



ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIAN CELTIC WRESTLERS

presents

PAN-CELTIC WRESTLING

THE MOST ANCIENT HISTORICAL EUROPEAN MARTIAL ART

Incorporating elements from several different sports indigenous to the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland & the Province of Brittany in France we have created a unique fusion style that we call Pan-Celtic Wrestling. These sports were practiced in Colonial Australia & the styles considered ancestral to Pan-Celtic wrestling include;



1. **CORNISH WRESTLING** or wrasslin Kernewek as it is known in the Unified Cornish language (also called gwrynva in the old Brythonic) is the best known of all the Celtic jacket styles once played in Australia. First recorded in Celtic Mythology, according to Geoffrey of Monmouth's 1139AD classic 'The History of the Kings of Britain', Cornwall was named after Corineus, the champion of King Brutus who defeated a giant named Gogmagog by throwing him over a cliff. If the name Corineus is substituted with Taranis the Gaulish thunder god, Brutus with Brennos the common name of Lugh the god of light & Gogmagog with Oghma, inventor of the ogham script, it becomes apparent that Geoffrey was actually retelling an older Celtic fable & there are many parallels with the Invasion Cycle of Ireland. The original Celtic tribe of Western Cornwall were called Cornovii by the Romans & in the 5th century the Anglo Saxons were calling the people that lived there Cornu Welsh or 'foreigners from Cornu' but even in that era the men were already known as powerful fighters. The sport was handed down from father to son since time immemorial & in 1923 the Cornish Wrestling Association started to formally organise competitions. Cornish wrestling has been played in Australia since Cornish miners were first brought out in the 1830s & towns like Bendigo, Ballarat, Cobarr, Broken Hill & Moonta all held championship titles.

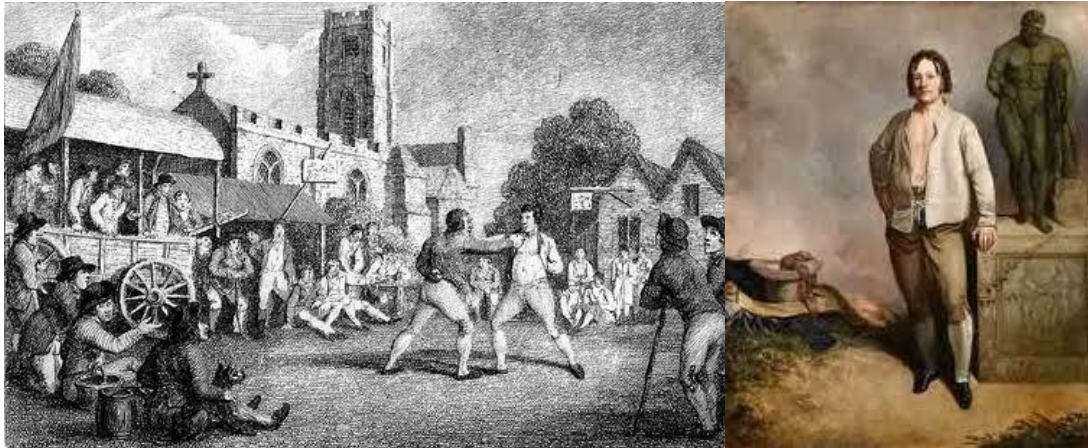


2. **Gouren** is the style of Brittany in France or Breizh as it is called in the Breton language (Brezhoneg), which is closely related to the Cornish tongue. Gouren is similar in nearly every aspect to the sport of Cornwall, using a wrestling jacket known as a roched & striving for a back touchfall, called a lamm. The Bretons are in essence descendents of the people who fled from what is now England with the Anglo Saxon invasions & set up colonies in Armorica to mix with native Celts. The Breton & Cornish people have always maintained contact with each other; inter regional tournaments in gwrynva/ gouren have been occurring since before recorded history. In 1520 during a lavish peace treaty at the Field of Cloth of Gold near Calais, King Henry VIII of England & King Francis I of France organised for the Cornish & Breton wrestlers of their kingdoms to fight against each other for the entertainment of the nobles. It is even said the two kings wrestled with both sides claiming victory, depending which side of the Channel the story is told. The Federation de Gouren was started at the same time as the Cornish Wrestling Association & a popular interceltic series began in 1928, instigating the concept of Pan-Celticism.



3. **DEVONSHIRE WRESTLING** or gwrynva Deunansek is the style that was once played across the Tamar River border from Cornwall, it likewise used a jacket to assist in holds & throws but the Devon style was more widely known for its liberal use of the 'outplay' or method of kicking an opponents shins from under them to make them fall. The Devon style differed from the Cornish in that competitors wore special shoes with hardened soles during competitions & several early 18th century authors stated that the whole county was addicted to the pastime. A famous match in 1826 between the champion of Devon, Abraham Cann &

the champion of Cornwall, James Polkinghorne attracted a crowd of 17,000 spectators in Morice Town near Plymouth but due to changing attitudes towards British sports it had completely died out in the county by 1880. Devonshire Wrestling was also made a central part of the Cotswold Olympick Games held in nearby Gloucestershire that lasted from 1612 till 1852. In 1963 the Cotswold Olympicks were revived and the sport was modified into an event called 'shin kicking' that can still be seen annually at the beginning of June.



4. **YMAFLYD CODWN CEFN** or the back fall style of wrestlo in the Cymraeg (Welsh) language also has ancient heritage extending back to early myth & the word for warrior, gwron, is the same used for wrestler in old Cornish & Breton. The Mabinogian Collection records that the Welsh hero Pryderi, the equivalent of Cu Chullain from Ireland, was trained in all the noble arts befitting a prince. In 1420 the poet Rhys Goch Eyyri defined these arts in his epic 'Robert ap Meredydd' as the 'y pedwar camp ar hugain' or 'four & twenty accomplishments' which included singing, hunting & weapons training in addition to yamavael or unarmed combat. The Welsh antiquarian Iolo Morganwg established the Gorsedd of Bards in 1792 & always had the idea of including the 24 measures of a man as part of the Welsh Eisteddfod, which he arranged to coincide with the Celtic Lughnasadh Harvest Festival on August 1. Ymaflyd was the same style as practiced in Cornwall that used a jacket for dynamic throws but also borrowed elements from the Devon style of outplay. It survived until the 1940s as a rural sport known as 'purring' that according to accounts was similar to the 'shin kicking' event mentioned above. There are unconfirmed accounts that indicate the sport has survived amongst the Patagonian Welsh in Chubut Province of Argentina.



5. **CORAICHT COLLEAB AGUS UILLE** or collar & elbow wrestling in Irish Gaelic was also a jacket style but unlike the other styles had each competitor starting in a fixed hold with the right hand on the opponents collar & the left hand resting on the opponents right elbow. Breaking the grip did not end the match however & the goal was to achieve a back touchfall similar to the Cornu-Breton styles. This sport was a part of the Aonach Tailtean or Games of Tailtiu held in Teltown County Meath from 636BC as part of the August 1 Lughnadsadh until abolished by the ecclesiastical reforms in 1169, the longest running ancient sporting carnival in Europe. According to myth the great Irish hero Cu Chullain competed at the Aonach Tailtean, which were started by his father the sun god Lugh. Also known as scuffling the sport survived in the countryside until the An Gorta Mor, the potato blight famine of the 1840s that killed over a million peasant farmers and forced so many others to leave the homeland to spread around the world. Scuffling was practiced in colonial Australia by Irish convicts, being instrumental in the 1804 Vinegar Hill rebellion & survived in America until being absorbed into the folk style (collegiate wrestling) in the early 20th century. In 1993 a group called Coiste Coraicht Ceilteach, began a revival movement for the sport in Ireland & is attempting to have scuffling re-recognised as a national sport by Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, the Gaelic Athletic Association.



6. **SCOTTISH BACKHOLD** is an old style of wrestling or carachd as it is called in Scottish Gaelic that requires competitors to seize each other in a fixed hold before the start of the match, one arm over & one arm under the opponents shoulder with hands clasped at the opponents back, hence the backhold title. Breaking the hold or touching the ground with any part of the body other than the feet ends the match. It is the same sport that is played across the border in the old Northern English counties of Cumberland & Westmorland. This sport has been central to the Highland Games since their inception in the 12th century but probably dates back to the 5th century kingdom of Dal Riata when Irishmen brought the idea of festive sporting games in imitation of the Aonach Tailtean. The Scottish kilt at one time was a larger garment than the simple wrap around skirt system that it is so well known today. Called the Great Kilt or 'breacan an fheilidh' it reached across one shoulder in the same manner that wrestlers start their matches. The backhold start may have evolved from the grip on the Great Kilt; it is highly likely that the Scottish & Cumbric systems share a common ancestry with the other Celtic styles as evolved forms of an earlier Caledonii Pict form of jacket wrestling. In the early 1860s the Royal Caledonian Society of Victoria sponsored some lavish festivals at the Melbourne Cricket Ground which saw crowds of 20,000 watch "dancing, rifle shooting, sword play, archery, caber tossing, putting the stone, foot racing, a grand shinty match, a grand quoiting match, a football match & wrestling after the Cumberland & Westmorland fashion." This shows that the sport was very popular in Colonial Australia.

Notable Celtic wrestlers from the past include;

John Goit, the earliest known Cornish wrestling champion of which there is a record who held the county title in 1602 according to Richard Carew in his 'Survey of Cornwall'.

Robert Dover, in 1612 the Cotswold Olympick Games were created by him on the hill above Chipping Campden, under the instruction of King James I to strengthen the men of the realm; in addition to Devonshire style wrestling which has subsequently evolved into the sport of shin kicking, he also included other activities such as dancing, backswording, coursing, hammer throwing, spurning the barre, pike drill & tumbling.

Sir Thomas Parkyns, known as the Wrestling Baronet, wrote the first book in English dedicated to the subject of wrestling in 1713 titled 'The Inn Play or Cornish Hugg Wrestler'; he adored the sport so much that he established a tournament on his land in Nottingham that lasted for another century after his death in 1741.

George Washington, the first president of the USA as a young man held the Virginia County Collar & Elbow wrestling title in 1750. Scuffling was a very popular martial art in early America & up until the Civil War was an essential part of the training for soldiers.

Richard Trevithik, a well known Cornish champion who built the first railway line in 1801 & combine this with the fact that Cornish miners were sent around the British Empire, Celtic wrestlers can be acknowledged as the pioneers of the industrial revolution for the entire world.

Abraham Cann was the last of the great Devonshire wrestling men who was famously declared champion of England in 1825, his death in 1866 ushered the end of an era for Devonshire Wrestling.

James Polkinghorne, Champion of Cornwall became a county celebrity when he fought Abraham Cann to a draw in 1826; he later became a well known stickler (umpire) & passionate promoter of Cornish Wrestling to keep the sport alive for many generations to come.

Thomas Grundy, Cornish wrestler who won the title of Champion of Britain in 1846 after defeating the champion of Devon named Chapple in a well publicised match in London.

Professor William Miller was Champion Wrestler of the Australian Colonies in 1874 who traveled to the USA to make a study of all athletic pursuits, later returning to Australia as Champion Athlete of the World. He established gymnasiums in Melbourne & Sydney; many fighters from different countries & from diverse sports such as bare-knuckle prizefighting, gloved boxing, Graeco-Roman wrestling & Catch as Catch Can wrestling, came to Australia just to challenge him & the first professional wrestling tournaments grew around this.

Donald Dinnie, Scottish backhold champion, caber tosser & all round athlete at the Highland Games from 1870 till 1913, traveled to the USA, Canada, South Africa, Australia & New Zealand to take on all comers in any style of wrestling or strongman event; as the prime rival for Professor Miller he is considered one of the pioneers of professional wrestling in Australia. He also helped promote early Highland Games in Sydney & Melbourne in the 1880s.

John (Jack) Thomas, Cornish wrestling champion of Bendigo in 1877 who traveled to all the Australian colonies to fight for purses, he was considered Australian jacket wrestling champion in 1892 and continued as a stickler (umpire) for the next two decades.

Jack Carkeek, a Cornish American miner who instigated a professional wrestling circuit in England at the beginning of the 20th century, like Dinnie before him traveled the world to promote the sport, helping to start another professional wrestling tournament in Australia in 1903.

Dillie Nielson was Australian Cornish wrestling champion in 1903 who traveled to South Africa to fight in several competitions amongst the Cornish communities, returning to Sydney in 1905 to fight against the world wrestling champion George Hackenschmidt in a Cornish wrestling match that was declared a world championship. Hackenschmidt won this by two falls.

J.R. Williams, was the last recognised national purring champion of Wales in 1947, no competitions seem to have been organised in this ancient sport after he migrated to South America.

The Wrestlers Oath; on my honour & the honour of my country I swear to wrestle, without treachery or brutality & in token of my sincerity, I offer my hand to my opponent. In the words of my forefathers; Good play is fair play (Kernewek; Gwary whek yu gwar tek)

The rules of Pan-Celtic wrestling;

- 1.** Wrestlers must wear jackets as assigned for each of the six Celtic teams & start all bouts with a handshake;
 1. **Kernow** – black jacket with a St Piran’s white cross on the back
 2. **Breizh** – white jacket with a croaz du black cross on the back
 3. **Cymru** - red jacket with a St David’s yellow cross on a black background on the back
 4. **Alba** - blue jacket with a St Andrew’s white x cross on the back
 5. **Eire** – green jacket with a yellow cros Cheilteach on the back
 6. **Diaspora** – yellow jacket with a green cros Cheilteach on the back

- 2.** Bouts are overseen by three sticklers or umpires who decide falls & ensure fair play is maintained.

- 3.** Bouts are divided into three rounds;
 1. The first round done in the Scottish backhold rules with the first fall or grip release ending the round.
 2. With a one minute break in between the second round is fought in the Irish scuffling rules until a back touchfall is achieved.
 3. After another one minute break the Cornish wrestling/gouren rules will apply with wrestlers free to find any hold they can on the jacket then aiming again for a back touchfall.

- 4.** Trips are allowed but no holds on the legs are permitted. Each fall, (i.e. any part of the body other than the feet touching the ground) scores one point for the still standing wrestler.

- 5.** Space limitations keep the competition within the defined perimeter of a circle with a 10m diameter & boundary force outs also score one point for the wrestler that makes his opponent step across the line.

- 6.** Due to time factors the rounds are limited to five minutes only if no clear fall is scored.

- 7.** Tournaments are based on a round robin, initially with names drawn from a hat & paired against each other, with successful competitors progressing to the next match. One wrestler has a bye in & he wrestles the loser of the bout that is fought.

- 8.** The final is between the winner of that fight and the previous winner, the victor then receiving the title Pan Celtic Wrestling World Champion.

The Federation Internationale de Luttes Celtiques FILC arranges an annual international tournament & Australian wrestlers have been invited to compete, it is our hope to send our champions to compete against the world’s best.

If you would like to learn more about this sport contact the Association of Australian Celtic Wrestlers at; coreeda@optusnet.com.au

The Federation Internationale de Lutttes Celtiques FILC as a body within the **European Traditional Sport & Games Association ETSGA** was created in 1985 & member organisations are;

1. Federation de Gouren – Bodadeg ar Gourenerien, joined in 1985
2. Cornish Wrestling Association, joined in 1985
3. Scottish Wrestling Bond – Comunn Carachd Na h-Alba, joined in 1985
4. Cumberland & Westmoreland Wrestling Association, joined in 1985
5. Frysland in Northern Netherlands has its own gouren association, joined in 1987
6. Glimusamband Island joined in 1987 but is now also a member of the International Glima Association IGA with Germany, Netherlands, Denmark & Sweden as member nations, in addition to belt glima they support backhold wrestling competitions as well
7. Glima i Sverige of Sweden joined in 1990
8. Federacion de Lucha Canaria, which promotes the indigenous belt/jacket style of the Canary Islands, an autonomous community of Spain, joined in 1991
9. Coiste Coraicht Ceilteach, the Celtic Wrestling Group of Ireland joined in 1993
10. Salzburger Rangger Verband, which promotes the jacket style of ranggeln, from the Halstatt heartland of the Austrian Alps, joined in 2001
11. Federazione S'Istrumpa di Sardegna, which promotes a Sardinian indigenous backhold style, joined in 1995
12. Federacion de Lucha Leonesa, of the Celt-Iberian provinces of Northern Spain & Portugal which promotes a belt catch hold style, joined in 1995

FILC is recognised by the **Federation Internationale des Lutttes Associees FILA**, the body that conducts Olympic Wrestling as a significant international organisation that promotes the growth of traditional wrestling. Other organisations closely connected to FILC include

1. Eidgenossisher Schwingerverband the Swiss Style Wrestling Organisation
2. Sports Council of Wales – Cyngor Chwaraeon Cymru
3. Isle of Man Sports Council – Spoyrt Ellan Vannin
4. Cumann Coraiocht Cheilteach Na h-Eireann which promotes a backhold style indigenous to West Ireland
5. Federazione Tradizionale di E Vinca, the Corsican traditional wrestling organisation
6. Georgian Chidaoba Federation, traditional jacket wrestling organisation in the Caucasus
7. Bachookheh Kushti Association, the jacket wrestling organisation of Khorassan Province of North Eastern Iran
8. Turkiye Geleneksel Spor Dallari Federasyonu which conducts tournaments in the traditional jacket wrestling style of Hatay & Gaziantep provinces of Southern Anatolia called Aba Gures, which may have been practiced in the ancient Celtic kingdom of Galatia
9. International Kurash Association IKA which holds a world championship in traditional Uzbek jacket wrestling
10. International Association of Traditional Wrestling Sports IATWS which has a worldwide confederation that conducts international tournaments in traditional Tatar koras belt wrestling & is affiliated with FILA through the World Belt Wrestling Committee Alysh
11. North American New World Celts Wrestling Association
12. South African Cornish Wrestling Association
13. Association of Australian Celtic Wrestlers

The Association of Australian Celtic Wrestlers is also associated with the **Australian Society of Traditional Wrestlers**, a national organisation that promotes the ethnic wrestling games of various cultures. As of 2011 ASTW consist of;

1. Association of Australian Celtic Wrestlers, founded in 2001
2. Coreeda Association of Australia, founded 1998
3. Australian Sumo Federation, founded 1992
4. Australian Ssireum Association, founded 2010
5. Turk Wrestling Australia, founded 1985
6. Australian Kabaddi Federation, founded 1990
7. Australian Zurkhane (House of Power) Sports Federation, founded 2008
8. Australian Kurash Federation, founded 2010
9. Australian Shuai Jiao Union, founded 2008
10. Australian Belt Wrestling Association, founded 2010
11. FILA Australian Pankration & Grappling Committee, founded 2010
12. Australian Sambo Federation, founded 2010
13. Australian Chin Lai Paih Association, founded 2010
14. Swiss Wrestling Club, founded 2001
15. Mongol Bukh Australia, founded 2010
16. African Wrestling & Sports Federation of Australia, founded 2011
17. Kushti Australia, founded 2011

Each of these sporting groups is affiliated with its own international federation, except the Coreeda Association which is based on indigenous Aboriginal martial arts. Australian traditional wrestlers have competed in the regional & world championships of these sports for a very long time but this is generally not well publicised. ASTW is trying to remedy this. More information can be found at the website <http://coreedaaz.com/>

Events which could possibly include Pan-Celtic Wrestling tournaments, demonstrations or lectures;

1. January 26; Celtic Australia Day Festival Milsons Point North Sydney NSW
2. February 1; **Imbolc**
3. March 1; **St David's Day** the patron saint of Wales
4. March 5; **St Piran's Day** the patron saint of Cornwall
5. March 17; **St Patrick's Day** the patron saint of Ireland Newcastle tournament NSW
6. March 28; Eaglehawk Dahlia & Arts Festival Bendigo Victoria
7. April 17; Bundanoon Highland Gathering in the Southern Highlands of NSW
8. May 1; **Beltane** Australian Celtic Festival Glen Innes Northern NSW
9. May 17; Kernewek Lowender in Moonta in the Yorke Peninsular SA
10. May 19; **St Yves Day** the patron saint of Brittany
11. May; Celtic Cultural Experience Teralba Lake Macquarie NSW
12. May; Berry Celtic Festival NSW
13. June 14; Australian National Celtic Folk Festival Portarlington Victoria
14. June 28 Kilmore Celtic Festival Victoria
15. August 1; **Lughnasadh** also the Welsh Eisteddfod & the Swiss National Day
16. September 13; Kapunda Celtic Festival in SA
17. September 19; Clans on the Coast in Nelsons Bay NSW
18. October 25; Celtic Festival of QLD in Helidon
19. October 31; **Samhain** also known as Halloween
20. November 1; NSW Highland Gathering in Castle Hill NSW
21. November 8; Beechworth Celtic Festival in Victoria
22. November Cornish Cultural Celebrations in Nowra NSW
23. November 21; Gippsland Celtic Music Festival Neerim South Victoria
24. November 30 **St Andrew's Day** the patron saint of Scotland