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ARM RESTLING
THE PEOPLE'S SPORT

Arm wrestling isn't just the trivial kids' play seen in middle school for generations. An Egyptian painting traces the sport back to 2000 B.C.

Have you ever arm wrestled? Most people would say they have seen someone arm wrestling or even tried it themselves as children. However, this small competition has been around for far longer than people realize. An Egyptian painting traces arm wrestling back to 2000 B.C., according to the Lebanese Armwrestling Federation.

The sport was played in ancient Native American culture as a test of strength. The form played by the Native American people would later be developed into wrist wrestling, which would combine with the form of arm wrestling at the time.

"It's been around before there were coliseums or arenas. It is a test of dominance and it comes from a primal instinct to overpower your opponent."

That's what Karim El Andary, founder and head of the Lebanese Arm Wrestling Federation, had to say about the ancient history of arm wrestling.

The sport can be found in numerous cultures as a competition of strength between tribesmen and comrades. However it wasn't till the 1900s that the game began to see official recognition and global popularization.

"In 1952 the first organized competition was held in Gilardi's Saloon in California by journalist Bill Soberanes, and in 1979 the first official Arm-Wrestling International League was formed," explained El Andary. It is no wonder the sport became popular quickly, as it is easy to practice.

Two players clasp their arms together and lay their other arm on the table, beginning to force the other to bend their arm in the opposite direction. A test of endurance and physical strength, the game has been used for a long time by people to determine who is more dominant.

The sport was termed "the people's sport" by El Andary, a game that the entirety of Lebanon can play.

There is no need for years of training; anyone can compete and the Lebanese Arm Wrestling Federation stages numerous competitions where anyone can sign up free of charge. After years of playing basketball, El Andary was introduced to the international sport of arm wrestling and sought to see where this game was played in Lebanon.

After noticing that there was no organized chapter for the World Arm Wrestling League in the Arab World, he decided to found the Lebanese Federation.



"I became quite interested in the game and decided to bring it to life. I knew we had a chance to compete and win internationally. It needed no previous investment or years of local federations. The game has been part of our culture for ages."

"It is now a national sport of Lebanon," explained El Andary. He predicts that with the upcoming talent, more and more contestants will participate in international competitions.

With the sport soon to be inducted into the Olympics, Lebanon has a chance to compete on an equal playing field.

As El Andary explained the road ahead for the federation, he showed the passion he holds for this sport and his hope that they will soon be integrating the competitions in schools and scouts, in order to offer a sport all generations can play.

"It is a sport that has no danger or harm to it. You and I could arm wrestle right now and people would surround us to fulfil their primal urge to see who is stronger."

As I delved more into the history of the game, I realized that in every culture this game has entered, it has immediately become popular. People want to participate in attainable physical competitions.



Now the Lebanese Arm Wrestling Federation is working toward making the game the number one sport of Lebanon, and to have playing centers in many Lebanese areas.

El Andary concluded: "I believe this game will become a unanimous force in the upcoming years, for all the rising generations to play. Special skill and training are needed plus motivation and determination which Lebanon has plenty of."

By Bob Mattar

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