

Schwingen

Schwingen is a Swiss variant of wrestling. It is considered a Swiss national sport, even more prominent than Hornussen and Steinstossen.

History

The roots of Schwingen in Switzerland cannot be determined. An early picture from the 13th century (in the cathedral of Lausanne) already shows the typical way of gripping the opponent. In central Switzerland and in the Swiss plateau, mainly on the northern rim of the alps, the Hosenlupf (literally: trouser lifting), as schwingen is also called, belongs to the common public festivities. The prize at the many alp festivals was a piece of trouser cloth, a sheep or other natural prizes. However, the fame of the winner counted more than the actual prize.

The first alp herder's festival in Unspunnen (Unspunnenfest) 1805 brought a revival of Schwingen. At that time, Switzerland was occupied by France. The goal of this festival was to reinforce the Swiss national consciousness.

In the last third of the 19th century, memorable Schwing festivals and a lively activity of educated gymnastics teachers brought Schwingen to the big cities. Thus the original fight of the herders and farmers became a national sport that reached all social levels. The associations, headed by the Eidgenössischer Schwingerverband (founded 1895), organised the sport by integrating regional peculiarities, improving the abilities of the fighters with teaching books and practices, and creating modern tournament rules.

Despite this extension to urban areas Schwingen is still most popular in the traditional rural areas of the northern alps.

Tournament

The fight takes place on the ring, a circular area with a diameter of 12 meters that is covered with saw dust. The two opponents wear short pants made of jute over their clothes. The fighters hold each other at these pants and try to throw each other onto their backs. There are several main throws, with names like "kurz", "übersprung" or "wyberhaagge", some of them very similar to judo techniques ("hüfter" is almost identical to koshi guruma, "brienzer" is basically uchi mata). A fight is won when the winner holds the opponent's pants with at least one hand and both the opponent's shoulders touch the ground. By tradition the winner brushes the saw dust off the loser's back after the fight.

The fight is judged by three referees, one of which stands in the ring. The referees give points, with a maximum of ten points for a winning throw. If the fight ends without a clear win, the more active fighter is awarded the higher number of points.

At a Schwing festival, every Schwinger fights six opponents, or eight at the Eidgenössische. The two Schwinger with the highest number of points after five (seven at the Eidgenössische) fights get to the Schlussgang (last round). The matching of the fighters is done by the fight court according to arcane rules. Often there are suspicions that the matchings have not been fair, to favor one contestant.

There are no weight classes nor any other categories.

The Schwing venues, regional and cantonal Schwing festivals, are held outdoors, between early summer and autumn.

The most important Schwing festival is the Eidgenössisches Schwing- und Älplerfest, that takes place every three years, the last time on August 20 till 22, 2004, in Lucerne. The winner of this tournament is proclaimed Schwingerkönig and receives a bull as his prize.

Traditions

Traditionally, Schwingen is a male sport. Women have only been schwinging for few years, the Frauenschwingverband, women's Schwing association, has been founded in 1992.

The Sennenschwinger (members of a pure Schwing club) wear dark trousers and a colored shirt, mostly bright blue, while the Turnerschwinger (members of a sports club dedicated to other sports as well) wear white pants and a white t-shirt.

Advertising and sponsoring is shunned at Schwingen. Successful Schwingers do not receive cash prizes but natural

prizes, like cow bells, furniture or live stock. These prizes may be sold for money.

The best Schwingers at a festival are given a wreath, the winner of the Eidgenössische is given the title of Schwingerkönig (schwinger king).