In-depth analysis to the future of boxing, weightlifting, and pentathlon after serious doubts for Los Angeles 2028

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The International Olympic Committee (IOC) aims to shake up the Olympic movement, adjusting it to the new times, and hence win the heart of young people while make attractive everything surrounding sports…

Something that I agree with to some extent, without commercializing sports, though. And without wiping out all at once the 100-plus-years legacy.

I say this because boxing, weightlifting and modern pentathlon have been tentatively removed from the Los Angeles 2028 games.

For different reasons, these sports disciplines will try to make the most out of the 18-months span to do all necessary lobby and regain the IOC's trust. In this regard, this issue will be discussed within the entity assembly, where their continuation or not will be decided.

Let's remember that wrestling, a pioneer sports discipline, was in jeopardy as sports event in Rio de Janeiro 2016.

This time, weightlifting has been part of the Olympics since Athens 1896, while boxing commenced in Saint Louis 1904. Modern pentathlon did it in Stockholm 1912. So all of them boast more than a century of tradition.

However, with the view to Los Angeles 2028, the IOC has imposed a series of conditions to the International Federations of those sports disciplines to continue to be part of the Olympic

program. Meanwhile, new disciplines such as surf, climbing, and skateboarding have been confirmed to L.A.

It is widely known that boxing and weightlifting have both been shaken up by sports scandals and lack of transparency. Therefore, the IOC has put forward these sorts of situation of responsibility. In the case of weightlifting, there have been several doping episodes in some nations, as the main argument to cast doubts on its future presence in the Olympic program.

In the case of the modern pentathlon, its uncertainty is due to a matter of change of format and search for universalization, which would entail the substitution of horse riding for another sport, (tentatively cycling), in order to make it more attractive to young people, resulting in a competition less expensive and elitist, since it is known the difficult framework required in the transfer and conditioning of horses.

This issue will initially be ratified at the next session of the IOC to be held in February, which will take place in Beijing and in which presumably Thomas Bach, IOC president and the leadership of the global sports entity, will ratify at least the 28 sports disciplines with guaranteed presence in Los Angeles; namely, athletics, rowing, badminton, basketball, canoeing, cycling, horse riding, fencing, soccer, golf, gymnastics, handball, hockey, judo, wrestling, swimming, rugby, taekwondo, tennis, table tennis, shooting, archery, triathlon, sailing, volleyball, surfing, skateboarding and climbing.

Boxing, weightlifting and modern pentathlon could actually join the list if approved. The host city could also propose some other sports, which would give some hope to baseball, given the huge tradition and power of baseball in the U.S.

Major viewpoints

We talked about the reasons argued, which have led to cast doubts on these three sports disciplines.

In 2009, AIBA (International Boxing Association) lost the trust of IOC. Consequently, this entity has called for transformations in three specific issues:

Finances, which would be the result of a plausible improvement in transparency, sustainability and income diversification; one referring to referees and judges, aiming at integrity, which has been corrupted several times; and its governability, which would lead to a change of mindset and culture in this regard.

AIBA’s president, Umar Kremlev, and his executives, have already taken the first steps in this regard at the recently concluded World Championship, after rigged and obscure results in Rio 2016 and the 2017 World Championship and the Youth World Championship held in Kielce, Poland, this year.

AIBA confirmed that officials involved in those questionable practices were banned from the institution. Now, judges of integrity will carefully examine the scope of exclusions based on the outcomes of the McLaren report.

Moreover, a prize money was awarded for the first time to the world championship medalists and they confirmed other steps will be taken in the interest of earning the confidence of IOC again.

In the case of weightlifting, doping is the main enemy inside and outside the platforms. Besides, an interim president has been heading for months and its International Federation have not set a date for an electoral congress yet, which has been postponed again.

This is precisely one of the requirements of the IOC, as well as the fact of conditioning the tickets corresponding to each nation to the doping cases that they have had during the four-year cycle. On such doping issue, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) denounced in 2017 —as a result of an investigation— that illegal practices such as the exchange of samples in anti-doping controls were used by several athletes as well as the use of undetectable growth hormones or blood transfusions, to circumvent the detection mechanisms of prohibited substances and being clean prior to the start of the competition.

Meanwhile, in modern pentathlon, it is about readjusting its competition format and the sports disciplines it has in order to reduce costs and gain followers worldwide, especially among young people. Hence it suffers from disadvantage regarding the skateboarding, surfing, climbing and even break dancing, which will make its official debut in Paris 2024 after being celebrated at the 2018 Youth Olympic Games held in Buenos Aires.

Nothing helpful was the case of a German trainer who hit a horse in the middle of a competition after the horse refused to jump over the obstacle.

This immediately raised questions and fueled controversy over the International Union of Modern Pentathlon.

Impact on Cuba

Excluding these sports disciplines from the Olympic program will immediately impact a lot of nations, the development of such disciplines, and the interest every country may now have on the development and monitoring of each of them.

In the case of boxing, we are talking about the biggest medal-winner sports discipline for the Greatest of the Antilles in Cuba's Olympic Games history (41-19-18) and only behind the United States (50-27-41) worldwide.

In the case of boxing, we are talking about the largest contributor of medals for the Greater Antilles in the context of Olympism (41-19-18), and second globally behind the United States (50-27-41).

Our boxers are given due prestige worldwide, which has been earned with great performance and sacrifice. Therefore, if boxing is finally excluded, our chances to win medals and titles would be considerably reduced.

Weightlifting has lost strength in Cuba and since Ivan Cambar won the bronze medal in London 2012, no great results have been achieved. Nonetheless, athletes fight hard to be competitive again at least in the region elite and then, worldwide, with an ongoing work and a history behind with two gold medals, one silver medal, and five bronze medals. Daniel Nuñez, Pablo Lara, Idalberto Aranda, Yoanfrys Hernández, Sergio Álvarez, Yordanys Borrero, and Cambar himself have been the man responsible of giving Cuba prestige for years all over the world. Now, some women contribute in this regard. Albeit with a rather tardy start, they performed pretty well in Tokyo.

In modern pentathlon, although Cuba does not boast wonderful performances, it is fair to highlight that Cuban athletes have qualified to Olympic Games and some have won medals in both Elite and Junior Pan American Games, which confirm the sustained development and work, which should not be cut short.

Let’s wait and see. The IOC and these International Federations have the final say.

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