Practical Medical Guide for Wrestling Competitions: Local, Regional or Youth Competitions

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ABSTRACT
Health regulations regarding wrestling competitions are strictly defined and described by the International Federation of Associated Wrestling Styles. There are well prepared medical instructors, doctors and health providers both for the FILA (International Federation of Associated Wrestling Styles) and for the National Federations present at adult international competitions. However, many competitions for younger ages or those held by local authorities supported by national federations are supervised by local medical doctors or ambulatory services inexperienced in wrestling. Every country has its own regulation for sport competitions but we lack a general practical guide for physicians or health care providers that could help these professionals to become familiar with wrestling.

Key Words: medical support, pre-competition examination, injuries, tournament organization.

INTRODUCTION
We would like to express our gratitude to you for spending your valuable time and knowledge on our beloved sport. We would like to help your work with some practical advice if you are not familiar with wrestling and wrestling rules. The FILA (International Federation of Associated Wrestling Styles) has its own well described protocol for International-, Continental or World Championships (4). The present guide is for such competitions where you are the only medical staff without any other medical help.

Basic Points:
- First, always introduce yourself to the Chief Referee who is a well prepared and experienced member delegated by the National Federation.
- It is useful to be familiar with the primary health care and the emergency guidelines and to follow them strictly.
- The participants must have their sport license checked by the Chief Referee without exception. The doctor–in-charge of the competition must not give permission for competing in case of missing this document and must suspend the wrestler. There may be younger wrestlers with parental permission but this must be approved by the Chief Referee, however you can overrule it and in certain cases you have the right to suspend it.
BEFORE THE COMPETITION

Medical Examination

It is a general examination, approximately 20-30 seconds long, to eliminate obvious ailments – e.g., skin infection, fever, arrhythmia, fracture or dislocation. The inspection is independent from the sport medical license. In case of doubt or obvious contraindication of being able to compete you have to suspend the wrestler and document it.

Our Advice

- **Open wound, suture:** forbidden to compete with these ailments!
- **Nails:** long or sharp nails may cause injury (skin, eye) during the bout, so it must be controlled. You have the right to examine it and obviously suspend the wrestler from the competition but do not have the obligation to cut it (3).
- **Suspend wrestlers with contagious diseases:** skin, pulmonary, ORL (Oto-Rhino-Laryngology), etc. Mycotic skin infection may be frequent which implies disqualification (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Mycotic skin infection.](The figure is from the archives of the University of Debrecen, Medical and Health Science Center, Department of Dermatology, Debrecen, Hungary.)

- **Examination of the pulse:** the large weight-, water- and mineral loss may cause a disturbance of the physiological equilibrium even in a healthy athlete. You do not need to measure all the cardiovascular functions but with a simple pulse test you can disclose major arrhythmia or pulse deficit (8,10).
- **Cardiac and pulmonary auscultation:** disclose major arrhythmic cardiovascular changes or pulmonary diseases. It is not expected from you to have the proper diagnosis under not ideal examining circumstances but in case of doubt you have the right to suspend the competitor (6).

COMPETITION

- The organizing body must settle you to a place which is visible and easily approachable. It is good to wear a special medical uniform to be obviously recognizable. It is not compulsory to sit at the same place the whole time, you may leave your position (refreshment, sanitary reasons etc.), but you must notify the Chief Referee in advance.
- During the competition if you see a position or situation which can be dangerous for a wrestler’s health even if it is left unnoticed by the referee, you can stop the bout without justification for preventing further injury (ex. laterally distorted knee, medially rotated ankle, etc.). If it is in a fall position, it automatically means the end of the bout by fall – but this is indifferent concerning the professional medical aspects.
- In case of injury, without serious complication, the referee calls you. The competitor should not leave the mat and you have to decide if the wrestler can continue or needs medical help. You do not have time limit for examination and solving the problem but you should have to tell in advance how much time your participation will take and whether the injury is reversible or not.
- If the injury is serious enough to suspend the bout, you have to decide if the wrestler needs referral to a hospital or not.
- Every medical intervention you initiate need to be recorded in written form.
- If there are no such circumstances, you are kindly asked not to enter the mat until the call of the referee.
Common Situations

- **Concussion:** First, decide about treatment and second decide about whether to let the wrestler return to compete. In most of the cases the origin of concussion may be unclear: direct trauma, secondary effect of dehydration, neck injury, hypoxia during a throw or the combination of all. To avoid the most dangerous consequences one has to follow the protocol of the so-called ABC rules of reanimation. Reclination of the person for free airway is the most important than to fix the neck and begin to move in case of intact consciousness and no neurological signs (2, 7, 12, 13).

- **Axial skeleton (spine) injury:** do not touch the wrestler to worsen the symptoms. Call for ambulance or put him/her into vacuum bed or place a neck orthosis depending on the site of injury (1).

- **Appendicular (extremity) skeleton injury:** reduction is not compulsory but can be measured in case of dislocation – avoid it in case of suspecting fracture-dislocation together (5).

- The referee must control the quality of the mat. A hole on it may cause serious distortions. If you notice such problem, please tell it to the referee.

- You must **not give any kind of oral medicine or treatment** to the wrestler during the bout. No medicine, no food, no drinks are allowed, and one must refuse to give them even in case of inquiry.

- **There is no time limit for the medical aid.** You have as much time as you need. But it is advised to inform the referee if the injury permits recovery. If it does not you can suspend the bout. If the situation allows it is advisable to notify how much time or you may need. The wrestler must not leave the mat during the medical interventions. In case of leaving it consequently the lost of the bout is followed.

- **Bleeding:** it is forbidden to wrestle with bleeding open wound, nose, etc. (Figure 2). We strongly ask you to prepare an emergency kit for such situations that contain cotton, bandage, gloves and some vasoconstrictor which is not on the doping list. If you see blood on the competitor or on the mat you can ask to clean them / it.

- **Eye injury:** the lesion of the cornea is a very common but not serious injury. It comes with tearing and the inability to keep the eyes open. In these cases we ask you to wash and cover the injured eye and refer the wrestler to the closest ophthalmology department (9).

- **Cauliflower ear:** it is a “trade mark” of wrestlers which is caused by the bleeding of the auricular cartilage. With time this blood is going to be calcificated and remains solid. Until that time it is very painful (11).

- **Creams:** may be used for raising local skin temperature (“heating”), for reducing pain or against hematomas. You may provide creams to help the competitor but it is nor required from you.

- **Tape, bandage or other medical supplies:** you are not obliged to provide them after the competitors’ wish. You may do it but you do not need to do it.

CONCLUSION

The health and safety of all of the athletes is the number one priority. In any case where you suspect that the wrestler is not fit to compete you have the right to suspend him from the competition even if he has valid certification for it. This will often require your courage, as the wrestler and coach will almost always want to continue. You must tell it to the chief referee and you must document it. We also ask you to differ if it is a permanent or temporary illness or you consider further evaluation or new medical permission after further recovery.
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