Words of Wrestling

Liliana Kaneva

To cite this article: Liliana Kaneva (2014) Words of Wrestling, International Journal of Wrestling Science, 4:2, 42-47, DOI: 10.1080/21615667.2014.954970

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/21615667.2014.954970

Published online: 30 Sep 2014.

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EDITOR’S NOTE:

Liliana Kaneva is a multi-faceted official of the Bulgarian Wrestling Federation. She currently heads its International Relations, Protocol, and Public Relations departments. She is a renowned figure in the world of sports, a long-time associate of the International Wrestling Federation (FILA), founder and Executive Director of the Bulgarian Sumo Federation, co-founder and Deputy Chairman of the European Sumo Union, board member of the International Sumo Federation (ISF).

Liliana Kaneva is a lecturer, journalist, writer, artist and photographer. She has authored more than 250 works of various formats and topics. Her works have been featured in newspapers, radio stations, and television channels at home and abroad.

Liliana is the author of the FILA anthem Palestrida as well as the anthems of three other international federations and organizations. She authored the anthem of the Bulgarian Wrestling Federation, Ode to Victory and wrote the book A Wrestling Summons, which was published for the 80th anniversary of the federation. Her collection of poems has been translated into French, English, Japanese, and Ukrainian and has been featured in various anthologies and prestigious publications. She has received multiple awards for her varied literary work, including the top award of the Bulgarian Association of Writers. She is truly an ambassador for sport around the world!

I first met Liliana at the International Symposium on Traditional and Olympic Wrestling in 2012 in Kahramanmaras in Turkey. She was singing along with a professor from Kyrgyzstan a folksong about wrestling heroes! We have excerpted some of the interviews of champions done in 2012 and their heart-warming comments that she included her book, Words of Wrestling. In this book, we see her intelligence, artistry, heart and joy that she brings to wrestling.

—DGC

Figure 1. Liliana Kaneva—A worldwide ambassador for wrestling.
Ivo Angelov: Two-Time European Vice-Champion and a Medal Holder From World Championships
(Since This Interview Ivo Angelov Became World and European Champion in 2013)

For me wrestling is everything. It extends beyond the mat – a person has to fight for everything in life – for love, for survival, for happiness. I was in love with football as a child. My father is a miner and my mother took care of me (I have three siblings). I would visit the coach alone and he would keep sending me back – “come the day after tomorrow.” Most of my classmates were training wrestling. They told me that they play football and other sports as part of their training. After the coach showed me some holds I fell in love with wrestling. I never had any regrets about football after that.

Most importantly I made great friendships through wrestling as well as wonderful memories; I hope for the same in the future. I will not discuss any material benefits, as it is not the most important factor.

The most exciting moment for me was the European championship in Varna in 2005, when I defeated my opponent and I realized I had become a bronze medalist.

It is a known fact that a competitor cherishes the first and the third place the most. I remember the great support by the spectators. I get goose bumps to this day.

Another unforgettable memory is from a men’s training camp where all of a sudden I was standing next to my idols – Armen Nazaryan, Nikolay Gergov, Ali Molov, and Sergey Mureiko. It was a moment of exaltation, so inspiring!

If a person believes in something and desires it wholeheartedly, sooner or later it will come true. One must however be devoted to his goals. It does not matter what type of success it is – in sports or in business…

Mihail Ganev: Two-Time World Champion and Medal Holder From European Championships

My father, may he rest in peace, was the one who took my brother and I to train wrestling. The two of us were always wrestling, ever since we were crawling babies. When I was in the fifth grade in Veliko Tarnovo, Lako Lakov took me under his wing, later I trained with Strahil, and served my military service at Levski sports club.

It was difficult at first. I was hardly able to cover the norms, but what idols I had, out of this world: Valentin Yordanov, Buvaisar Satiev, Simeon Shterev. I dreamt of becoming a hero on the Great Mat and not on the mat of the rural town of Zlataritsa.

I must have been born with luck. At the World championship in Guangzhou in 2006, I defeated one of my idols Buvaisar Satiev. I was among the very few, who had managed to defeat him. They named me the executioner of Russians. I had a flat tire so to speak. I was unable to even secure a medal. All the good and bad things happen within a fraction of...
I tore ligaments in my knee and had to pack my bags — I did not see the mat for two years, until 2010. That same year I reached the top — I became a World champion! I cried. In 2008 I lost my father and later a dear friend. I cried in their memory. I had promised to win a medal and I kept my promise. It is not easy, a lot of work, a lot of sweat. My coach Simo has a bag of tricks (holds) and he opens that bag daily.

We should have had this interview before a weigh in, look at me I am soaking wet!

**Boyan Radev: Two-Time Olympic and World Champion, a Renowned Patron and Maecenas of Bulgarian Art**

Before I became a wrestler and an art collector, I worked as a laborer at the “Republica 3” mine situated above Moshino, my village. I was breaking up coal, which went to the separation plant via conveyor belts to get sorted out. It was a very hot day. My partner and I were working atop the bunker. I was breaking the coal with an extremely heavy hammer and he was shoveling it on the conveyer belt. At that time I didn’t have a passport yet. The work safety boss was from my village and arranged for me to work without a passport. This same hot day I asked my partner to go and fill up the flask with water. He responded: “You are younger, you should go.” The water fountain was some 200 meters away and there was someone sitting beside it. I didn’t know him but I asked him to wash my back from the coal. He washed my back and said: “You are very fit, where are you from?” I told him that before I started work at the mine I used to drive a horse cart at the state farm in Moshino. He was Todor Ivanchev, a former wrestler, who quit due to a shoulder surgery. He showed me the scar. He said to me: “I want you in the town of Pernik at the “Mir” stadium at 5pm. You are super fit; you will be a great wrestler.”

I took the bus and went straight to the stadium. The youth coach known as Djafera ordered me “Get undressed” and handed me a pair of nylon shorts. There were no singlets back then. I wrestled an unknown boy. I used my miner and horse cart driver approach. I went into him and destroyed him. Later I found out that he was a Sofia regional champion many times.

If it were not for wrestling I would have been nobody. Back then they used to award two hundred and fifty dollars for an Olympic title. We wanted to have a place to train and to be fed. We wanted to be champions. The most important thing was to be sitting atop of the champion’s ladder to the sound of the Bulgarian National Anthem. I was proud with myself, with my coaches, and with Bulgaria.

In the second “halftime” of my life I started collecting paintings. At that time I used to visit often Sofia municipality, because I needed to change my home. A municipality clerk was lying to me and to another man, who was also going there every day. I asked that man who he was. “I am a painter,” he says. “If that is so let’s go have some whisky and you give me a painting as a present,” I responded. We sat down at the table and he told me that he was Stoyan Iliev, a student of Dechko Uzunov. We went to his studio. He told me to pick whatever I wanted. Now what? “Stoyan I know nothing about art paintings. Just give me something to hang in my house.” He gave me a nice work of his. I still have it to this day. He and his wife are very close friends of mine.

Figure 4. Boyan Radev next to his bronze bas-relief.

Figure 5. Boyan Radev – Olympic champion, Tokyo 1964.
All my distinctions, medals, and the rest of the items, which I have donated to Bulgaria, are exhibited at the National History Museum. There are around 200 items – icons, marble arrows, etc. Out of all my numerous awards I am most proud of the Coubertin medal, the Jacques Rogge trophy, and the FILA golden necklace. I am lacking only a distinction by the Pope. I hope this doesn’t come across as me wanting a medal by the Pope!

Wrestling helped me win the hard fights in life and to always wrestle to win. There are people, who have no pre and post history – just one “halftime” without a finish. I am not talking about a champion but about a man. The second “halftime” of my life is quite strong and has no end. Collecting art is also an occupation for a champion. It requires persistence and the patience of a pursuer.

An athlete must compete as long as he can, he must have a drive. I have had a drive for everything I have done – to be the best dressed man, to achieve something no one else can.

Artists and wrestlers honor only themselves. That being said, my idol in wrestling is Dimitar Dobrev. I am proud to have been his opponent at the age of 17 and that he was my coach during one Olympic Games and one World championship. Along with Mr. Watanabe from Japan, Hristo Traykov is also one of my idols. There is no one else like him on the wrestling mat – the greatest genius, a super talent, a unique wrestler. There will never be another one like him! Hristo is the unhappiest person in terms of athletic standing and the happiest person on the mat. Money means nothing to me, it is just paper. BBQ’s, chalga (pop folk) parties and the like - I don’t think so! When I have money I buy masterpieces and I feel light. I will collect art as long as I live and I will donate as long as I can. Is art collecting a passion? I am currently working on that answer. I will tell you in ten years.

Tzeno Tzenov: President of the European Council of Associated Wrestling and FILA Bureau Member

Wrestling is my life calling, a way to be close to universal human values and to witness in person the intrinsic qualities of my peoples. Wrestling is not only a social and communal occurrence. It is most importantly a phenomenon of the overall human development.

When we are discussing wrestling, the associations, which come to mind, direct our attention to topics such as history, the psychology of a given nation, traditions or in general to anything that occupies a person’s active life.

In my case wrestling opened the door to a wonderful world, in which strength and mastery are intertwined with honor, pride, and mutual respect, a world where a wrestling bout often transforms into a friendship.
I have countless memories and in order to summarize them I have to say, that all of them are connected to Bulgarian victories on the mat. I have seen plenty of pain and disappointments as well as outbursts of happiness and admiration. All these events together make up one unique memory of the thing, which makes me truly happy.

May the people, who devote themselves to wrestling, make it an inseparable part of their lives from the earliest of days till the very end.

Valentin Yordanov: Olympic, Multiple World Champion, Multiple European Champion, and President of the Bulgarian Wrestling Federation

Wrestling is like the Universe. I have always felt part of it. The entire life of a person is a struggle – for improvement, for freedom, for victory; a struggle to save ourselves from our inner world, to save the Earth; a struggle for survival, a struggle for the future of our children…

Wrestling is a journey much like life – you never know when and how it ends. Sometimes you are infinitely happy; sometimes you are miserable, angry, impatient or desperate. I have felt it all.

I am still carrying inside the lively feeling of being on top of the Olympic ladder; when I was becoming a World and European champion or when I failed to do so and how my supporters cheered or cried along with me… The feeling was indescribable, when thousands of supporters in Teheran lined up to greet me and to even tear off a piece of my clothing.
So many memories…

One thing I know for certain is that a person can never achieve anything alone, thus I always enjoy the successes of others as my own, because they are intertwined in one global thread, which leads to the big goal. Almost every night I dream of wrestling as if I am reliving life.

Figure 10. Out of this Valentin will come out as the winner.