

The First Fatal Incident of Pangration/Pankration

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Abstract The desire for distinction in conjunction with direct physical contact contributed to conduction of athletic events of high intensity and to cause of sports injuries. Purpose of this research is the identification and analysis of the first fatal incident of pankration in antiquity. The survey classified the pankration in category of ancient writers called heavy events. According to results the range of allowable holds combined with the liberality of movements, make possible the presence of serious injuries (lacerations, bruises, dislocations) and fatalities. Despite the expected high number of fatalities, this research has been found only one reported incident in which the athlete (pankratiast) Arrachion died because the choking hold, who had been implemented. In causing the incident crucial role played the kind of the applied hold in conjunction with the locked anatomical region (larynx), the neck entrapment in the elbow joint and the outcome of the athlete due to hypoxia or anoxia. After a review of literature, the book of Pausanias "Greece's Excursion", VIII, 40. 1-2., was identified and analyzed as the text which contains the first fatal injury of pankration in the world history.

Keywords: *sport medicine, sport injuries, pankration, trauma*

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1. Introduction

Pankration was an ancient Greek combat sport introduced into the Olympic Games in 648 BC and founded as a mix of boxing and wrestling. [1,2,3] The term comes from the Greek word "παγκράτιον" [pankrátion], literally meaning "all powers" from παν (pan-) "all" + κράτος (kratos) "strength, power". [4] Plutarch in his "Ethics" writes it is obvious that the pankration is a mix of wrestling and boxing. [5] The sport of pankration, which called "pammachion", is a combination of incomplete wrestling and boxing events. [5] Plato says that the pankratiasts are "pammachoi". [6] It was a complex event of wrestling holds and free blows with hands and feet. During the contest all the holds of the torso, the head, the fingers or toes, except bite "δάκνειν" and taking off eye "ορύττειν" were allowed. [1] Philostratus in "Imagines" mentions: <<ταυτί γάρ του παγκρατιάζειν ἔργα πλὴν του δάκνειν και ὀρύττειν>>. [7] The "ορύττειν" includes violent-dynamic positioning of the finger (especially the thumb or the indicator) on the eye, nasal or oral area of the opponent. Furthermore prohibited movements were kicks and punches to the genitals. [8] On the other side kicks, thrusts, grips of dislocation, knees, head were figures presented-took place during the contact of the game. [9] From the above mentioned it can be concluded that the pankration because it was a combination of two sports had a variety of holds which dramatically increase possibility of sport injuries.

2. Methodology

The method used was as thorough investigation of the writings of Greek and world literature.

3. Results

Pankration due to the fact that it came from the combination of two other sports (wrestling and boxing) provided greater freedom of movement and thereby increase the possibilities of causing injury. Specifically by receiving in mind human anatomy so as to commit the hold (such hand member), and the aim of anatomical region of blow (such as neck), it can be concluded that some holds would present greater likelihood to the causing an injury, with riskier ones the stranglehold. The investigation concluded to this hypothesis following a review of the literature, where a pankration athlete died because of stranglehold, which he had been applied by his opponent. According to Pausanias at 564 BC, Arrachion had been immobilized by his opponent, who has implemented a hold with his legs and arm and gripped Arrachions neck, applying the so-called hold of "apognimos". Arrachion grabbed the big toe of his opponent and with a coordinated movement of the knee dislocated his opponent's ankle with violent external rotation and forced him to "ban", to declare his lose. The opponent fainted from the pain, caused to his broken finger. The Arrachion became Olympic medallist for the third time, but he died fighting due to the choking hold, which had been implemented [10].

The great traveller of antiquity (Pausanias) for the only fatal incident in the history of pankration writes [8.40.1] XL: <<The Phigalians have on their market-place a statue of the pankratiast Arrhachion; it is archaic, especially in its posture. The feet are close together, and the arms hang down by the side as far as the hips. The statue is made of stone, and it is said that an inscription was written upon it.

This has disappeared with time, but Arrhachion won two Olympic victories at Festivals before the fifty-fourth, while at this Festival he won one due partly to the fairness of the Umpires and partly to his own manhood.

[8.40.2] For when he was contending for the wild olive with the last remaining competitor, whoever he was, the latter got a grip first, and held Arrhachion, hugging him with his legs, and at the same time he squeezed his neck with his hands. Arrhachion dislocated his opponent's toe, but expired owing to suffocation; but he who suffocated Arrhachion was forced to give in at the same time because of the pain in his toe. The Eleans crowned and proclaimed victor the corpse of Arrhachion. >>. [10] Translation by W. H. S. Jones (1933) [11].

For the same incident Philostratus writes on <<Imagines>>: <<Accordingly the antagonist of Arrichion, having already clinched him around the middle, thought to kill him; already he had wound his forearm about the other's throat to shut off the breathing, while, pressing his legs on the groins and winding his feet one inside each knee of his adversary, he forestalled Arrichion's resistance by choking him till the sleep of death thus induced began to creep over his senses. But in relaxing the tension of his legs he failed to forestall the scheme of Arrichion; for the latter kicked back with the sole of his right foot (as the result of which his right side was imperilled since now his knee was hanging unsupported), then with his groin he holds his adversary tight till he can no longer resist, and, throwing his weight down toward the left while he locks the latter's foot tightly inside his own knee, by this violent outward thrust he wrenches the ankle from its socket. Arrichion's soul, though it makes him feeble as it leaves his body, yet gives him strength to achieve that for which he strives.>>. [12] Translation by Arthur Fairbanks (1931) [13].

4. Discussion

Both these texts describe the incident of the death of pankratiast Arrachion. According to Pausanias in this fight, a fracture of a metatarsal phalanx bone is presented: <<ἔκκλαι τῶν ἐν τῷ ποδὶ τοῦ ἀνταγωνιζομένου δάκτυλον>>. [14] Even the athlete presented a fainting episode because of the pain caused from his broken finger. [14] Philostratus in <<Imagines>> does not refer to fracture, but dislocation of the ankle from the malleoli due to wrench out: <<οὐκ'εἶ μὲν ἐν τῷ σφυρῷ τὸν ἀστράγαλον ὑπὸ τῆς εἰς τὸ ἔξω βιαίου ἀποστροφῆς>>. [12] In this dislocation occurred rupture of synovial and perhaps of articular ligaments. The articular surfaces not returned to their original position when the outside stimulus stopped (Arrachions hold). This dislocation probably caused functional disorders, such as weakness of bounce in the affected limb, swelling, tenderness around the front APL (Ankle Peroneal Ligament) and partial or complete rupture of the APL and the Calcaneal Peroneal Ligament with a plenary anterior and lateral laxity [15].

Regardless of the injuries reported the common fact is that both authors agree that Arrachion ended from the choking hold referred to have been implemented by his opponent. This incident (choking) is the only which states that pankration athlete ended the time of the contest. The theme of Arrachions death and the way in which this

occurred has engaged important researchers: Gardiner (1955), Harris (1964), Miller (1991), Brophy (1978), and Hollenback (2003). [16,17,18,19,20] These authors searched the various interpretations (Philostratos and Pausanias) and in combination with the technique of modern martial arts such as Karate, Taekwondo, Jiu-Jitsu, attempted to reconstruct the incident. Researchers do not agree on the stance and grip, brought death. The interpretation of Brophy (1978) is that the neck of Arrachion fractured as a consequence of violent rap of both athletes on the ground [21].

According to Hollenback (2003), a possible answer can be given by the contemporary literature which deals with the causes of sudden death of young athletes during or immediately after the race. [20] Excluding deaths due to stroke, use of medicinal products-narcotics or trauma, investigations have a common denominator, according to which the deaths were the result of a range of congenital cardiac conditions. [20] The athletes competing in sports with such congenital cardiac dysfunction are prone to experience heart failure or arrest, which caused unexpectedly during intense physical exercise. The Hollenback concludes that, like the modern sportsmen, in an analogous manner and ancient athletes are vulnerable to syndromes of "sudden death" because of heart diseases. Hollenback considers that the research hypothesis that the opponent killed Arrachion is mistaken and implies that he died because of a cardiac arrest [20].

This case (cardiac arrest) is not devoid of theoretical basis, but the original text of Pausanias: <<την ψυχὴν ἀφίησιν ἀγγρόμενος>> [10] and Philostratus: <<πνίγματι ἔφθη αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐντελευθεν θανάτου>> [12] state that the death occurred due to choking Arrachion rather suddenly, as usually happens in cases of "sudden death" due to cardiac dysfunction, which lead to cardiac arrest. The case death by choking hold is facilitated by the reference of Philostratus (choking him until get him the narcosis of death, which (narcosis) began to permeate his senses): <<πνίγματι ἔφθη αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐντελευθεν θανάτου τοῖς αἰσθητηρίοις ἐντρέχοντος>>. [12] The sleep of death, in which the author refers to, is the cyanosis, the dark purple color of the skin and mucosa. This coloration is due to insufficient oxygenation of the blood in the lungs or the significant reduction of blood flow through capillary vessels [22].

Arrachion because his respiratory passage (larynx) was under pressure from the forearm of opponent, [23,24] could not breathe, resulting cyanosis. Characteristic is the Karyotakis reference: <<In just his face began to bruise and his eyes to getting darken>>. [24] The cyanosis develops when the hemoglobin in the capillaries is less than 5mg. In this case cyanosis is presented due to high concentration of reduced-hemoglobin in the venous blood of the skin and due to saturation of oxygen in arterial blood. This phenomenon is usually visible on the lips, nails, ears and cheeks [22].

The above hypothesis, which combines the ancient-original sources with citations of modern medicine exports a documented conclusion that the Arrachion not ended due to the syndrome of sudden death (cardiac arrest), as mistakenly Hollenback supports, but because of hypoxia or anoxia (total oxygen ellipse) by the hold, which had been implemented to his neck.

According to the hypothesis and taking into account the ending of pankratiast Arrachion, we conclude that the death resulted due to rapid hypoxia or anoxia. Initially due to partial or total obstruction of the larynx (depending on the technique and intensity of the applied hold), caused inadequate ventilation of the lungs (due to airway blockage and consequent lack of oxygen). Then the implementation of the hold (choking) amplified the apnea and led to further decrease below the normal range of the available percentage of oxygen (O₂) and a subsequent increase in the levels of carbon dioxide (CO₂), which is a byproduct of burning O₂. The reduced rates O₂ disturbed blood flow in oxygen dependent brain and caused changes in level of consciousness, fainting and ultimately death of pankratiast.

The analysis of each historical period should take into account the prevailing socio-economic conditions and the need for harmonically physically fit citizens able to defend at any point in time their life and the city-state. According to research findings, despite the observed intensity of conduction of the event and the expected variety of injuries caused by the long history of the sport, only one incident recorded in which the death occurred in athlete from a choking hold. Therefore we have no right to make a generalized reference about brutality of the ancient games, but we obtain the fact that sports events are analogous to the social and political context of the analysed period.

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