Institutional Transformation, Governance Reform, & Identity Standards in Global Wrestling

By Coach Shan Al

Executive Summary

The international governing body for amateur wrestling underwent a profound institutional transformation between 2013 & 2014, transitioning from the **Fédération Internationale des Luttes Associées (FILA)** to **United World Wrestling (UWW)**. This rebrand was not a routine cosmetic overhaul, but an emergency survival response to an unprecedented existential crisis: the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) recommendation on February 12, 2013, to drop wrestling from the core Olympic program beginning with the 2020 Games.

Under the leadership of **Nenad Lalović**, who succeeded ousted president **Raphaël Martinetti**, the federation instituted widespread structural, technical, & governance reforms to address severe IOC criticisms regarding chaotic competition rules, administrative opacity, lack of athlete representation, & significant gender imbalance. Key reform milestones included:

- Equalizing Olympic discipline weight categories to a 6–6–6 structure across Men's Freestyle, Men's Greco-Roman, & Women's Freestyle for the Rio 2016 Games.

- Rewriting competition rules to replace confusing, short-period scoring & "ball draw" leg clinches with continuous, cumulative scoring over 2 three-minute periods.

- Securing formal reinstatement to the Olympic program on September 8, 2013, by securing 49 votes at the IOC Session in Buenos Aires, defeating competing bids from baseball/softball (24 votes) & squash (22 votes).

- Formally adopting the English-language identity **United World Wrestling (UWW)** on September 7, 2014, in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

While historical media reports & post-crisis disclosures highlighted financial irregularities—such as a 2020 Swiss tax ruling against Martinetti regarding €6.5 million in unrecorded payments from Azerbaijani sources—available evidence confirms that the 2013 Olympic crisis was driven by systemic governance failures, spectator unfriendliness, & gender inequality, rather than proven money laundering or criminal match-fixing convictions.

1. Historical Evolution of International Wrestling Governance (1905–2014)

Wrestling's international governing structure evolved over more than a century through successive organizational transformations, reflecting the sport's shifting relationship with the Olympic Movement & its need for standardized global rules.

Governance Timeline

Date / Era	Organizational Entity	Key Developments & Purpose
1905	*Amateur-Athleten-Weltunion* / *Deutsche Athleten-Verband (DAV)*	Established in Duisburg, Germany, to govern both wrestling & weightlifting internationally—standardize World Championships.
1912	*Internationaler Ringverband* (International Wrestlers' Union)	Emerged at the Stockholm Olympics as the first wrestling-specific international body; held its first congress in Berlin (1913) to establish standardized match lengths (20 minutes). Serves as UWW's primary foundational date.
1921	*International Amateur Wrestling Federation (IAWF)*	Formally reconstituted in Lausanne, Switzerland, with 19 founding national federations under inaugural President Einar Råberg, fulfilling IOC mandates for sport-specific federations.
1952–1954	*Fédération Internationale de Lutte Amateur (FILA)*	Adopted French naming under President Roger Coulon at the 1954 Tokyo Congress, solidifying French as an official administrative language.
1994	*Fédération Internationale des Luttes Associées (FILA)*	Renamed the International Federation of Associated Wrestling Styles to incorporate non-Olympic styles and move past strict "amateur" nomenclature.

June 2014	FILA Bureau (Dubrovnik, Croatia)	Approved the proposed name change to United World Wrestling & designed a new visual identity with branding agency Olive Grove.
Sept 7, 2014	*United World Wrestling (UWW)*	Member nations unanimously ratified the UWW identity at the Tashkent Congress in Uzbekistan on the eve of the World Championships.

```
[1905: Duisburg Union]
        ▼
[1912: Internationaler Ringverband] ——————→ (Stockholm Olympics)
        ▼
[1921: IAWF Established] ————————————→ (Lausanne IOC Congress)
        ▼
[1954: FILA (Amateur Era)] ——————————→ (Roger Coulon Admin.)
        ▼
[1994: FILA (Associated Styles)] ————————→ (Inclusion of Assoc.Styles)
        ▼
[2014: United World Wrestling] ——————————→ (Post-Crisis Rebrand)
```

Continuity of Purpose: Historical Mandate vs. Modern Mission

The core administrative continuity from the 1912/1921 IAWF to modern UWW lies in international coordination: establishing unified rules across national borders, supervising international referees, managing world championships, & preserving wrestling's Olympic standing. However, UWW's modern mandate expands significantly beyond basic administrative management:

- **Original Mandate (1912–1950s):** Standardize basic technical rules for amateur Greco-Roman & Freestyle wrestling, coordinate national federations, ensure Olympic competition compliance under European-centric administrative structures.

- **Modern UWW Mission Today:** *"To lead the growth of Wrestling, competitive and recreational, around the world."* UWW's stated vision is to be globally recognized as an inspiring, innovative, and leading Olympic federation anchored by core values of **Unity, Integrity, and Resilience**, alongside accountability, trustworthiness, and digital transformation.

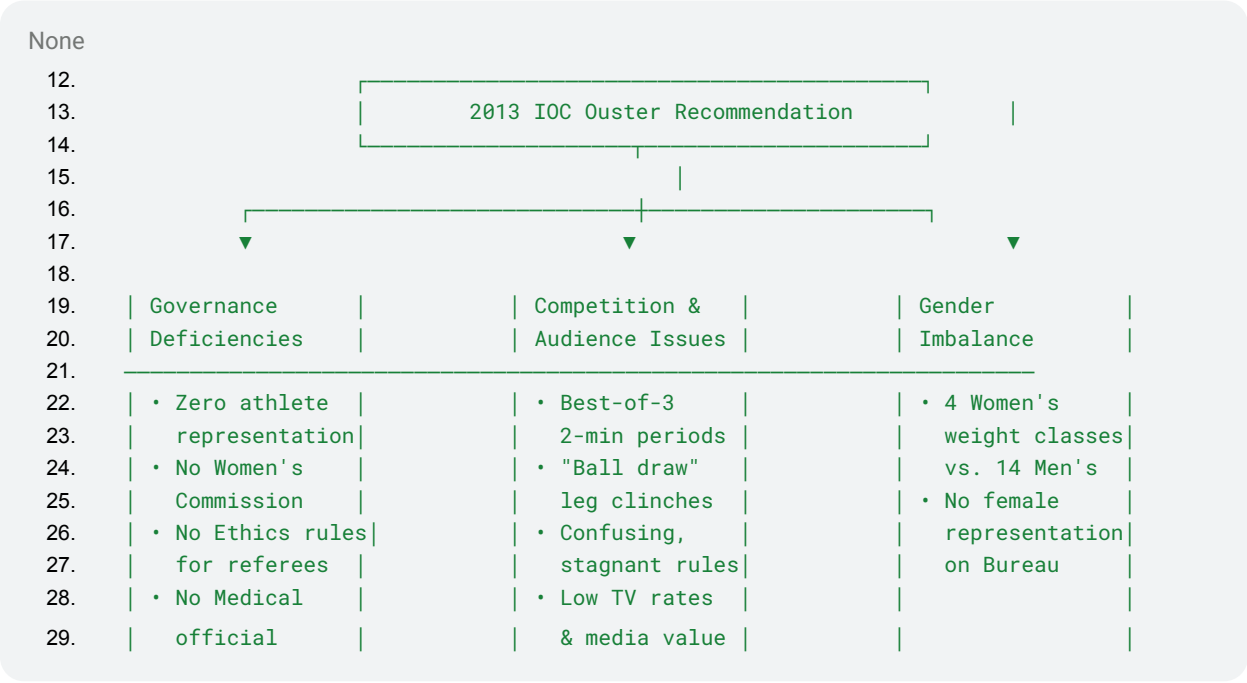
2. The 2013 Olympic Crisis & Institutional Turnaround ↓

The February 2013 IOC Removal Recommendation

On February 12, 2013, the IOC Executive Board shocked the international sports community by recommending that wrestling be excluded from the core program of 25 sports for the 2020 Olympic Games. While wrestling's position at the 2016 Rio Games remained secure, losing core-program status forced the sport into an emergency fight against competing candidate sports (specifically squash & a joint baseball/softball bid) for a single remaining provisional slot.

Primary Drivers of the Crisis

The IOC evaluated wrestling across 39 distinct criteria. The decision to recommend exclusion was driven by systemic administrative, structural, & political deficiencies within FILA:



1. **Governance & Institutional Deficiencies:** IOC evaluation documents revealed that FILA maintained no active athlete representation on its decision-making bodies, lacked a dedicated women's commission, possessed no formal code of ethics for technical officials, & had no medical representation on its executive board.

2. **Confusing & Unpopular Rule Formats:** A decade of continuous, erratic rule modifications under FILA leadership produced a competition format that audience members & casual viewers found incomprehensible. Periods were scored independently (resetting scores each period), allowing a wrestler to outscore an opponent on total points but still lose the bout. Furthermore, tied periods were routinely decided by drawing colored balls out of a bag to assign a leg-clinch advantage, effectively deciding Olympic bouts by random draw rather than athletic skill.

3. **Severe Gender Inequality:** Women's freestyle wrestling, introduced at the 2004 Athens Olympics, was limited to only 4 Olympic weight classes, whereas men competed across 14 weight classes (7 Freestyle, 7 Greco-Roman).

4. **Diplomatic Alienation & Leadership Failure:** President Raphaël Martinetti alienated key IOC stakeholders, bloated federation management by prioritizing non-Olympic "associated styles" (grappling, pankration, belt wrestling), & failed to defend wrestling's position while competing sports actively lobbied IOC Executive Board members.

Leadership Resignation & Reinstatement Campaign Sequence

Following the IOC's February 12 recommendation, FILA underwent a rapid leadership turnaround:

```
None
    [Feb 12, 2013] IOC EB recommends wrestling exclusion from 2020 core program.
                   ▼
    [Feb 16, 2013] FILA Bureau holds no-confidence vote in Phuket; Martinetti resigns.
                   Nenad Lalović named Acting President.
                   ▼
    [May 18, 2013] Extraordinary Congress in Moscow elects Lalović President;
                   approves structural governance & rule changes.
                   ▼
    [Sept 8, 2013] Full IOC Session in Buenos Aires votes to reinstate wrestling.
                   (Wrestling: 49 votes | Baseball/Softball: 24 | Squash: 22)
                   ▼
    [Sept 7, 2014] Tashkent Congress ratifies United World Wrestling identity.
```

Lalović led a sophisticated diplomatic lobbying campaign supported by public relations firm Weber Shandwick & a diverse presentation team. This team included prominent Olympic medalists **Carol Huynh** (Canada), **Lise Legrand** (France), **Daniel Igali** (Canada), & former USOC CEO **Jim Scherr**.

3. Core Areas of Structural & Technical Reform

Technical Rule Modifications & Competition Format Overhaul

In May 2013, the extraordinary FILA Congress enacted sweeping technical rule changes designed to make wrestling more dynamic, aggressive, & easy for television audiences to follow.

Technical Rule Modifications & Competition Format Overhaul Table ⬇

Feature / Metric	Pre-2013 FILA Rules	Post-2013 Reform Rules
Bout Structure	Three separate 2-minute periods; score reset to 0–0 after each period.	Two 3-minute periods with continuous running time.
Scoring System	Best-of-three periods (a wrestler could win total points across 3 periods and still lose).	Cumulative scoring across the entire 6-minute duration.
Takedown Value	1 point awarded per standard takedown.	2 points awarded for standard takedowns to encourage active attacks.
Tie-Breaking / Stalling	0–0 ties resolved by drawing a colored ball from a bag to grant a leg clinch.	Forced passivity clocks, mandatory activity periods, & point penalties for stalling.

Gender Parity & Leadership Initiatives

Gender equity served as the primary lever for demonstrating administrative modernization to the IOC:

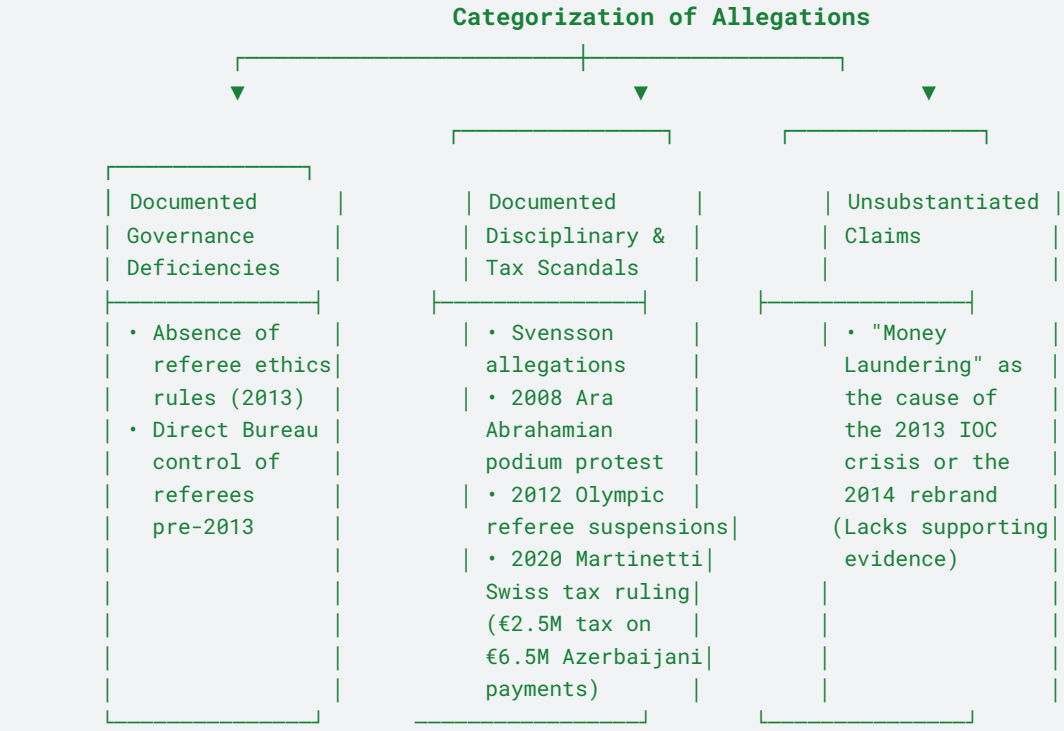
1. **Equalizing Olympic Weight Categories (The 6–6–6 Model):** In December 2013, FILA restructured its Olympic weight categories for the 2016 Rio Games. To achieve discipline parity without expanding total athlete quotas, FILA eliminated 1 men's freestyle class and 1 men's Greco-Roman class (reducing both from 7 to 6) & added 2 women's freestyle classes (expanding from 4 to 6).
    - *Note on Parity:* While this achieved an equal balance of 6 weight classes per discipline, overall program parity remained asymmetric: 12 total men's events (Freestyle & Greco-Roman) versus 6 women's events (Freestyle only).
2. **Constitutional Leadership Representation:** FILA established an Athletes' Commission, chaired by Olympic champion Carol Huynh, granting the commission a seat on the Bureau. The federation mandated reserved seats for female leadership on the Bureau (initiating roles for Carol Huynh, Rodica Yaksi, & Natalia Yariguina), eventually requiring at least 2 female Vice Presidents on the Bureau & mandatory female representation across all Continental Councils.

4. Scrutiny of Officiating, Misconduct, and Financial Controversies

To maintain research integrity, institutional analyses must clearly separate established administrative facts from unsubstantiated rumors and isolated disciplinary actions.

Scrutiny of Officiating, Misconduct, and Financial Controversies Table ⬇

None



Documented Governance Failures

- **Systemic Governance & Referee Vulnerabilities:** Prior to 2013, FILA lacked independent ethics rules for technical officials, & Bureau executives directly controlled referee assignments. Former FILA Bureau member **Pelle Svensson** (Sweden) publicly denounced FILA as corrupt, alleging that referee assignments & medals were influenced by political favors.

Documented Officiating Controversies & Integrity Incidents ⬇

- **The Ara Abrahamian Incident (Beijing 2008):** Swedish Greco-Roman wrestler Ara Abrahamian placed his bronze medal on the wrestling mat & walked away during the 84 kg award ceremony to protest biased judging in his semifinal match against Italy's Andrea Minguzzi. The IOC stripped Abrahamian's medal for breach of ceremony protocol, but the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) noted that FILA lacked an adequate internal appeal mechanism for officiating disputes.

- **London 2012 Referee Suspensions:** Multiple officiating personnel were suspended mid-tournament during the 2012 Games following egregious scoring errors, prompting post-2013 reforms that separated referee management from political Bureau oversight & implemented standardized video challenge systems.

- **Frank Chamizo Allegation (2021):** Italian wrestler Frank Chamizo publicly alleged he was offered a $300,000 bribe to throw a match at a 2021 Olympic qualifier against an Azerbaijani opponent. UWW initiated a review of referee management in response.

Financial Scandals & Tax Enforcement

On October 7, 2020, UWW issued an official statement confirming that Swiss authorities had ordered former president Raphaël Martinetti & his wife to pay €2.5 million in back taxes on €6.5 million in unrecorded payments received in 2010, 2012 from Azerbaijani entities. UWW noted it had no prior knowledge of these transactions.

- *Chronological Note:* While these financial transactions occurred prior to the 2013 crisis, the Swiss tax ruling occurred years later (2020). The payments reflect transparency deficiencies under Martinetti's tenure, but available records do not link these payments directly as the official rationale for the IOC's February 2013 exclusion recommendation.

Anti-Doping Violations

Wrestling has enforced retroactively tightened anti-doping measures. Following IOC re-analysis of anti-doping samples, 2008 Beijing Olympic champion **Artur Taymazov** was stripped of his gold medal in 2017.

Conclusion & Research Directives

The transformation from FILA to United World Wrestling demonstrates an aggressive institutional response to an existential threat. Driven by IOC pressure, the federation overhauled its leadership structure, modernized technical rules, built dedicated pathways for women's leadership & competition, plus modernized its public brand.

For research & analytical purposes, governance evaluations must maintain strict factual boundaries:

1. Recognize Nenad Lalović as the central figure of the institutional turnaround, backed by formal Bureau & Congress approvals.

2. Attribute the 2013 Olympic crisis to documented governance flaws, unoptimized spectator formats, & gender inequality.

3. Track historical integrity issues (such as the Martinetti 2020 Swiss tax ruling and CAS officiating rulings) as context for ongoing structural oversight reforms.

For more, please view coachshannyn.com/resources, coachshannyn.com/articles, & coachshannyn.com/international-blog.