

Out of Darkness

The Hold Taken - Catch Around the World

Ruslan Pashayev

Part 4

The name is Ringen, the place is Germany



Ruslan Pashayev

My name is Ruslan Pashayev and I am a professional wrestling fan from Delaware, Ohio (USA). Besides that I am a professional ballroom dancer, choreographer, and coach. As a hobby I have researched the history of professional wrestling since 2005.

History

The German folk wrestling style called Ringen was researched by the XIX century sports historian and gymnastics teacher Karl Wassmannsdorff (1821-1906), PhD. He was also a Knight of the Order of the Zähringer Lion. In his book "Medieval German Wrestling with 119 illustrations of Albrecht Dürer" he provides a detailed analysis of German wrestling traditions. According to Wassmannsdorff, the folk wrestling of German people (Ringen) was after the freestyle fashion (Kür-Ringen). This style was practiced in two modes, standing wrestling and up and down wrestling.

Pietro Monti (1457-1509) a master of arms from Milan (Italy) in his famous work called "De Dignoscendis Hominibus" (1492) describes the wrestling customs of the German people as follows: "They commonly grab the legs with their hands," "They consider all things permissible in order to overcome the opponent," "They also wrestle with their feet and hands on the ground like quadrupeds."

In 1840 the famous pioneer of French/Graeco-Roman style Jean Dupuis (1799-1888) promoted his "Olympic Games Wrestling" in Bayreuth (Upper Franconia, Bavaria, Germany) he was challenged to a wrestling match according to the local customs by a farmer called Conrad Münch. His style called "Ringen Bauern Art" (wrestling after the peasants'



German Folk Wrestling

Other famous wrestling authors of that era included:

- Fabian von Auerswald (1462 – 1537). He served as a wrestling coach to John Frederick, the Duke of Saxony.
- Paulus Hector Meyer of Augsburg (1517 – 1579).
- Nicolaes Petter (1624 – 1672). He was a Dutch wrestling master of German descent. His wrestling/self-defense manuals were illustrated by the famous Dutch Baroque painter Romeyn de Hooghe (1645-1708).



Daniel Veelward, 1806

fashion) was described as “wrestling without any conditions”, or free for all wrestling.

Besides Kür-Ringen there also was an Old Ringen style which only allowed holds of the torso above the waist. In that particular style headlocks, use of hip/back for throwing as well as tripping/hooking were all strictly prohibited. Wrestlers started the match in either equal hold (above and under hug) which they didn't have to maintain or at a distance facing each other. Old Ringen also existed in two different modes: standing wrestling for a throw, and up and down wrestling. The great account of Old Ringen was given in “Castle Czvargas,” an 1899 book by Australian author Archibald Birt (1862-1943): *“The undercatch was fought for desperately. But these men were not content with the fair throw, but must needs be to grovel and scramble on the ground, struggling furiously, until one made the shoulders of the other touch the earth together.”* Notably, Birt pointed out that tripping which was the key skill in English Folk wrestling wasn't allowed in that particular style.

German freestyle wrestling as a form of self-defence was covered in the 1443 wrestling manual by German Hans Talhoffer of Swabia. In his book he refers to the famous Ott Jud wrestling master to the princes of Austria. This book described and included illustrations of various wrestling holds and positions known as: the beginning with equal arm grip, warding off, hip wrestling, arm lock around the hip, the throw over the head and, and several others.

In 1552 leading Dutch painter Marten van Heemskerck produced a series of sketches on fencing and Germanic wrestling. Probably the best visualisation of that style was a drawing produced by the famous Dutch engraver Daniël Veelwaard (1766-1851) for the previously mentioned famous book by GutsMuths called “Gymnastics for Youth.” His drawing shows a wrestling match in five episodes, starting with the opening hold (upper arms hold), includes two ways of throwing, and finishing with the fair back fall (pinning fall). The first throw is an artistic “flying horse” performed with the wrist and knee-hold. The second throw is more pragmatic “hype” with the tight hold around the waist (bear hug). It's interesting that Veelwaard chose to show both sides of that universal wrestling style - artistic and pragmatic.



Daniel Veelward, 1806

To settle quarrels, besides actual wrestling, Medieval Germans used rough and tumble up and down fighting called Raufen (Scuffling). All kinds of wrestling holds (including illegal holds) as well as punching and kicking were allowed in Raufen. The Raufen combat was an exhibition of animalistic brutality and featured atrocities like biting, gouging and etc. The use of various small weapons in this kind of fight was permitted and negotiated prior to the contest. Notably, the proficiency in the art of wrestling was a key factor in winning any fight. In fact Raufen was a degenerated form of Ringen. Sometimes Raufen matches attracted local gamblers and were of "professional challenge" nature since the considerable sums were at stake. Thus Raufen became illegal and since then was practiced by the low order (local ruffians).

Description

Simon Goulart (1543-1628) the Medieval French humanist speaks of contemporary German and French wrestling customs in "Lichamelicke Sterckte" (Physical Strength) a chapter from his 1625 book called "Cabinet Der Historien." He mentioned a certain wrestling style called "Worstelen (Worstelinge), Lijf tegen Lijf", or "La Lutte, Corps-à-Corps" which means "Wrestling, Body to Body." In France this hand-to-hand style was known as the Burgundian wrestling (Lutte Bourguignonne). The wrestlers started the match in an equal close hug like position (body to body) and after that proceeded as they wanted. That style didn't have any restrictions regarding holds. The lift and throw technique dominated that style and better developed muscles of the hip, groin and lower abdomen area were a decisive factor. Often competitors would try to achieve a Bear Hug or a Crotch Hold on their opponent, lift him off his feet in the air, lock arms around his body and cast him down on the ground. Such Bodyslams were known as the "stones from the sky" throws (meteorite throws).

There were two kinds of starts in Ringen matches: Zulauf (wrestlers begin the match at a distance from each other looking for an opening and suddenly attack) and Close Wrestling (wrestlers begin the match in close quarters).

Often a Zulauf wrestling start was the ancient Germanic trial of strength called Drücken/Auf die knie zwingen (bringing someone down to his knees). In this case two wrestlers would rush into each other and catch-hold of one another by the hands intertwining their fingers and using all their strength, would try to force their opponent down to his knees. Often a Close Wrestling start was the Peasants' Grip (Bauern-Griff), an equal above and under hold around the body/waist.

Two styles of Ringen in the Middle Ages:

1. Ganzer Ringkampf (Full Wrestling), up and down freestyle.

In that style wrestlers would close and quickly go down together. On the ground, the battle for the dominant uppermost position would occur. Ground wrestling was commonly known as the Liegekampf (lying down fight) or Löwenkampf (lion fight). The winner had to make his opponent give in any resistance by placing him flat on his back and keeping him in an immovable position. The defeat had to be verbally admitted.

2. Halber Ringkampf (Half Wrestling, or Wrestle for a Throw), standing freestyle.

In that style to win the match the wrestler had to give his opponent a flying fall on his back.

During the Middle Ages similar styles were practiced in Netherlands and Flanders where they were known as Ondergooi and Neergooi respectively.

The most common wrestling techniques of Medieval German freestyle were:

Arm-Ringen (use of arms and hands for throwing),

Hüft-Ringen (use of hip for throwing),

Haken-Ringen (Hooking, use of legs and feet for throwing) or **Häkeln** (Crochet Technique).

Most of the falls were given by using the Arm-Ringen technique (advantageous catch-hold and throw).

This “hug” also originated in old Germanic trial of strength. The objective was to take opponent down using physical strength only (lifting him up or swaying him from side to side), without using any wrestling techniques. In Ringen contestants didn't have to maintain their initial holds and would break and switch holds and use deceiving maneuvers to try to achieve an advantageous hold which lead to a throw.

William Caxton (1422-1491) an English writer, in his translation of French prose romance "Les Quatre Filz Aymon" also mentioned 2 starts in Frankish (Germanic) folk wrestling, “at a distance” and “close equal hug.”

Swiss Catch followed the German fashion, it was known as Ringen der Entlebucher (wrestling style of the residents of Entlebuch District, Switzerland), or Rutzen/Ruschen (to rush into someone with violent force causing a fall). That style was example of Zulauf wrestling. In that wrestling style the opening hold wasn't practiced. Instead the wrestlers would start in a free stance a distance away from each other ready for an immediate acceleration and attack.

The most accepted technique of Zulauf wrestling was called “Bulls” (Stieren). Two men would rush in towards each other like bulls trying to catch the optimal hold and then throw opponent backwards “heels over the head” (Suplex). The most popular throw was the “head between the legs” or Back Body Drop of modern pro wrestling. Those dangerous throws caused many a broken neck. Among tactics used in the close wrestling were: throwing over the hip (hip lift technique) called Hufen or Huefen (Crossbuttock), and giving the back (Buttock and Flying Mare). Also a very popular strategy was Kreuzsprunges, or jump over cross, which basically was a Flying Horse.

There were two styles of Ringen in the Middle Ages (see box), and similar styles were practiced in Netherlands and Flanders where they were known as Ondergooi and Neergooi respectively.

Current status

During the 1800s, the Turnvereins Era, the Medieval German Ringen was revived by the German Gymnastic Society (GGS) which popularized it all around the world. The GGS style of Ringen was first introduced by the forefathers of modern gymnastics, German enthusiasts Johann Christoph Friedrich GutsMuths (1759-1839) and Dr. Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778-1852).

Two kinds of Ringen, the Complete Wrestle and the Repeated Wrestle.

Complete Wrestle

Competitors stood a few steps apart from each other and after a signal the wrestling match would begin with a mere play with the hands in order to obtain the most advantageous hold. This was done to prevent wrestlers from rushing on each other with too much violence. The wrestlers were allowed to seize each other fairly round the body or by the limbs (above and under the waist), the head and neck were to be spared as much as possible, and blows of any kind were strictly prohibited. One was considered defeated when thrown flat on his back and kept from rising in that immovable position for the previously agreed amount of time so he cannot gain the uppermost position (pinning fall), or until he himself verbally admits his defeat and gives in any resistance (cries, enough!) Those matches were one fall affairs.

Repeated Wrestle

Victory was gained by giving the adversary two back falls, and it wasn't necessary to keep him on the ground. The thrower quit his opponent the moment he is down on his back (quick flying fall). The wrestler who has thrown his opponent without falling himself or touching the ground with his hand or knee was an immediate victor. In that style generally the wrestler was considered defeated if, after being thrown, he landed on his back, but sometimes it was enough if any part of the trunk of his body (back, belly, sides) touches the ground. Those matches were contested usually for 2 of 3 and sometimes for 3 of 5 back falls.



Starting position



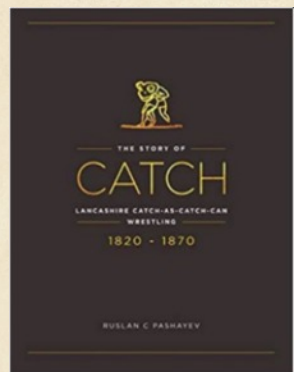
The Referees Hold



Cross Buttock



Headlock Throw



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The former was author of the famous "Gymnastics for Youth" (1793) and the latter was founder of gymnasia in Berlin (1811) and organizer of large gymnastic gatherings.

According to the Rules of German freestyle wrestling as they appeared in the 1793 book by J. GutsMuths called "Gymnastics for Youth" there were two kinds of Ringen, the Complete Wrestle and the Repeated Wrestle (See box).

In England and in the United States the GGS Ringen (Turners Catch) was known as a loose wrestling style or catch-as-catch-can. The GGS loose wrestling style influenced the evolution of British and American amateur freestyle wrestling. In 1866, the National Olympian Association (NOA) had a Great Gymnastic Gathering at Crystal Palace, London. Wrestling was represented by two styles, the Cumberland and Westmorland Back-hold and the Catch-as-catch-can as it was practiced by the athletes of GGS. In 1867, the wrestling manuals were issued by GGS. The catch portion of the manual was presented by Mr. Schweizer, GGS Catch wrestling instructor. An evolved variation of GGS Catch was later adopted by the amateurs of America (1880s), the National Sporting Club of London (1890s), the National Amateur Wrestling Association of Great Britain (1904), and then was finally exposed worldwide at the Olympics in St. Louis (1904) and London (1908).

The Story of Catch: The Story of Lancashire Catch-as-catch-can Wrestling.

FIRST FIFTY YEARS 1820-1870. by Ruslan C Pashayev

The Birth and Evolution of Catch-as-Catch-Can Pro-Wrestling in East Lancashire, England. "The Story of Catch" covers the most forgotten stages of Lancashire's Catch Wrestling history, including its origin, its fast growth and evolution during first fifty years of Catch, introduction of professionalism and its Golden Era, as well as introduction and popularization of it in the United States. This story has many heroes who affected Catch in its early stages and remained in history as true symbols of Lancashire Wrestling. But the whole story is dedicated to the memory of Adam Ridings of Bury, Lancs (1819-1894), who was also known under the nickname of "Dockum of Bury" a pioneer of Catch Wrestling, and the most prominent and popular wrestler of Lancashire in the 1840's-1850's. For anyone with a serious interest in history of professional wrestling "The Story of Catch" is a must.