 in Zrenjanin (Serbia) our wrestlers won 11 medals, out of which 7 were in male and 4 in female categories, while Nikola Gajić won the gold medal in Kazakh wrestling discipline. A year earlier at the European championship in Novi Sad (Serbia) nine medals were won, 4 in female and 5 in male categories, and the only gold was won by Una Tuba in the “alysh” discipline, who also, in the same discipline, won the title of world champion that year. Of course, these medals do not carry the same weight as the ones in Olympic disciplines, but nevertheless they have a significant impact on promotion and popularization of wrestling sports in Serbia (Kasum and Radović 2008). It is also apparent that many wrestlers, who are unable to qualify for participation in the OG, find their sports curiosity, motivation and personal satisfaction in non-Olympic disciplines by which the base is expanded and wrestling appears attractive to a greater number of young people. The appearance of evident interest in non-Olympic wrestling disciplines, and similar rules were noticed in almost all the leading wrestling countries (Kasum, Jovanović and Ćirković, 2010). Non-Olympic disciplines further popularized and expanded knowledge of wrestling and wrestling values as a basis for other sports (Ilić, Mudrić, Kasum, Ćirković i Gavrilović, 2012; Popović, 2014). They are also an upgrade to a professional career (Sports/Pro Wrestling, August 8th 2016; Alabama Entertainment, September 9th 2016).

COACHES ORGANIZATION AND ‘GEOGRAPHY’ OF THE WRESTLING FEDERATION OF SERBIA

Naturally, athletes’ great successes never come without the support of other factors. This great generation of wrestlers has been created by the coaches who worked with them. Several of our outstanding wrestlers were born and raised in Senta, which cannot be a coincidence. Everybody knows about the current national team wrestlers, Nemeš and Fris brothers, but a number of national team wrestlers in all age categories come from Senta, who were coached by former great wrestlers Nandor Sabo and Laslo Zerge. For decades Subotica has produced a large number of first class wrestlers, all of whom, including Davor Štefanek, were trained by the legendary Sreten Damjanović.

Partizan from Belgrade gave birth to a great generation of wrestlers and accomplished great successes, and Boško Kecman coached Petković, Maksimović, Bajlović etc.

Proleter from Zrenjanin has been the most successful club in Serbia for the last ten years, and the coach of this team is Vojislav Trajković. The founder of a powerful wrestling club in Novi Sad is Rajko Tešanović, and Gradimir Dedić created a great generation of young wrestlers in Sombor.

National team head coaches for the last 20 years were: Branislav Piperski (1997-2000), Goran Kasum (2000-2004), Milorad Dokmanac (2005-2012), Bojan Mijatov (2013), Sreten Damjanović (2014-2015), and the current head coach Milorad Dokmanac has been once again in that role since December 30th 2015. In addition to the already mentioned club coaches, the ones that were also involved are: Laslo Šljaher from Kanjiža, Pajo Ivošević and Aleksandar Jovančević from Novi Sad, Dragan Radojević, Ivica Dujmić and Srđan Đoković from Kragujevac, Milan Marić and Igor Frgić from Sombor, Mladen Kecman, Stanko Bogdan, Stankov Sreten, Dalibor Perović, Batrić Karadžić and Dejan Jovičić from Belgrade...

An especially successful period of Serbian wrestling, was from 2014, when the renowned Bulgarian coach Stojan Dobrev became the coach of the senior national team in Greco-Roman style, and for the past seven years under his leadership 20 medals at major senior competitions and 5 in younger senior

competitions were won. Of course, it is impossible to list all those who worked with wrestlers, but since 2011 and the adoption of the Law on Sports, an accurate record and licensing of coaching staff has been introduced. In 54 active wrestling clubs, which are members of the Wrestling Federation of Serbia, 152 sport specialist have been employed (Board of Directors of the Wrestling Federation of Serbia, December 28th 2016), which certainly is not a small number, but the fact that most of them have other occupations, and perform that function alongside another regular job is a problem. As in some other national sports federations, this one of the biggest reasons of insufficiency of our coaching staff (Radojević, Grbović and Jevtić, 2019), which resulted in the need for a foreign head coach of the national team. One of the obligatory conditions for acquiring and renewing the coaching licence is attending seminars for continual education, which cover the topics including coaching technology, competition analysis, recovery and diet, as well as compulsory education on doping, by which the the WFS accepted completely the recommendation that fighting doping, is founded, primarily, on a preventive level (Mandarić and Delibašić, 2014). The significance of these seminars aimed at preventin unwanted occurrences in sports, reflects in the fact that, for instance, the opponent's injuries inflicted by breaking the rules are not recorded at all in wrestling (Mandarić and Delibašić, 2016). Furthermore, these seminars have contributed to respecting the anti-doping rules, thus, after several doping offences, the situation in Serbian wrestling is sportslike. This is further supported by the fact that young people do not perceive wrestling as a sport significantly affected by doping. (Pavlović, Savić, Tošić. 2016).

SPORTS OFFICIALS IN WRESTLING, SERBIAN SPORTS AND INTERNATIONAL SPORTS ORGANIZATIONS

When analysing the progress of wrestling in Serbia, alongside the competitors and coaches, who are direct creators of sports results, one should not neglect the people that secure the work conditions. After extremely challenging years in the development of Serbian society (the end of the 1990s), during which the national wrestling organization was led by individuals from unsportsmanlike parts of society, significant changes in the leadership, officials and members of the national changes have been taken by the end of 2001, when a Belgrade businessman Nenad Lalović was appointed President of the WFS. He brought an efficient organization, financial security, business ethics... he designed a new image for the wrestling federation. During his first years of work in wrestling, Lalović had a great support from Milan Bata Ercegan, who in 2002 withdrew from the office in the World Wrestling Organization - FILA, which he performed for 30 years, as well as the support from Branislav Simić, famous wrestler and wrestling referee, who, for years, was responsible for referees in Europe and was one of the leading referees in the world. Human quality, professional abilities and Lalovic's vision enable a quick success of both wrestling and the national wrestling organization in international sports. The changes in the WFS were also recognized in international sports environment, thus in 2004 Lalović became a member of the Bureau of European wrestling federation CELA, while in 2006 he was elected to the management of the UWW Bureau. In addition to significant changes he initiated both in the national and the international scene, Lalović is one of the individuals who have contributed most to a successful mission in the preservation of wrestling at the OG program. His campaign advocating Olympism, fighting not only for wrestling but for authentic romantic and educational Olympic values, secured him a place of interim president of World Wrestling Federation FILA (UWW today), to be re-elected as the president for a six-year term at the regular FILA Congress (2014). Successes at organizational and sports-diplomatic levels made Lalović a member of International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 2015, and as the representative of the Association of Summer Olympic International Federation (ASOIF), a member of the IOC Executive board (2018). The IOC membership is not of national significance, but Serbia before Lalović never had a member of this highest sports authority, and all of our sports benefit from this, and naturally wrestling as well. Lalović performed the role of the WFS President until 2008, and Modest Dulić was his successor, who remained in office for one year. Since the Beijing Olympic Games

Željko Trajković has been the WFS president. As an accomplished athlete, with the experience obtained as a WC Proleter president and the vice president of WFS, Trajković has made notable results. Positive changes in society and government as regards to sports, have brought less financial worries, while the wrestling authority in the international environment made it possible for Serbia to organize some of the important competitions every year. With organizational consolidation and progress in results the Federation has become an example of a leading, successful national sports organization. Trajković is a member of the Executive committee of NOC and the vice president of Sports Association of Serbia, and in 2017 was elected Bureau member of the European Council of Associated Wrestling - CELA.

WFS vice president for years has been Rajko Baltić, the director of WC Partizan, who in the past 25 years has accomplished great successes with the Partizan from Belgrade, organized many great competitions and left a very deep mark in Serbian wrestling. Baltić in 2017 has been appointed the first Vice president of the Mediterranean Committee of Associated Wrestling Styles - CMLA. One of the most prominent sports workers in the past is certainly Vojislav Tabački, once a successful wrestler and prominent wrestling referee, who is currently performing the role of coordinator for non-Olympic disciplines, and he performed the roles of the President of Sports Association of Serbia and the Vice President of the NOC (2005-2008), then the Assistant Minister of Youth and Sports in the Government of the Republic of Serbia (September 2008 - January 2010.)

Davor Štefanek was appointed president of Sports Federation of Serbia (the territorial sports organization of Serbia) in 2017, which represents another great acknowledgement to him personally, but also to the whole wrestling organization.

Every sports organization, including WFS, is successful because it has good representatives, who create and realize program activities. Secretary Generals in the past 10 years were: Mladen Kecman (2008 - 2011), Milan Jelić (2012), Milorad Dokmanac (2013-2014) and once again Milan Jelić (2014-). Jelić was declared best secretary general of national **branch federations in Serbia**.

As for the wrestling referees, that is the only part that didn't go along with the revival of wrestling in Serbia. After the OG in Athens and retiring of the legendary referees Branislav Simić, Darko Nišić and Vojislav Tabački from the global scene, who were, for years, leading referees in global and continental federations, Serbian wrestling was left without a representative at the refereeing top. Although Tabački won a golden whistle as the best referee at the 2006 World Championship, however, due to differences within the WFS he did not get a chance to referee at the OG in Beijing, therefore, after quite a lot of time we did not have a referee at the biggest competition. At the OG in London, Mladen Kecman was a referee, but already at Rio OG none of the referees from Serbia were chosen. Currently, WFS has 40 wrestling referees that umpire at the national and international competitions, and most frequently, three of our referees get a chance to umpire at the biggest international competitions: Vesna Piperski Cucić, Rudolf Lerinc and Nikola Torbica.

FACTORS OF THE PROGRESS IN WRESTLING AND SERBIAN WRESTLING ORGANIZATION

No great sports success, as a rule, comes suddenly. Planned efforts to obtain success lasted for 20 years. Wrestlers and their coaches, families, sports representatives, administration, and the big number of other professions and vocations are behind the continuity of Serbian wrestling success. "The taking place of" the results had a certain prerequisites, the most prominent including:

The generation of talented wrestlers

The first very important factor for progress of any sport, including wrestling in Serbia, is the entrance of a certain extremely talented generation on the stage. That generation was led by Štefanek, Fris and Maksimović, and very quickly and successfully, they were joined by Pektović, Nemeš brothers, Kadžaja, Stankić, Mičić, Efendijev, Nađ. The coaching ambiance, coaches, support, national recognition led to a

professionalization of the most successful wrestlers. Training and competitions have become a workplace which significantly reduced the number of juniors who would quit during the transition to a senior competitive category. Not so long ago, our most talented young wrestlers would quit wrestling and sports before turning 21-22 years of age, the period that is most favourable for accomplishing outstanding results in wrestling (Kasum, 2006b; Kasum i Radović, 2007a). That is how many competitive careers ended, including champions of the world in cadet category Jakšić and Vučelić, the European champion in junior category Renko, the European runner-up Korica, the cadet runner-ups of Europe and the world Agošton and Crnobrnja, first, second and third at the wrestling festival Poštić, Mladenović and Borozan, as well as many others, who didn't win world or European medals, though they clearly possessed potential... Before the generation that was the turning point, only four wrestlers managed to win medals both in the age competitive categories (cadets, juniors, younger seniors) and in the senior competition (Dokmanac, 2003). In the analysis of successes of the current generation, that created 6 wrestlers: Štefanek, Fris, Maksimović, Mičić, Mate and Viktor Nemeš. Besides them, most of those who showed potential for the highest sports accomplishments, have stayed in competitive wrestling, and it's realistic to expect that someone else from the current generation will find themselves on the list of medal winners at the senior competitions. Better conditions have created a chance for success. Of course, just like with any other, this analysis is based on the possibility that a sport, with a relatively small number of athletes and clubs is preserved, that both senior and younger athletes can together develop through learning and perfecting.

Serbian society's commitment towards sport

It is known that the macro surroundings of a sport has great influence on sports results. Year 2006 can be considered as the beginning of changes in the entire Serbian sports system, when the implementation of the plans, outlined in the OC of Serbia project "Beijing 2008", started (Evtić, 2013). That year, at the joint meeting of all sports actors in Serbia, a suggested model of the national sports system with clearly defined position was adopted, including the role of government bodies, political and government structures related to sports (Jevtić, 2012). In September that year, sport found its place in the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, by which legal prerequisites were created that more attention was to be given, than it had been before, to the Serbian sport. The government took over the financing of professional sports, which for wrestling and other non-profitable sports was a certain step forward into the future. Wrestling, as most non-commercial sports, without the significant help from the government cannot ensure even a partial realization of its program (Jevtić, 2019), therefore the idea that ensured a necessary work safety and stability, was that at the start of a year Sports Federation should sign a contract with the Ministry of Youth and Sports and thus be aware of the resources it can count on. The sole fact that the contractual money is at the disposal to elite athletes and the coach, significantly improved the preparation and realization of the training program, since, unlike before, it was no longer necessary to demand alternative solutions, such as: reducing the number of competition and coaches in delegations, not including the support staff, cutting and "lowering the costs" of preparations and travelling, choosing cheap gear and supplementation... The best wrestlers, seniors and juniors, are awarded scholarships, and major competition medalists are financially awarded. All medal winners at the OG, world and European championships, who are Serbian citizens, at the age of 35, starting February 2nd 2007 have gained a right to national recognition (since 2009 the age requirement was raised to the age of 40). This measure partially solved a number of socially significant challenges for top athletes post-professional sports career, but that was also an important personal satisfaction, as well as an additional motive for further sports advancement. When the Law on National Recognition in Sport was adopted, it positively discriminated 19 wrestlers. There are 14 "old" medal winners alive today, but since 2007 nine wrestlers have met the requirements and became holders of this recognition (eight competitors and one coach). From 1912, when the first Wrestling Club was founded in Sombor, until 2007, when national recognition and medal awards were introduced, 23 wrestlers in total, Serbian citizens won medals at the biggest competitions (Kasum, Ćirković, Jovanović, 2010). Since 2007 that success has already been attained

by eight wrestlers, seven of which did not win any major medals prior to that. Davor Štefanek is the only one of the eight, who as an active athlete and before the introduction of national recognition fulfilled the prerequisites for national recognition (second place at European Championship 2004). However, in the following period, unlike most individual sports athletes in Serbia, Štefanek has managed to win eight more medals in accordance with the criteria for national recognition and has confirmed multiple times that he is an outstanding - elite athlete. When we take the fact that five wrestlers with Serbian citizenship who until recently have been citizens of the United States, Russia, Georgia and Bulgaria, are currently members of the Serbian national team, it is clear that national recognitions to athletes are an exceptionally stimulating measure reaching the top of the sports success pyramid.

National coaches and coaching organization

Sports success is the measure of talent of the athletes who work with talented coaches. Additionally, talented leaders with a vision are important for the outlook and vision of sports development. Serbian, European, and World wrestling were lucky because mister Nenad Lalovic exchanged his professional vocation with the role of sports representative with a vision and capacity to approach problems of national and international wrestling traditionally but also innovatively. It was confirmed once more that there is a lot in common between athletes and entrepreneurs, and business world intentions, to convert good athletes into entrepreneurs, once more proved justified (Jevtić, 2014).

Organization and participation at the international competitions

Since 2002, Serbia has organized at least one big competition each year, and four times in one year two big competitions were organized (Table 3). In the last 17 years in Serbia, 23 major international competitions have been held. Just for comparison's sake, at the time of the SFRY for almost a century of its existence, major competitions were organized only three times: European Senior Championship (1968) was held in Skopje (today the Republic of Northern Macedonia), as well as the World Senior Championship (1981) in freestyle. At Hvar (today the Republic of Croatia) European Junior Championship was held in 1972 (Greco-Roman and freestyle). The organization of major competitions in the first and second decade of the 21st century contributed to the significant improvement of wrestling infrastructure, increase in this sport popularity and massive involvement, as well as including a bigger number of volunteers and other professions within the wrestling organization structure. Through international competition organization, the Wrestling Federation of Serbia became one of the best organized sports federations in Serbia, as proven by a large number of recognitions and awards.

Table 4. International wrestling competitions organized in Serbian cities

| Year | Competitions | Discipline | Category | City |
|------|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| 2002 | European Championship | Greco-Roman | juniors | Subotica |
| 2003 | European Championship | Greco-Roman | seniors | Belgrade |
| 2004 | Olympic Qualifying Tournament | Greco-Roman | seniors | Novi Sad |
| 2005 | World Championship | Greco-Roman | veterans | Belgrade |
| 2006 | Final tournament of the European Champion Cup | Greco-Roman | seniors | Zrenjanin |
| 2007 | Final tournament of the European Champion Cup | Greco-Roman | seniors | Zrenjanin |
| 2007 | European Championship | Greco-Roman, Freestyle, women | juniors | Belgrade |
| 2008 | Olympic Qualifying Tournament | Greco-Roman | seniors | Novi Sad |
| 2009 | European Championship | Greco-Roman, Freestyle, women | cadets | Zrenjanin |
| 2010 | World Championship | Greco-Roman, Freestyle | veterans | Belgrade |
| 2011 | European Championship | Greco-Roman, Freestyle, women | juniors | Zrenjanin |
| 2011 | World Championship | non-Olympic disciplines | seniors | Belgrade |
| 2012 | European Championship | Greco-Roman, Freestyle, women | seniors | Belgrade |
| 2013 | World Championship | Greco-Roman, Freestyle, women | cadets | Zrenjanin |
| 2014 | World Championship | Greco-Roman, Freestyle | veterans | Belgrade |
| 2014 | Mediterranean championship - all the age categories | Greco-Roman, Freestyle, women | cadets, juniors, seniors | Kanjiža |
| 2015 | European Championship | Greco-Roman, Freestyle, women | cadets | Subotica |
| 2016 | Olympic Qualifying Tournament | Greco-Roman, Freestyle, women | seniors | Zrenjanin |

| | | | | |
|------|-----------------------|--|------------------|-----------|
| 2017 | European Championship | Greco-Roman, Freestyle, women, non-Olympic | seniors | Novi Sad |
| 2017 | European Championship | Greco-Roman, Freestyle, women | pioneers | Belgrade |
| 2018 | European Championship | non-Olympic disciplines | seniors, juniors | Zrenjanin |
| 2019 | European Championship | Greco-Roman, Freestyle, women | younger seniors | Novi Sad |
| 2020 | World cup | Greco-Roman, Freestyle, women | seniors | Belgrade |

Foreign coaches in the Wrestling Federation of Serbia

The arrival of the Bulgarian coach Stojan Dobrev is a solution that must be viewed from a position of strengthening of the coaching organization, but, above all, as “the import” of work methods to ensure specific competitive results. The Bulgarian expert fitted perfectly in Serbian wrestling and cooperation with the legendary coach Sreten Damjanović. The athletes also reacted positively and when they cooperate well with a coach, they become more confident in their skills and abilities and achieve better competitive results (Jowett & Cramer, 2009). Dobrev brought a specific work approach, with a focus on instructive style of coaching, which, along the already existent style of award and Feedback (Marjanović and Rađević, 2016) presented an innovation adapted to the ethos of Serbian wrestlers. The implemented measures were not too invasive, but in the beginning they were faced by some resistance of athletes, who, nevertheless, very quickly recognized and accepted the orientation from democratic to instructive coaching approach. If it is known that the coach has a major significance and role in wrestling (Kasum & Gligoroc 2013; Kasum, Mijić and Janković, 2007), that he is the one that has to analyse and recognize the factors that contribute to success (Kasum, 2001; Kasum, 2007; Kasum and Bačanac, 2007; Kasum, & Radović; 2009), it is completely logical that Stojan Dobrev was one of the key links in the chain of success of Serbian wrestling. So far, at the biggest world competitions, he has won 20 medals in the senior competitions and 5 in the younger senior competitions with Serbian wrestlers. Alongside these successes of our wrestlers at the biggest global competitions, three medals won at the recently held World cup in Belgrade, December 2020, should also be mentioned. The above mentioned confirms that the quality of the wrestlers work, which makes any analysis and the prospect of the future development of Serbian wrestling optimistic and realistic.

CONCLUSION

The Serbian wrestling has accomplished a large number of outstanding results in the last decade. The crisis that lasted during the sports sanctions during the disintegration of the SFRY, was completely overcome, and a strong and stable country, that wants and supports sports, was one of the prerequisites for setting realistic and attainable goals in regards to the wrestling development, from participatory to elite.

The Serbian Wrestling Organization created an elite sports representative and diplomat - Nenad Lalović, who has done a lot for the recognition of wrestling in Serbia and the world in a very short period.

The arrival of Bulgarian coach Stojan Dobrev was the missing link in the professional work of the WFS.

In the altered conditions of wrestling organization functioning, human resources improvement and financial conditions for training, with the efficiency of national organization and wrestling clubs, prerequisites have been created for the continuity of the success both in mass participation and in quality and concreteness at the international competitions.

The road to Tokyo 2021 is planned and it is realistic to expect that the continuity of success will persist. Mate Nemeš, Kadžaja and Mičić have already secured the norm for participation at the Olympic wrestling tournament. It is realistic to expect that Viktor Nemeš and Zurab Datunašvili will join them and other wrestlers will also try to use their chance at the qualifying tournaments.

The Olympic Games in Tokyo are currently the main goal, but it is also very important to think about what to do after Tokyo. Fris and Štefanek have already announced the end of their competitive careers, and Maksimović might not have competitive ambitions to be in the Serbian national team. It is likely that coach Stojan Dobrev will not stay in the Serbian wrestling system. In such circumstances, someone from this

generation of wrestlers should, with the support of a more experienced coach, take over the national team of young and talented wrestlers. Nemeš brothers, Kadžaja, Datunašvili, Nađ, Živanović, Mičić, Vuković, Ilić, Kovačević and other younger wrestlers represent an excellent foundation, so that the plan for the Paris OG (2024) is realistic and plausible.

The last decade confirmed that, when talented athletes are provided with good conditions and a well-run coaching process, top results are inevitable. What remains is that the WFS in the following period gains a national training centre. Limited circumstances have predetermined that the major wrestling centres are in Subotica, Zrenjanin, Novi Sad, Senta, Sombor and Belgrade. The national training centre “Košutnjak”, which is being built in Belgrade, as well as the Wrestling Academy in the northern Serbia, will enable a greater number of athletes, coaches and staff to participate in preparations, in the environment that is the integral part of the plan and realization of top competitive results. With the construction of training centres the conditions for the wrestling base to expand and enlarge will be created.

Note:

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