

FIGHTING SPORTS

WRESTLING AND WWF

Perhaps it's the old brain in action, but it might sound enjoyable to watch a good scrap and somebody getting a pasting, providing it presents an evenly matched contest in fair game.

Wrestling is a sport with a long history and which featured in the ancient Olympics. There are also many national and regional forms such as found in Central Asia, China, India, Turkey and even Northern England, in the form of Cumberland Wrestling. However, these rather, traditional formats have been supplanted, commercially at least, by the media circus otherwise known as WWF (World Wrestling Federation). The main combatants with nicknames and massive biceps and chests, that make them look like alien action men from a fantasy film, compete in televised spectacles that are as much theatre as sport.

One of the early celebrities of the sport was Hulk Hogan, who gained fame through appearing in Rocky III, before going into film using his own character. Other stars followed with lurid and chest names like Diesel and Razor Ramon. The eighties and early nineties was perhaps the golden era for the sport, but there was trouble afoot. Many of the big bodies were bulked up on steroids and other drugs, leading to scandal and bad press, and the "Attitude Era" saw the promotion and celebration of the baddie and some brutal action. In the millennium to follow, the sport would tone down this aspect to make the sport more palatable and marketable for younger viewers, who now follow the likes of Chris Jericho and CM Punk, Mark Lucas Callaway – better known as The Undertaker, is arguably the most enduring wrestler, having undergone a number of good and bad guy role transformations, and fought in there decades. Commercially, wrestling has weathered its bad press storm but the sport is under threat from a surprising adversary, namely the Olympic Committee.

You'd think with its ancient history wrestling's Olympic status would be unquestioned but you'd be wrong. The New York Times reported that:

'Both freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling will be contested at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, but they will be excluded from the 2020 Summer Games.'

The decision was made in a secret ballot by Olympic Committee Members. It seems that main rationale behind this is to achieve the objective of presenting events that are 'relevant to sports fans of all generations' Traditional wrestling simply isn't as popular as newer sports like snowboarding, rollerblading or the staged, melodrama of the WWF. There's also another young upstart in the fight ring now, in the form of MMA.

MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

In 1970s Britain, the most popular Chinese Take-Away was not Chop Suey and Rice but a Bruce Lee video. In this films he took on the gangsters of the Triads, but in his fighting style, he laid the foundations for what would become Mixed Martial Arts. Fights involving combat techniques from different martial arts had been popular in China and Japan for a number of years, but it was primarily the Americans who combined this with boxing in a number of bouts which pitched a well known boxer against a wrestler, judo or karate king. After a while, the sport developed its own multidisciplinary expert MMA fighters. In the US in the nineties, MMA was first branded as Extreme Fighting and

fought in a cage but it wasn't an 'anything goes' affair, as moves such as eye gouging or kidney punches were barred. The main competition is the Ultimate Fighting Championship, but there are other events such as Strikeforce, Bellator Fighting Championships and the Invicta Fighting Championships, which is a women's competition.

Supporters of the sport argue that the best MMA fighters are as good as the best boxer, wrestlers, and martial arts fighters combined, but critics express concerns about the risk of serious injuries to competitors. It's certainly no picnic in the park, but neither is boxing.

THE NOBLE ART OF BOXING

Fisticuffs has always been a way of settling disputes, but it has gradually become more regulated over the years. It first became popular in England in the eighteenth century, through fighters such as James Figg and Jack Broughton. In those days, there were Prize fights in which anyone fancying their chances could take to the ring. They were bare knuckle fights, that could last for up to thirty or forty rounds. The modern fight game owes much to John Sholto Douglas, the ninth Marquess of Queensbury, who introduced the Queensbury Rules in 1867. This led, amongst other things, to the wearing of boxing gloves. By the end of the nineteenth century, the sport had also become very popular in America with John Sullivan reigning as World Champion for ten years, until defeated by the black James J. Corbett, also known as 'Gentleman Jim'.

During the twentieth century, boxing became one of the most popular and lucrative sports, laying it open to match fixing and fighters being intimidated to throw fights, as portrayed in Harold Robin's book, 'A Stone for Danny Fisher'. Boxing has also proved to be a rich topic for film makers with unforgettable classics such as Kid Galahad, starring Elvis Presley, Somebody up there likes me, with Paul Newman, Robert DeNiro as Raging Bull, and of course, Sylvester Stallone in the Rocky movie series. In real life, the heroes of the ring have included Jack Dempsey, Joe Louis, Rocky Marciano, Sugar Ray Robinson, Marvin Hagler and the renegade, Mike Tyson, but throughout the history of boxing, one name, or in this case two names, reigns supreme.

Cassius Clay was born in 1942 in Louisville, Kentucky. Learning boxing in a local gym and pursuing the sport as a teen amateur, in 1960, at just eighteen years of age, he annihilated the opposition to win the gold light-heavyweight prize in the Rome Olympics. Four years later, he defeated Sonny Liston to become World Heavyweight Champion of the World. Apart from his youth, Clay was remarkable in other ways. Firstly his boxing style was unlike any other man of his weight; he was light and nimble on his feet, 'dancing' around the ring in what became known as the 'Ali Shuffle'. Contrary to wise convention, he often dropped his guard, taunting his opponent to hit him and avoiding punches through lightening fast reactions. Out of the ring, he was a media sensation, boastfully declaring, 'I am the greatest!' Like a modern day rapper, he made up rhymes about his prowess such as:

'I float like a butterfly, sting like a bee.'

I should be a postage stamp; that's the only way I'll ever get licked.'

He successfully defended his title a number of times throughout the mid-sixties, but the political landscape at the time was a troubled one and soon to impact in his career. Firstly, he became a Muslim and joined the Black Muslim organization, The Nation of

Islam, Changing his name to Muhammad Ali. He was then drafted to go to war in Vietnam but refused to go as a conscientious objector, stating that he had no argument with the Viet Cong, and wasn't going to fight a white man's war. This led him to having his titles removed and being banned from boxing, and probably stole the best years of his career. Eventually, in 1970, he won a law suit allowing him to fight again and fought the bulldozer known as 'Smoking Joe Frazier.' Not as agile as he once was, he lost, but undeterred he continued fighting and regained much of his former ability.

After Frazier lost his title to George Foreman, the totally bizarre location of Congo was to set up what was billed as the 'Rumble in the Jungle.' Ali won with an eighth round knock out, having used the sucker 'Rope-a-dope' trick on his opponent. Worried about Foreman's big punch, Ali stood back against the ropes allowing his opponent to strike many harmless blows, the impact of which were largely absorbed by the ropes, until Foreman tired himself out. Throughout his career, Ali won the world title on three separate occasions. However, after his career ended, he developed Parkinson's disease, in which his speech became increasingly slurred. It was a sad epitaph for a man who had been so articulate, with wit as sharp as his jabs.

To some, pugilism will always be viewed as barbaric and primitive, but to its fans, despite the blood and the pain, it will always retain a unique beauty and a special place in the world of sport.

Bibliography: English matters. Sport. 7/2013, pp.35-37

EXERCISES:

1. Give the meaning to the nouns:

1	a scrap	a	czarny charakter
2	a pasting	b	paker, napakowany gość
3	a baddie	c	cios /prosty/
4	an adversary	d	bójka
5	a beefcake	e	pięściarstwo
6	a jab	f	sprawność
7	pugilism	g	przeciwnik
8	fisticuffs	h	walka
9	prowess	i	walka na pięści
10	a bout	j	lanie

2. Match the collocations in English and Polish languages:

evenly matched	fight	opuszczać gardę
to pitch a boxer	the guard	wystawić boksera przeciwko zapaśnikowi
bare knuckles	blows	unicestwić przeciwnika
to drop	contest	unikać ciosów
to annihilate	punches	walka na gołe pięści
to strike	against a wrestler	zadawać ciosy
to avoid	the sport	waga półciężka
light-heavy	on steroids	uprawiać sport
to pursue	weight	być napompowanym sterydami
to be bulked up	the opposition	wyrównana rywalizacja

3. Match the meanings of adjectives:

cheesy	fighters	znośny /do przełknięcia/ sport
palatable	blows	szybki w nogach, 'tańczący na ringu'
intimidated	fast reactions	zstraszeni zawodnicy
nimble	nicknames	nieszkodliwe ciosy
lightening	on the feet	błyskawicznie szybkie reakcje
harmless	sport	tandetne ksywki

4. Find the meanings of boxing idioms:

to throw in the towel	not to apply as much force in a situation as you could	przyjąć cios na klatę, stawić czoło problemom
to be on the ropes	unreasonable, unfair	mieć wsparcie
to pull punches	to accept criticism	mieć kłopoty
a sparring partner	to give up	poniżej pasa, niesprawiedliwe
below the belt	to be fast asleep	poddać się, zrezygnować z czegoś
to take it on the chin	to be in difficulty	być cwany
to have sb in the corner	to be cunning	głęboko spać
to box clever	somebody who you argue with for fun	być skłonny do czegoś, oszczędzać (kogoś), odpuszczać (komuś), wstrzymać się z krytyką (owijać w bawełnę)
to be out for the count	to have support	partner treningowy, partner do dyskusji

5. Fill in a proper boxing idiom. Change grammar form where needed.

Don't give up now! It's too soon to _____.

Bill has been barred from the boxing ring for not hitting the other fighter as hard as he could. He stroke him with light blows and enabled the other boxer to win. "I have never _____ in my life!" cried Tom.

His political career is _____, as he was found lying about taxes.

I like having friendly arguments with Ben. He's my _____.

America is not the only democracy where campaigns are not according to the rules. Polish ones are also _____.

I didn't _____. I told her exactly what I thought of her.

Anne and Harry had a terrible row last night. I was _____ so I didn't hear any of it going on.

When John could stand no more of Mary's bad temper, he _____ and left.

Mike really supports me when it comes to my divorce. I _____.

He is far too cunning to come at us in the open. He _____.

Paul really _____ today when he got fired for missing a deadline.

The teacher doesn't _____ when it comes to discipline.

ANSWERS:

Nouns:

1	a scrap	a	bójka
2	a pasting	b	lanie
3	a baddie	c	czarny charakter
4	an adversary	d	przeciwnik
5	a beefcake	e	paker, napakowany gość
6	a jab	f	cios prosty
7	pugilism	g	pięściarstwo, boks
8	fisticuffs	h	walka na pięści
9	prowess	i	sprawność
10	a bout	j	walka

Collocations

evenly matched	contest	wyrównana rywalizacja
to pitch a boxer	against a wrestler	wystawić boksera przeciwko zapaśnikowi
bare knuckles	fight	walka na gołe pięści
to drop	the guard	opuszczać gardę
to annihilate	the opposition	unicestwić przeciwnika
to strike	blows	zadawać ciosy
to avoid	punches	unikać ciosów
light-heavy	weight	waga półciężka
to pursue	the sport	uprawiać sport
to be bulked up	on steroids	być napompowanym sterydami

Adjectives

cheesy	nicknames	tandetne ksywki
palatable	sport	znośny /do przelknięcia/ sport
intimidated	fighters	zstraszeni zawodnicy
nimble	on the feet	szybki w nogach, 'tańczący na ringu'
lightening	fast reactions	błyskawicznie szybkie reakcje
harmless	blows	nieszkodliwe ciosy

Boxing idioms

to throw in the towel	to give up	poddać się, zrezygnować z czegoś
to be on the ropes	to be in difficulty	mieć kłopoty
to pull punches	not to apply as much force in a situation as you could	oszczędzać (kogoś), odpuszczać (komuś), wstrzymać się z krytyką (owijając w bawełnę)
a sparring partner	somebody who you argue with for fun	partner treningowy, partner do dyskusji
below the belt	unreasonable, unfair	poniżej pasa, niesprawiedliwe
to take it on the chin	to accept criticism	przyjąć cios na klatę, stawić czoło problemom
to have sb in the corner	to have support	mieć wsparcie
to box clever	to be cunning	być cwany
to be out for the count	to be fast asleep	głęboko spać

Don't give up now! It's too soon to **throw in the towel**.

Bill has been barred from the boxing ring for not hitting the other fighter as hard as he could. He stroke him with light blows and enabled the other boxer to win. "I never **pulled punches** in my life!" cried Tom.

His political career is **on the ropes**, as he was found lying about taxes.

I like having friendly arguments with Ben. He's my **sparring partner**.

America is not the only democracy where campaigns are not according to the rules. Polish ones are also **below the belt**.

I didn't **pull any punches**. I told her exactly what I thought of her.

Anne and Harry had a terrible row last night. I was **out for the count** so I didn't hear any of it going on.

When John could stand no more of Mary's bad temper, he **threw in the towel** and left.

Mike really supports me when it comes to my divorce. I **have him in my corner**.

He is far too cunning to come at us in the open. He **boxes clever**.

Paul really **took it on the chin** today when he got fired for missing a deadline.

The teacher doesn't **pull any punches** when it comes to discipline.

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