

The Pan-Caribbean Wrestling League

in connection with the Dean's Innovation in Sports Challenge

I. Introduction

We propose to establish a Pan-Caribbean Wrestling League (“PCWL”), based in Jamaica, that will serve as a bold catalyst for growth in the Caribbean, both economically, culturally, and academically. The PCWL will achieve this growth using a confluence of bottom-up and top-down strategies. First, the PCWL will tap into the regions’ existing grassroots enthusiasm for wrestling by partnering with local schools to incorporate wrestling and mindsports into their curricula. Second, the PCWL will complement this grassroots energy with a series of competitions for aspiring and professional athletes, with the ultimate goal of training local wrestlers to stage an audacious and compelling attempt to qualify for the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The media attention generated by these wrestlers’ improbable stories will propel the PCWL beyond the Rio Olympics, establishing the league as a source of pride and cultural empowerment across the region.



The nucleus of the proposed PCWL lies in the small, indigenous Maroon community of eastern Jamaica. Although the league ultimately aspires to engage athletes throughout the Caribbean, the Maroon community provides an ideal starting point for our broader project. The Maroons carry a fierce, proud, and complicated history that will capture the imagination of interested athletes, the media, and potential investors.

The sport of wrestling is intimately tied to the rich history of the Maroon people. Following the colonization of Jamaica by Britain in the 17th century, many African slaves labored under a brutally efficient plantation system. The Maroons, as a community of escaped slaves, emerged during this era as a daring and relentless opponent of colonial slave labor. During their wars with the British, the Maroons became remarkably skilled in physical combat, conducting a devastating guerrilla campaign against colonial forces. Owing to the fruits of this campaign, the Maroons became the first people of African descent in the Western Hemisphere to fight for and gain their freedom.



In recognition of this honored history, wrestling has become one of the Maroon community’s most revered and popular sports. Children often wrestle recreationally in sandpits sprinkled throughout the region. In 2014, the Charles Town Maroons capitalized on this popularity by hosting a summer camp for local youth interested in wrestling. This camp proved to be a resounding success, and participants were left wanting more.

II. Empowering Local Youth

The PCWL aims to leverage this popularity in two interrelated ways. First, PCWL will provide funding and assistance to local Maroon schools in order to incorporate wrestling and mindsports into their curricula. Kevin

Wallen, a fellow at Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet & Society and the Director of the Jamaican Wrestling Federation, has offered to assist in this endeavor. Wallen suggests that training in wrestling can be effectively paired with lessons about tolerance, critical thinking, and self-reliance. Further, because wrestling can provide access to scholarship opportunities for skilled wrestlers, Wallen believes PCWL could also "steer youth away from social ills." As he states succinctly, "Wrestling is a gateway to a better life."

At the same time, partner schools will explicitly link these wrestling programs with a parallel effort to encourage participation in mindsport competitions. Traditionally, Jamaican youth have ranked remarkably low in mathematical achievement. PCWL proposes to address this concern by connecting Jamaicans' innate love of competition to the development of mathematical intelligence. Charles Nesson, a professor at Harvard Law School, poker professional, and widely recognized advocate for the Maroon community, will help lead this effort. Professor Nesson believes that schools can effectively link the skills required to succeed in wrestling with the skills acquired through engagement with mindsports, including critical thinking, advanced concentration, and showing strength from a position of weakness.



The convergence of these two overarching forces—physical and intellectual vigor—will enable Maroon youth to achieve the balance necessary to thrive personally and academically. Moreover, as enthusiasm for these programs expands, PCWL also hopes to broaden the scope of the project to incorporate schools across Jamaica and, ultimately, the wider Caribbean region.

III. Competition and Cultural Harmony

Armed with the grassroots enthusiasm generated by its partnership with local schools, PCWL plans to fund and organize a series adult wrestling competitions that will attract aspiring and professional athletes throughout the region. Once again, the Maroon community provides the ideal starting point for this project. To begin with, locating the competitions in Jamaica will enable the country's Maroon and Rastafarian communities to address a cultural schism that has plagued Jamaica for more than two centuries.



In the 18th century, following decades of violent clashes between the Maroons and colonial forces, the British proposed a peace treaty to Maroon leaders. Faced with the utter destruction of their community, the Maroons reluctantly agreed to the treaty's terms. But their freedom came at a high price: per the terms of the treaty, the Maroons agreed to stop harboring runaway slaves, and to return every newly escaped slave they encountered to colonial forces. In this way, the Maroons for a time became a de facto police force for the British. This troubled past has inspired ongoing and profound cultural tensions between contemporary Maroons and the Rastafarians, who are largely descended from the slaves that the Maroons once policed.

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Recent signs, however, indicate that the rift between these two communities may be mending. In 2014, Ras Iyah V, a leader and Elder of the Rastafarian community, met with Colonel Frank Lumsden, the leader of the Charlestown Maroons, to discuss ways to initiate a healing process between the two communities. Ras Iyah V has agreed to help sponsor a conference in May 2015 at the Couples Hotel in Montego Bay, Jamaica, that will promote cross-cultural understanding between the two groups. PCWL, in partnership with Ras Iyah and Colonel Lumsden, plans to make this conference the site of the PCWL's inaugural event. Wrestling competitions will take place on sand pits adjacent to the hotel, and organizers will invite professional and amateur wrestlers throughout the region to participate. Among these participants will be Angus Arthur, a highly accomplished Jamaican wrestler who plans to compete in the 2016 Rio Olympics. Mr. Arthur is also keen to lead and mentor a team of Jamaican wrestlers aiming to qualify for the Rio Olympics, which will be discussed in greater detail below.



In addition to inaugurating the league, event organizers will also invite a broad cross-section of talented Jamaican artists—Maroons and Rastafarians alike—to participate in the conference, including actors, musicians, and music and film producers. Interaction among these artists, coupled with the contributions of athletes from across the region, will not only help mend the rift between the Maroon and Rastafarian communities, but also inspire conference participants to consider and deliberate the future of Jamaican creative arts and sports culture. Too, the event will generate the publicity necessary to initiate an auspicious launch for PCWL's subsequent wrestling competitions. This publicity, combined with Jamaicans' built-in enthusiasm for the sport of wrestling, will establish the Maroon community as the principal host for future PCWL events. With the assistance of PCWL, Colonel Lumsden believes that the Maroon community could become a “wrestling Mecca,” attracting highly skilled competitors from across the region.

IV. The Road to Rio

The May conference will offer a crucible in which the two main Jamaican communities can come together and meld. PCWL hopes this opportunity to engage in a dialogue that celebrates Jamaican independence and the two communities' common ties will be the beginning of a new phase of integration on the island. Greater harmony and awareness of joint history will lead to cultural invigoration and enable Jamaicans to sculpt their own identity and the course of their future.

Part of this future will involve the continued success of the PCWL. The league will work to facilitate further regular meetings and communications between aspiring and professional wrestlers. This will require setting up online fora on which athletes can share their ambitions and training plans. PCWL will also work to establish more tournaments in Jamaica and other Caribbean locations in order to retain the momentum generated by the May conference.

The growing interest in the PCWL will allow the league to deepen our contacts with organizers of the 2016 Olympics in Brazil. Recently, PCWL organizers met with Pedro Trengrouse Laignier de Souza, a United Nations consultant and a member of the organizing teams for the 2014 FIFA Football World Cup and the 2016 Olympics. Laignier de Souza is actively involved with PCWL, and sees promise in its vision for wrestling's role in creating a more united Jamaica and a more inspired generation of youth.

Additionally, PCWL plans to liaise with professional Brazilian wrestlers aiming to compete in the Rio Olympics, and will invite them to contribute to the online discussion boards. Warm relations with Brazilian wrestling hopefuls will encourage these athletes to participate in PCWL events in the run-up to the qualification rounds of the Olympics. This will in turn motivate some of the Jamaican participants from the PCWL, aside from Angus Arthur, to attempt to qualify to compete in the Olympics. PCWL will work with Rob Van Dam, an American three-time world wrestling champion of considerable prominence, and Alistair Overeem, a British professional heavyweight wrestler of Jamaican origin, to work with aspiring Olympic wrestlers to create both physical and psychological training regimens. These athletes' stories will provide compelling narratives that tie closely to the overarching project of cultural empowerment and self-creation that lies at the heart of PCWL's mission.



V. Media Involvement in Narrative Creation

PCWL expects that the journeys of young Jamaicans—days spent combining wrestling and mindsports in schools, competing in the inaugural tournament of the PCWL, creating and responding to a surge of the sport's popularity amidst increasing cultural unity, and training with global peers during the run-up to the 2016 Olympics—will be fascinating. These stories will thus offer intriguing opportunities for media outlets, both in Jamaica and worldwide.



PCWL has been in communication with Grupo Globo, the largest Latin American media outlet, to gauge commercial interest in such opportunities. Marcelo Campos Pinto, Executive Director of Globo TV, has expressed interest in running a story that draws parallels between aspiring Jamaican wrestlers and the Jamaican bobsled team that improbably qualified for the Winter Olympics in 1988, as loosely depicted in the 1993 film “Cool Runnings.”

In addition to Globo's potential involvement, PCWL also plans to amplify exposure for aspiring Jamaican wrestlers through social networks. Media is increasingly becoming mobile, shared, and personal. Television shows are distilled into YouTube clips, which are shared via social media outlets, and stories of personal growth are well placed in this context, given that fora like Facebook and Twitter are centered on individual brand creation. It is easy to imagine the aspiring athletes being tagged in, and commenting on, posts that concern their training and

progress. A potential sponsorship agreement between media companies and athletes, whereby the athletes receive compensation in consideration for the sale of production rights to the media company, would create opportunities for the production of television shows that follow the athletes through their journeys. This media interest will in turn increase the value of the PCWL itself, which will generate sponsorship interest and the potential for selling broadcasting rights to media outlets. PCWL envisages the marketing potential of the wrestlers' narratives to constitute a significant source of revenue generation for the project.

VI. Resources

PCWL anticipates funding needs in the following cost areas:

- Providing funds for schools to incorporate wrestling and mindsports into their curricula, both in class and as part of after-school programs. Costs will include compensation to teachers and trainers, purchase of materials and manpower necessary to construct wrestling pits, and purchase of materials for large-scale poker, chess, and dominoes tournaments.
- Purchase of materials and manpower necessary to construct wrestling pits on the Couples hotel grounds and at subsequent PCWL events.
- Renting stadium space for indoor PCWL events.
- Fees related to promotion of PCWL events, including advertising and media outreach.
- Stipends for the travel and accommodation of trainers and mentors, and (potentially) compensation for their services.
- Purchase of a website domain name and payment of website hosting fees.
- Fees for web design and graphic design services.

VII. Team

- **Angus Arthur** is a Jamaican national who recently received a scholarship to wrestle at Purdue University. He plans to represent Jamaica in the 2016 Rio Olympics, and has offered to assist in the mentorship and training of other Jamaican wrestlers aspiring to qualify for the games.
- **Abhishek Banerjee-Shukla** and **Dakotah Burns** are third-year students at Harvard Law School. Under the tutelage of Professor Charles Nesson, the students have worked on multiple projects related to the Maroons and have acquired extensive knowledge regarding the culture of wrestling in the region.
- **Peter Carfagna** is the faculty supervisor of Harvard Law School's Sports Law Clinical Program and Chairman/CEO of Magis, LLC, a privately owned sports marketing, management and investment company. In the event that PCWL receives funding through the Challenge, Mr. Carfagna has agreed to use students from the Sports Law Clinical Program to support PCWL, including preparation of the legal documents necessary to form the league.
- **Rob Van Dam** is an American professional wrestler known worldwide for his appearances with Extreme Championship Wrestling and the World Wrestling Federation/World Wrestling Entertainment leagues. Mr. Van Dam plans to help train and mentor PCWL athletes.
- **Charles Nesson** is a professor at Harvard Law School and co-founder of Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet & Society. Professor Nesson is a passionate and widely recognized advocate for the Maroon community. He plans to be involved in every stage of PCWL's evolution, including the education of youth in mindsports, the organization of the May conference, and strategic planning for future PCWL events.
- **Alistair Overeem** is a world famous martial artist and kickboxer of Jamaican descent. He is best known for appearing in Ultimate Fighting Championship competitions, and is currently ranked #10 in official UFC heavyweight rankings. Mr. Overeem plans to help train and mentor PCWL athletes.
- **Pedro Trengrouse Laignier de Souza** is a United Nations consultant and a member of the organizing teams for the 2014 FIFA Football World Cup and the 2016 Rio Olympics. He has offered to serve as a liaison for PCWL's project in Brazil, and to help generate publicity and support for Jamaican athletes' journey to qualify for the Olympic games.
- **Kevin Wallen** is the president of the Jamaican Wrestling Federation and a fellow at Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet and Society. Mr. Wallen plans to spearhead the wrestling training programs for Maroon youth.