

**Professional paper**

## **THE ORGANISATION OF THE WORLD KICK BOXING CHAMPIONSHIP**

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**Abstract:** The organisation of the two world championships in Serbia, in 2001 and 2007, showed that a small country was able to organise two major championships on the highest level. The championship held in 2001 was officially proclaimed at a meeting of the World Kick Boxing Federation to be the best organised one in the previous thirty years of the federation's existence. The championship held in 2007 did not make such a sensation, but only as far as the media were concerned. However, it was even better and more thoroughly organised than the one in 2001. The reception, accommodation, superbly organised transfer, the service of the volunteers and hostesses, the excellent conditions of the Pionir sports hall, the reception of the officials of the World Federation by the president of the country, the fact that the Serbian Prime Minister had officially opened the world championship, the completely full hall with more than 10,000 spectators, direct broadcasting on Serbian Radio-television (RTS) taken over by Eurosport, the final evening organised in the manner of the greatest boxing matches in Las Vegas with the use of a light-show, the excellent scenography – all this delighted kick boxers all over the world, as well as their managers, trainers and spectators. If we add to this the traditionally good hospitality of the organisers and Serbia in general, the well balanced food, as well as the presence of representatives of various ethnic groups (Moslems, Indians, etc.), then the impression of the excellent organisation is even more profound. There have been, of course, numerous minor and more worrying problems, but most importantly, neither the competitors could notice them, nor could their managers, trainers or the public, as each problem was solved in a blink of an eye, due to the outstanding organisation of the commissions, services and managers of the championship.

**Key words:** championship, organisation, competitors, finale

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **The history of kick boxing**

Kick boxing appeared in the early 1970s in the United States of America.

The great interest of the western world in eastern martial arts during the 1960s and 1970s led within some circles of top American karate experts to the forming of a need to create a new sport in which the fighting rules would be freer and closer to reality.

A new, more unconventional style of fighting contributed greatly to the attractiveness of competitions, though it also had some negative. One of them was a large number of competitors' injuries. In order to reduce the number of injuries, the competitors used various protective equipment.

Although this sport revolutionized the rules of the hitherto known martial arts, some top competitors were ready to try a more true-to-life fighting style, where full contact would be allowed during the delivery of kicks and punches.

One of the most important moments in the history of FULL CONTACT was the organisation of the first world championship. It was held in Berlin in 1978 and gathered some 18 national teams.

After its name had been changed several times, eventually the acronym of WAKO was chosen, which is still in use and stands for The World Association of Kickboxing Organisations.

In the course of all these years many changes have taken place, new disciplines have been introduced and WAKO currently has member organisations from 125 countries and five continents.

World championships are held once in two years, during even years, and European championships are held once in two years as well, but during odd years.

WAKO has seven kick boxing disciplines:

FULL CONTACT, LIGHT CONTACT, SEMI CONTACT, LOW KICK, K-1 RULES, MUSICAL FORMS and KICK LIGHT.

Since 2006, WAKO has been a member of the World Organisation of Sports Games (GAISF) or the SPORT ACORD, as it is called nowadays.

### **Kickboxing in Serbia**

Today the Serbian Kickboxing Association includes 105 officially registered clubs. This association also includes the regional associations: the Kickboxing Association of Vojvodina, the Kickboxing Association of

Belgrade and the Kickboxing Association of south-eastern Serbia. In all the clubs there are more than 15000 active sportsmen, of whom more than 5000 have been registered as competitors who either used to be or still are active competitors. Only in this year, 250 new competitors, who have so far taken part in competitions, have been registered.

All this makes an outstanding basis for the achievement of top results that have internationally been attained by our competitors. Our competitors have been at the top of world kickboxing for almost two decades. Serbia is currently in the second place, immediately after the Russian national team. Our national team achieved the best result at the world championship that was held in Belgrade in 2001, getting a total of 19 medals, including 6 gold ones.

Due to the great reputation which our association has in kickboxing all over the world, we have had the honour to organise two world championships in Belgrade. The first one was held from 22-29th November in 2001, the second from 24-30th September in 2007.

### **The preparations for the organisation of the World Championship in 2007**

The preparation of organising such championships involves gaining support from the appropriate institutions in Serbia on time (usually one year in advance). Such institutions are the Serbian Ministry of Youth and Sport, the Serbian Sports Association and the City Sports Secretariat. In order to get the organisational and material support of the authorized state institutions, it is necessary to provide a study on the organisation of a sports event which is of interest to the Republic of Serbia. This study, with all the required details, is delivered to the Ministry of Youth and Sport, together with an application and properly filled in forms.

If, on the basis of this study, appropriate support is obtained from the authorized sports and state institutions and the project is accepted as a part of the work programme, it could be said that a large part of the initial work has already been done.

The next step is to find sponsors who will finance the costs of the championship. This part of the organisation represents the most difficult phase. The members of the Administrative Committee of the Serbian Kickboxing Association and its president have the largest number of duties related to the financing. Their task is to provide, through sponsors, financial resources that will cover all the costs of the championship, which are usually very large.

The organiser has a duty to cover the following costs:

- Airplane tickets for the members of the Directorate of WAKO;

- The accommodation for the president and the members of the Directorate of WAKO;
- The renting of the sports facilities where the championship is to be held;
- The rent of boxing rings;
- The manufacturing of medals, diplomas, cups, statues and the printing of advertising material, letters of thanks, tickets and passes;
- The advertising material: the billboards, TV spots, posters, flyers etc.;
- The use of buses for the transportation of the championship members;
- The organising of three joint dinners: one for the members of the Directorate, another for the presidents of national federations, and the third for all the participants at the end of the championship – THE SAYONARA PARTY;
- The official personnel (hostesses, translators, technical staff);
- Referee taxes;
- The taxes for the organisation of the championship which are due to WAKO;
- Annual WAKO membership fees;
- The provision of a sports hall;
- Light effects (for the two final evenings);
- Singers, performers and dancers; and
- Medical personnel.

Apart from these, there are numerous other small and large expenses which the organiser has to pay. In order to settle all the above listed expenses, it is necessary to form a “sponsorship pool” which consists of companies and individuals who recognise their own interests in participating in such a project. Sponsors can be offered a wide range of advertising in all its usual public forms, which are related to the holding of the championship itself. If the organiser is to offer something attractive to potential sponsors, it is essential that he makes an agreement on the broadcasting of the final evening of the championship with one of the television companies with a national frequency. The Serbian Kickboxing Association has had good cooperation with the Serbian Radio-Television Broadcasting Company, which broadcast the final evenings of the two world championships. The Kickboxing Association obtained 270 seconds of advertising in the course of the broadcast itself, as well as the broadcasting of a number of advertising spots based on the RTS media plan. Such an agreement can be used in the best way at the time when the offer to the sponsors is made, thus enabling them to broadcast advertising spots or trailers. In addition to

these seconds of advertising, sponsors are offered various other benefits, all with the aim to carry out mutual interests.

### **The promotion of the championship**

The promotion of such a big project is an important part of the organisation itself. The forming of a team in charge with all the tasks related to the promotion and successful realisation of the project is compulsory.

A marketing company may be hired to perform these tasks. The Serbian Kickboxing Association hired the “Best Assist” agency to perform organisational tasks for the purpose of the organisation of the World Championship in 2007. It carried out a great part of the work related to championship marketing and it was through this company that the Association hired 30 billboards at various locations in the city. Posters were put up throughout the city in proper places and on several occasions. Flyers were handed out at 5 busy locations in the city, and several days before the beginning of the championship, the RTS broadcast attractive TV spots 10 times a day.

### **The technical part of the championship organisation**

If the first two steps are accomplished satisfactorily, the technical part of the organisation, which consists of several phases, can begin.

The first phase is the choice of sports facilities where the championship is to be held. The facilities have to be of an adequate type and level in order to fully meet all the needs of the participants. Regarding the fact that the number of participants exceeds 1,000, it goes without saying that the sports facilities must consist of the main sports hall, where at least four boxing rings can be placed. It also must have all other accompanying facilities such as dressing rooms, a press centre, a restaurant and so forth, which will enable the championship to be held without a flaw. These facilities must be examined by WAKO representatives, who give permission for the holding of the championship. We know from experience that there are two halls in Belgrade which completely meet these standards. These are the Belgrade Arena and Pionir. Unfortunately, the former has a formidably high rental price, which makes it an almost impossible choice. The latter completely meets the requirements as regards the capacity, size, equipment, and surely, the price. It was, therefore, a logical choice during the organisation of the world championship in 2001 and 2007. A hall is reserved by contract for the period of five days due to the organisation requirements and the preparation of the boxing rings. In order to solve this problem successfully, it is of the highest importance to plan the right number of boxing rings. This planning is the task of the members of the WAKO organisational committee. We also know by previous experience that the number of contests that can be held in one boxing ring during one hour is 5 to 6. The working time, if

one can put it that way, of all the participants of the championship, both the competitors and the personnel, lasts 7 hours a day, which means there can be 35-42 contests a day in a single boxing ring. The number of boxing rings required for the smooth running of the competition is assessed on the basis of the total number of contests planned for the first day. Of course, it is not wise to wait until the last day to assess the required number of boxing rings. This should be done much earlier, and it should also be based on the competitors' applications, while the final number is determined a day before the eliminative contests begin, when all the rings must be ready for use. There is always one extra ring which can be used in case of need.

The second phase represents the choice of hotels where the participants of the championship will be accommodated. During the choice of hotels, the organiser must take into consideration several issues:

- The hotel category must be appropriate (at least 3 star hotels for the competitors and minimum 4 star hotels for the management of the World Federation);
- The hotel price should be acceptable to all the participants;
- The accommodation should be based on overnight accommodation + breakfast + one meal, usually dinner;
- The hotels should not be too far from the sports hall where the championship takes place;
- If the hotels are far from the sports facilities, the transfer of the participants should be organised on a daily basis; and
- Appropriate police departments should be informed about the championship, including the hotels where the participants will be accommodated, and which will, consequently, be their official place of residence.

If the above listed requirements are fulfilled, the organiser examines the available hotels and signs a preliminary contract with the appropriate hotels as regards their use. During the organisation of the world championship in 2007 the main hotel was the Srbija Hotel. The participants were also accommodated in the Slavija and the Slavija Lux hotels.

The third phase is the choice of the main transportation company of the championship which will be engaged to transfer the participants during the championship. The organisation of transportation is necessary during the arrival and departure of national teams (to and from the airport, railway station etc.), as well as in the course of the championship itself (for example, daily transfer from a hotel to the sports hall and vice versa). A preliminary contract is also signed with the transportation company pertaining to the use of their

services. During the organisation of both world championships in Belgrade, the principal transportation company was the Lasta Company from Belgrade.

In the fourth phase, the Kickboxing Association has to send complete material related to the championship to all the national federations, and the material is sent through the WAKO office (at least 6 months prior to the championship). This material must contain the following information:

- The exact date and place of the championship;
- The disciplines included in the championship programme;
- The daily programme of the championship;
- The information on the accommodation (including its quality and price);
- The information on the possibilities of arrival to the place where the championship is to be held (airports, international highways, railway and ship transportation etc.);
- The application form for the members of national teams;
- Visa application forms (if required); and
- The information about the closing date for the application for the championship (usually one month prior to the beginning of the championship).

The creation of an internet presentation related to the sports event is of a great importance in this phase. An internet presentation was made for the needs of the world championship and it contained all the necessary information related to the championship organisation. In several different categories, the visitors of the website could learn everything about the venue, the hotel accommodation and travelling to Belgrade. A separate category available on the website was the participants' application for the championship. National teams signed their participants up using a form and all the information received in this way could be seen on the website on the same day. In this way, the visitors of the website could have the information about the current number of registered competitors, including their categories and disciplines.

### **The actual organisation of the championship**

Before the very beginning of the championship, it is very important that national teams should send in their applications in due time, with precise data about the number of participants, the time and way of their arrival, as well as the accommodation. If these applications arrive on time, the organiser has enough time to make a detailed plan for the reception and accommodation of all the participants. Experience shows that it is best to engage a professional travel agency in this phase of the organisation. During the organisation of the

World Championship in 2007 this job was done by the travel agency Plavi, plavi, which was responsible for the reception and accommodation of all the participants in the championship. All the internet applications received by the Kickboxing Association were classified in a data base, which was created especially for this occasion. Thus, the Kickboxing Association had the schedule of the arrival of national teams much before the championship began, which made the reception's task much easier. Apart from this agency, the Kickboxing Association had engaged a large number of hostesses, whose task was to be in immediate contact with the leaders of the national teams of participating countries at the championship. Each national team had its hostess, whose duty was to be in touch and give any needed help to the leader of a national team, from the reception at the airport or the railway station, the accommodation and participation in the championship, to their departure from Belgrade. At the Nikola Tesla airport in Belgrade, there was a visibly marked desk for the reception of all the participants.

Apart from hostesses, it is necessary to engage a sufficient number of volunteers, who have special tasks in the sports arena during the competition. As all the competitors who take part in the championship have to wear the official uniforms supplied by specified companies, producers of kickboxing equipment, with the permission of WAKO - one of the volunteers' tasks is to hire this equipment. Reliable people have to be engaged for this job because this equipment remains in the possession of the organiser at the end of the championship. Volunteers have to take great care of the equipment so that its greatest possible quantity should remain for later use by the Serbian Kickboxing Association. This equipment is later allocated to various clubs by the Association, which is one way of helping them in their work. Apart from the hiring of equipment, volunteers have some other tasks in the sports arena as well. One of the important tasks is the distribution of food and drinks to the officials and personnel during the championship. The organiser must provide and distribute in due time sufficient quantity of sandwiches and soft drinks to the referees and official personnel. There should be at least 30 volunteers. At least 10 hostesses should be exclusively in charge of VIP guests. In this way the whole championship may progress much more easily.

During such championships it is compulsory to set up the official championship office, which is usually at the main hotel of the championship (the office was at the Srbija Hotel during the World Championship in 2007). The championship office is open 24 hours a day and it is from there that the control of the entire organisation of the championship is carried out.

### **The beginning of the championship**

The first two days of the championship require the most work. It is then that the participants arrive and are given accommodation. The hostesses meet the national teams, according to a predetermined schedule. They guide them to the main hotel, where, at the office of the championship, the delegation leaders regulate their duties towards the organiser regarding the accommodation, as well as the WAKO competition fee, for which they get appropriate receipts, as well as forms for the competitors' weighing. Afterwards, the national teams are put up in the chosen hotels with the hostesses' help and the competitors are submitted to weighing.

The weighing premises have to be close to the championship office. During the world championship in 2007, the weighing was done on the premises of the sports centre Šumice, which is in the vicinity of the official Srbija Hotel. Referees, both foreign and domestic, are engaged to perform the weighing, i.e. control the competitors' weight. Then they also examine their passports or competition ID cards, thus checking their citizenship and age. Apart from weighing, medical examination is performed on the same premises, and it is done by the official medical personnel, engaged at the championship. Each competitor, having properly filled in the weighing form, is submitted to a medical check-up and weighing. After the examination is over, this form has to be verified by the doctor on duty and the referee who checks the competitors' weight. Only competitors with a verified registration form can take part in the championship and they can later be picked out by drawing lots. Weighing is usually finished during the first day, although it is sometimes also done on the second day, due to the late arrival of some national teams, in which case it usually ends in the early afternoon hours.

A referee seminar must be held on the second day of the championship and that is when the choice of the referees is made, as well as the appointment of the chief referee for each boxing ring. At the same time, the WAKO directorate members have an appointment organized with a statesman of high rank (the President, the Prime Minister or the Minister of Sport). During the last world championship the delegation was received by the Serbian Prime Minister and the Minister of Sport.

After the seminar is over, the choice of competitors by drawing of lots is publicly done, so that one representative of each national team is present. The drawing is done by the competition WAKO commission, and the computer-aided processing of the drawing, the order of contests and the results are also done by an appointed WAKO official. When the drawing is over, its result is printed in a sufficient number of copies, so that each organization gets one. Consequently, the selectors of national teams know the exact schedule and timetable of contests, so they may prepare their competitors in good time. It

is very important that all the representatives of national teams, selectors and trainers should be informed about the timetable of contests and the schedule of the competition for each day of the championship. At the same time the sequence of contests for each boxing ring is made, so that the ring supervisors can have precise data about the number of contests and participants. The same data are delivered to official announcers and the directors of the championship, who are in charge of the progress of the competition.

After the drawing of lots has been done, a joint meeting and dinner are organized for the presidents of national teams and the members of the WAKO directorate.

## **THE COMPETITIVE PART OF THE CHAMPIONSHIP**

On the third day of the championship the official competition begins, which involves eliminatory contests in all the boxing rings.

The official opening of the championship is usually organized in the afternoon hours of the same day, during the break between eliminatory contests or immediately after them.

### **The ceremonial opening of the championship**

The official opening represents a real sports spectacle. It is then that all the participating countries are introduced and the contestants lined up. All the participants usually withdraw into a space outside the sports arena and then the national teams are presented in alphabetical order, which is accompanied by sound and light effects. This requires perfect coordination and cooperation of all the engaged assistants. Their task is to line up all the participants of the championship in due time, in the space which has been previously planned so that the procession may take place smoothly. Special boards with the names of the countries are made for the occasion. They are carried by girls who walk in front of each national team that has been called out. During the organization of the world championship in 2007 the members of the folk ensemble Branko Krsmanović were given this task. They led national teams during the procession, dressed in traditional national costumes.

It is also necessary to engage for this occasion a professional MC, who will take care of the entire course of the official opening.

After all the national teams have been lined up, the championship is officially proclaimed open by a top-ranking statesman. On that occasion the WAKO president Dr. Ennio Falsoni addressed the participants and spectators,

as well as the president of the Serbian Kickboxing Association, Borislav Pelević. The World Championship in 2001 was opened by the former Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić, and the President of the Serbian Olympic Committee Ivan Đurković opened the World Championship in 2007.

On the same day, after the official opening and the eliminatory contests, a dinner is organized for the chairmen of national teams, the judges, referees and the members of the WAKO directorate.

On the fourth and fifth day, eliminatory contests continue in all the boxing rings.

### **The final part of the championship**

The first part of the final contests is held in the evening hours of the sixth day. There are just two boxing rings during this time in the sports arena, where the final contests are simultaneously held in the categories which are determined by the organizer in consultation with the members of the WAKO Competition Committee.

On the last day of the championship, only the evening program is held, in which the finalists take part in the categories which the organiser has chosen. Only the best contests are left for this part, as well as those in which domestic contestants participate.

The program usually consists of 12 to 15 contests which are followed by obligatory ceremonies in which the winners are announced.

The organization of the final evening is indeed a real spectacle in itself, which looks a lot like the organisation of top professional shows. On that occasion, only one ring remains in the sports arena, and it is surrounded by chairs on the ground floor for VIPs. The use of all available light and pyrotechnical effects is compulsory, as well as a video beam in order to create a highly spectacular atmosphere.

After the final part is finished, it is a must to organise a joint celebration - the Sayonara Party for all the participants of the championship, sponsors, and journalists, members of the Organisational Committee and all the devotees of kickboxing. This celebration marks the official conclusion of the championship. That is a chance for all the participants to relax and enjoy music and finish such a great international sports competition in good spirits.

After the end of the championship, the organiser has the obligation to provide transportation for the members of national teams to the airport or the railway station, according to a previously determined schedule. When the last participant has left the venue, it is technically brought to an end.

## CONCLUSION

The organisation of world championships in martial arts, viewed from the perspective of the organisation of the Kickboxing World Championship in 2007, has many problems which are analysed.

One of the main problems is that martial arts are not sufficiently present and broadcast in the media. The aim of every organisation is, in the first place, to increase the popularity of the sport on the national level, which leads to its greater diffusion and a larger number of club members, the final aim being the development of the sport and the creation of a better foundation for future activities. As it has already been pointed out here, the fact that martial arts, in this case kickboxing, are not sufficiently present in the media represents a major problem in finding sponsors and donators for any large project. It is difficult to attract sponsors, considering that there are numerous sports which already have a prominent standing in the media. All the related activities are mainly centred on the support of the Ministry of Sport or personal contacts through which financial means are supplied. One should also have in mind that Serbian industry is not in an ideal situation, which presents an additional problem. Due to the above mentioned circumstances, the Kickboxing World Championship in 2007 did not arouse the same public attention as the World Championship held in Belgrade in 2001 had. All WAKO members admitted that the world championship held in 2001 was the greatest and best organised in the history of this world organisation. The atmosphere that prevailed in Serbia during that year considerably contributed to creating such a favourable impression, as well as the fact that the championship was officially opened by the Serbian Prime Minister, and that the President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia received the leaders of the World Federation. The final evening of the championship was held in front of 10000 spectators at the Pionir Sports Hall, marked by the presence of a large number of top-ranking VIPs from the world of sport, politics and culture. Our national team accomplished the greatest success in that championship by winning 19 medals, 6 of them being gold ones. A confirmation of the superb organisation were numerous greeting cards addressed to the Yugoslav Kickboxing Association after the end of the championship, from a large number of sports associations from our country, sports organizations, as well as from official state institutions and prominent statesmen, among which the most important were the greetings from the President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Dr. Vojislav Koštunica, the Commander-in chief of the Headquarters of the Yugoslav Army, Nebojša Pavković, the President of JOK, Dragan Kićanović, the Director of

Sports Department, Dragan Vuksanović, the President of the Serbian Sports Association, Siniša Krajčinović, and many others.

The situation was similar in 2007 as well, though there were fewer spectators and statesmen.

But, without a doubt, the 2007 World Championship contributed considerably to the increase of the popularity and development of this sport.