

# Wrestling for life

A look at how wrestling has fared in the Olympics in light of the IOC's decision to drop the sport from the Games from 2020.



▲ Funerary relief found in Athens depicting wrestlers. Circa 500 B.C.

## THE DISTANT PAST

Wrestling is as ancient as the Games itself. In fact, from 708 B.C., it was the decisive discipline in the pentathlon before the Olympics was abolished in A.D. 393. The sport has been part and parcel of the modern Olympics, right from the 1896 Athens Games. Only in Paris [1900] was wrestling not part of the Games. At the end of the 19th century, professional wrestling was quite popular in Europe, but at the turn of the century, it began to lose its sheen. Olympic amateurism gave wrestling a new lease of life. To make the bouts more exciting and entertaining, the format was tweaked to three two-minute rounds in the 2000 Sydney Games. Women entered the wrestling arena in Athens 2004.

## THE RECENT PAST

In London 2012, wrestlers from 29 countries finished on the podium.

## THE PRESENT

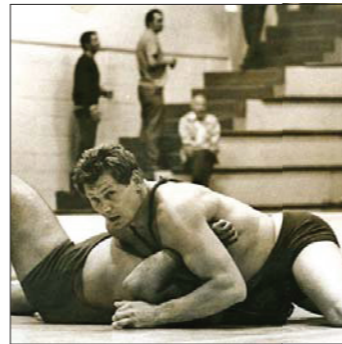
More than 180 countries are involved in the sport, reflecting its global presence. The TV audience for wrestling is a whopping 23 million. Despite its undisputed popularity, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) decides to eliminate wrestling, starting with the 2020 Games. When an online voting conducted by Huffington Post asked fans which sport should face the axe in the 2016 Rio Olympics, synchronised swimming was a clear winner! Wrestling was not even in the picture.

## FASCINATING FACTS

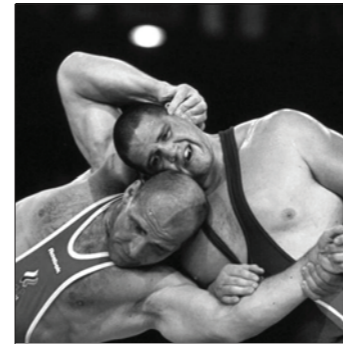
The first modern Olympic champion was not even a trained wrestler. Germany's Carl Schumann won three gymnastic titles in the Games before body-locking England's weightlifting champion Launceston Elliot for the gold. At the 1912 Stockholm Games, the bout between Finnish wrestler Alfred Johan Asikainen and



▲ Carl Schumann (left), first wrestling champion, Athens 1896.



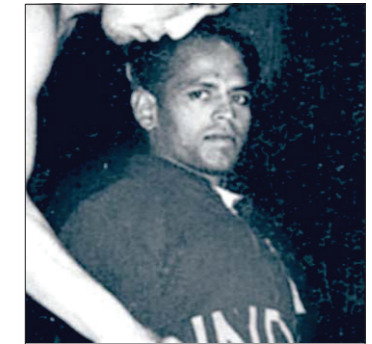
▲ Aleksandr Medved of the Soviet Union won gold in 1964, 1968 and 1972.



▲ Alexander Karelin (left) of Russia won gold in 1988, 1992 and 1996 but had to settle for silver in 2000.



▲ Longest bout, 11 hours 40 minutes. Asikainen (left) and Klein. Stockholm 1912.



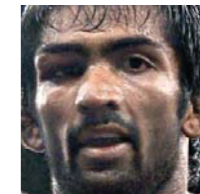
▲ K.D. Jadhav. His bronze in Helsinki 1952 was the first individual medal an Indian won after Independence.



▲ Sushil Kumar, bronze in Beijing 2008 and silver in London 2012.



▲ Geeta Phogat, the first Indian woman wrestler to appear in the Games.



▲ Yogeshwar Dutt, bronze in London 2012.

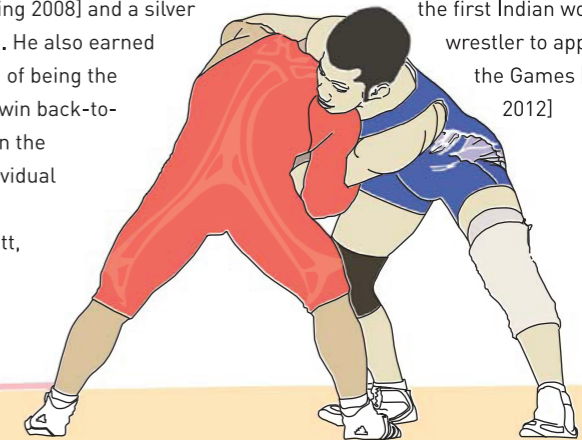
Russia's Martin Klein lasted nearly a dozen hours [11 hours 40 minutes] before the latter prevailed. It remains the longest wrestling match ever. Egypt's Ibrahim Mustafa was the first African to win an Olympic wrestling title [Amsterdam 1908] while Shohachi Ishii of Japan became the first Asian to finish on the podium [Helsinki 1952].

## INDIA'S TRYST

Wrestler K.D. Jadhav brought glory to the country by achieving a podium finish

in the 1952 Helsinki Games. Sushil Kumar did even better, clinching a bronze [Beijing 2008] and a silver [London 2012]. He also earned the distinction of being the first Indian to win back-to-back medals in the Olympics [individual section]. Yogeshwar Dutt, too, joined the party when he claimed the

bronze in the London Games. Geeta Phogat made history by becoming the first Indian woman wrestler to appear in the Games [London 2012]



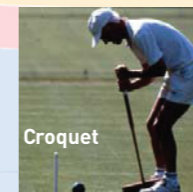
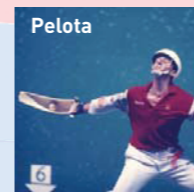
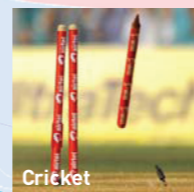
Wrestling	
No. 25	Quarter final
CUB	KOR
GR 55 KG	
1	Round 2
	1:40
London 2012	

## BOOTED OUT

A few prominent sports which were dropped like hot potatoes after brief appearances at the

Olympics: cricket, baseball, croquet, lacrosse, polo, pelota, power boating and softball.

Cricket, India's "unofficial" national sport, figured in only one Olympics [1900] before it was bowled out.



## COMING BACK

Rugby sevens and golf are making a comeback in Rio de Janeiro 2016.

## THE FUTURE OF WRESTLING

