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FILA announces modifications to international wrestling rules

Gary Abbott USA Wrestling
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FILA, the international wrestling federation, held a special meeting of the FILA Bureau, the sport's governing council, in Rome, Italy on January 31 to address the rules of international wrestling.

"They held a specific meeting for the FILA Bureau regarding the wrestling rules," said Stan Dzedzic, the FILA Bureau member from the United States. "There was serious debate around whether all the items about the rules had been addressed. It was important that it was addressed by the entire Bureau on such an important topic."

At the meeting, the FILA Bureau developed some specific changes in the rules of the sport, focused on three areas: the appeal process, the rules of Greco-Roman and the enforcement of the current rules.

These rules come into effect today (Feb. 9), and a copy of the rules modifications can be downloaded from the FILA website:[FILA letter: Modification of the Wrestling Rules](#)

A statement about the modifications has been posted on the FILA website:

"The FILA Bureau that met in Rome (ITA) on 31 January 2009 adopted some important modifications to the wrestling rules regarding the wrestlers' protection and the Greco-Roman matches. These new provisions come into force on 9 February 2009 and must be applied to all competitions entered in the FILA calendar. The effects of these modifications will be analyzed by FILA following the Continental Championships in view of a final decision."

Dzedzic said that the FILA Bureau meeting went well, and he is confident that the changes developed will help the sport of wrestling in the long term.

"I walked away with a feeling of accomplishment and purpose for the Bureau," said Dzedzic. "There was an open dialogue, a serious debate and they wanted to do what was the best for the sport. It was a very logical discussion."

The first aspect of the modifications is concerned with the process in which a call by the officials can be reviewed. The referees can no longer decide to review the video during a wrestling match. Each wrestler, through his coach, can request an appeal once during a match. If the appeal is upheld, the wrestler will be allowed another video review later in the match. If the appeal is not upheld, the opposing wrestler will receive one point.

A jury of appeal has been set up to also examine any video review, in addition to the referees review. This jury of appeal has the final say, meaning it can change the decision of the referees on the appeal.

"In the past, there was no right for an athlete to appeal on the field of play during the situation in question," said Dzedzic. "Now, only the athletes, through their coach, can request a review of a hold. It is an interesting concept. It gives full rights to the athletes on the mat, in the full view of the world. It is an interesting shift in power."

The second portion of the modifications concerns new procedures in Greco-Roman wrestling. Each period will be split into portions of 90 seconds on the feet, and 30 seconds in par terre. This is a change from the 60 seconds on the feet, followed by two 30-second periods in par terre.

If the score is 0-0 after 90 seconds in the first period, the red wrestler is placed in the advantage position in the clinch. If the situation is repeated in the second period with a 0-0 score, the blue wrestler is placed in the advantage position in the clinch.

In the third period, if there is a 0-0 score after 90 seconds, the wrestler who scored the most points in the first two periods will have the choice of position in the clinch, followed by the wrestler with the highest value of points. Only if no wrestler has an advantage in those criteria will there be a draw to determine the clinch position.

“There was a sense of urgency and passion about making the rules better for Greco-Roman,” said Dzedzic. “There was a consensus that we did just that. The debate was lively.”

Dzedzic believes that the Bureau members agreed that the Greco-Roman changes will enhance the sport.

“It provides more time to compete, the incentives for the offensive wrestler are greater, and luck has been reduced dramatically. The final result will be left in the hands of the wrestlers,” said Dzedzic.

Dzedzic noted that in 81% of the Greco-Roman matches at the Olympic Games, no wrestler scored in the first minute of the match. He believes that the rule modifications will provide the better wrestlers more incentive to score points.

The third aspect of the modifications concerned what FILA called “Penalty for negative wrestling.” According to Dzedzic, this was a commitment by FILA to apply the current rules in a more strict and consistent manner. Dzedzic said that this will help eliminate tactics such as burying the head, blocking, grasping hands on the mat, and crawling out of bounds to avoid a scoring situation.

“My hope is that Section C (Penalty for negative wrestling), although vague, is the most important element of this document,” said Dzedzic.

Dzedzic said that the wrestling community should look at the impact of these rule changes in their entirety, rather than focus on just isolated portions of the modifications. He called the rule modifications “different and new.”

“The consensus about these rules are strong,” said Dzedzic. “Now, the onus is on the athletes and the coaches who wanted changes. They will have to wrestle in a way to make them work. The onus is on keeping the spirit of these rules.”