

What ails wrestling in Canada.

March 17th, 2018 - J. Jordon

What I witnessed yesterday at Junior National Championships, was a blight on the history of our great sport in this country.

I have never seen such a disorganized mess of a tournament in this country or in any other. Furthermore, the lack of willingness to listen to reason and consider the athletes first, speaks to an arrogance that can only exist within a very broken sport organization.

It was about 10:30am on Friday, March 16th of this year at the COMPLEXE SPORTIF CLAUDE-ROBILLARD, the venue for Junior and Senior Canadian Wrestling Championships, in Montreal, when I noticed growing tension between volunteers and athletes at the entrance to the tournament floor. Upon further investigation, it became apparent that athletes were not gaining access to the floor until they were either in the hole or on deck. This would be fine, if there was some indication of when their matches were coming up; however, there was none. Furthermore, there was simply nowhere in the corridor the athletes could warmup. No mat, no list of match numbers on a screen, quite simply no indication whatsoever of when they were about to compete. This is not a simple departure from normal wrestling tournament protocol. There was literally no means by way of sight with which athletes could determine when their matches were about to take place.

It was also very clear to me that this was causing the athletes visible distress. Their warmup routines were gravely disrupted and they could not gain access to their coaches, who more often than not, were either on the floor coaching other athletes, or up in the stands trying to determine by line of sight how to juggle and manage the debacle.

This brings us to another concerning fact that very clearly compounded matters. WCL had limited access to the floor, near as I can tell, to coaches with NCCP Level 3 certification and up + a Making Ethical Decisions course. This meant that many coaches, some with over 40 years of coaching experience; coaches who had developed World Medalists and Olympians, were excluded from floor access. They could not corner their Junior National level athletes.

To the credit of the coaches allowed onto the floor, they cooperated as best they could to cover each other and corner matches of athletes whose coaches were excluded from the competition. That having been said, not having an athlete's own coach in their corner, is obviously not an ideal scenario.

When I decided to inquire with one of the volunteers at the gate to the competition area, he rudely fingered my accreditation and determined I was not fit to ask questions, let alone speak to anyone responsible for convening the event. The head table, filled with WCL staff and PTSO dignitaries, was inaccessible. I explained to the volunteer that I am on the WCL Board and President of Ontario Wrestling. The volunteer, visibly irritated, was still unwilling to allow me to speak with anyone in a position of decision making authority.

It was at this point that I spotted Andrew Pagé, WCL's new Event Coordinator, on the floor and beckoned him over for a discussion, as I was clearly disallowed from walking over to him. I explained, very calmly, that the situation at the gate was causing much distress to the athletes and disrupting their warmup routines. He indicated that he didn't care and that they were welcome to warmup further down the corridor, in the weigh in room. A room which, I might add, had the curious distinction of having a complete absence of warmup mats or any indication of what match numbers were currently in progress.

I then asked Mr. Pagé how many wrestling tournaments he had attended in the past. He responded, "Zero". He then asked, "How many athletics events have you attended?" I asked him how that question was relevant at a National Wrestling Championship. He did not appear to grasp my point. I can only assume that he felt his experience at athletics events in the past, had some bearing on a National Wrestling Championship. I have to admit that I fail to see the correlation.

I then asked if I could speak to someone at the head table. Mr. Pagé declined to allow me to do so. I might add that I had explained to him my positions at both Ontario Wrestling and the Board of Wrestling Canada Lutte. Furthermore, I expressed my concern for the safety of the athletes, some of whom were walking onto mats without a coach in their corner. Those doing so were at times afforded another coach, some were allowed to compete without one, still others were admonished by officials and a certain few were even threatened with being expelled from the tournament altogether. All of this for something that the athletes clearly had no hand in, nor responsibility for.

If someone can explain to me, how the scenario I just described is in any way beneficial to our athletes, their safety, performance or development, I am all ears. Until then, I will consider, as I'm sure many other coaches, athletes, officials, supporters and sponsors do right now, that Wrestling Canada Lutte has ceased to be in any fashion athlete centric in its focus.

Allowing an individual who has never before seen a wrestling tournament, let alone run one, determine the direction of a National Championship Event, is in my mind completely inexcusable.

I am not just angry with our staff at WCL. I am ashamed to be involved. We have put at risk the safety of our athletes and in so doing have compromised the most basic tenant within our mandate.

We desperately need change within Wrestling Canada Lutte and we need that change now.