A photograph of two shirtless men wrestling in a sumo ring. The man in the foreground is wearing a black mawashi and is in a low, defensive stance. The man behind him is also shirtless and is leaning over him, attempting to throw or pin him. The background shows a crowd of spectators and a white fence. The word "KIRKPINAR" is written in large, white, serif capital letters at the bottom of the image.

KIRKPINAR

A letter from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk
to Pehlivan Mehmet of Kurtdere
in 1931

To Pehlivan Mehmet of Kurtdere,

I have come to know you as a Turkish wrestler of world fame. I also learned that you described the secret behind your success in the following words:

"In every wrestling match, I thought I had the Turkish nation behind me and I also thought of our national honour."

I admired what you said as much as your deeds. Therefore, I am recording your words as a professional maxim for all Turkish sportsmen to demonstrate how pleased I am with you and your words.

Enclosed with my letter is a small gift for you and your children.

Pehlivan, I wish you a long, healthy life."

Kemal Atatürk



The Kırkpınar Festival is held in Edirne in June of each year. A Kırkpınar Committee set up by the Municipality determines the dates and makes the necessary preparations for the festival:

In keeping with old traditions, the Kırkpınar festivities and matches continue for a week. Following horse races, folklore shows and fairs, the grease wrestling is the feature of the last three days.

This year, we will hold the 625th Festival, between 30 June and 6 July 1986.

EDİRNE

Edirne, Turkey's north-western gate to Europe, is a historical city. It was the capital of the Ottoman Empire for 91 years and contains many Turkish-Islamic works. It has become a symbol of Ottoman Civilisation with its mosques, palaces, caravanserais, bridges, covered bazaar, traditional baths and Turkish houses.

Edirne is architecturally an open-air museum. It is possible to see five centuries of architectural development within a radius of one kilometre.

The Selimiye Mosque described by its architect (Sinan) as his "masterpiece" is in Edirne. Other works include the Beyazıt Mosque and its complex, Old Mosque, "Üç Şerefli" Mosque, Muradiye Mosque, Rüstempaşa and Ekmekçiioğlu Ahmet Paşa Caravanserais, Gazimihal, Sarayhane, Beyazıt II and Ahmet Paşa bridges.

Important in the history of medicine is the five-hundred year old hospital, the Darülsifa where music was first used in treatment.

Tourists from Turkey and abroad visit Edirne throughout the year to see the many historical building and sites.



The Legend of Kirkpınar

There are legends galore about how the Kirkpınar Wrestling Matches contest started, but the following is the most popular. During a campaign started by Orhan Gazi to capture Rumelia, his brother Süleyman Paşa went on to Domuzhisari with 40 warriors. They crossed by raft and captured Domuzhisari plus other forts in the region and returned. The 40-strong advance force, on their way back camped in Samona (now in Greece) and started wrestling for sport. Two of them wrestled for hours but neither managed to win. Later, on a Spring Festival Day (May 6) the pair started another match at Ahır Köy meadow. They wrestled from morning till midnight, became exhausted and died. Their friends buried them under a fig tree and left.

The warriors, when they visited the burial site years later, saw several springs where the grave should have been and named the place Kirkpınar (The Forty Springs).

In time, oil wrestling tournaments became traditional in the Kirkpınar area.

Site of the Kirkpınar Tournaments

Following the Balkan Wars and World War I, Kirkpınar wrestling tournaments were moved from Kirkpınar meadow now near Samona Village in Greece, to Virantekke situated on the Edirne-Mustafapaşa road.

Since the proclamation of the Turkish Republic, they have been held in the Sarayıcı district of Edirne.

The Characters in Wrestling

Kırkpınar Ağası - The Agha of Kırkpınar

In the past, the Kırkpınar Matches were supervised by the Kırkpınar Aghasi. They were some of the most interesting personages of the matches, who invited the pehlivans, organized the matches, catered to the guests, provided room and board for the visitors. At the same time, they were responsible for ensuring that the matches were carried out in keeping with tradition, and in addition, handed out the prizes. Providing security was also their business.

Başpehlivan - Chief Pehlivan

The Başpehlivan receives the largest Kırkpınar prize, and keeps the title of Başpehlivan of Turkey for one year. A wrestler who is Başpehlivan three years in a row receives the grand prize of a gold belt, the famous Altın Kemer of Kırkpınar. Winners of other races and pehlivans considered worthy of recognition are given encouragement prizes. The prize of a Başpehlivan may be cash, or it may be a horse, a bull, heifer or a ram. In past years, it was the custom to give the Başpehlivan a camel, the second prize winner (Başaltı) a bull followed by such prizes as horses, etc.

Cazgır

The master of ceremonies at grease wrestling match who introduces the wrestlers to the spectators and calls for the matches to begin is called a Cazgır, or Salavatçı. The cazgır introduces the wrestlers paired by the committee of referees by reciting their names, titles and skill in games with suitable verses and prayers.



Greasing

To make it difficult for them to be gripped, the wrestlers grease themselves around cauldrons of oil and water placed appropriately around the field.

Ceremonially, this is done using the right hand to grease the left shoulder, the breast, arms then finally the kispet, repeating the same sequence with the left hand. After the match starts, the pehlivans may at any time get grease or water from ever carriers that wander around the field.

Peşrev

Peşrev is the warm-up prelude to the match. It is performed harmoniously, aesthetically appealing to the spectators and raising the morale of the pehlivans, (or wrestlers). During the peşrev, the pehlivan exercises to prepare his breathing muscles and heart for the match that will start shortly.

The pehlivans then gather in front of the board of referees. A cazgır presents them, and recites prayers. On a signal, the drums and clarinet (davul and zurna) start playing and the pehlivans start their peşrev in time with the tune, waving their hands and arms in an exaggerated manner.

During the peşrev, the pehlivans walk forward three times and backwards three times. Then they kneel with their left knee on the ground, moving their right hand from the ground to the knee, the lips and the forehead three times. Some may cut a blade of grass from the ground and bite on it. After this ceremony, the pehlivans start jumping up and down, slowly, shouting "Hayda bre pehlivan," literally "Come on pehlivan," from time to time. After moving to and fro, the opponents calves are felt and the back stroked, the back of the neck locked. The hands then lock in several shakes and the match has started.





Kispet

Kispet or leather trousers, the most important item of equipment of a pehlivan in a grease wrestling match, is made of either water buffalo, heifer or calf hide. Around the waist, it is thicker and about four fingers wide. This section, through which thick rope is passed to grip the waist, is called the kasnak. The section just below the knee is the 'paça'. A piece of felt is placed between the paça and the flesh, the leather is then pulled down over the felt and tightly secured with twine. If this is not done, fingers can easily be hooked on to the paça, causing the pehlivan to lose the game.



Zembil

Kispets, between matches, are stored in a sack woven of reeds called a zembil. A pehlivan who retires from wrestling hangs his zembil on the wall to give this message, implying that he will never do the kispet again.



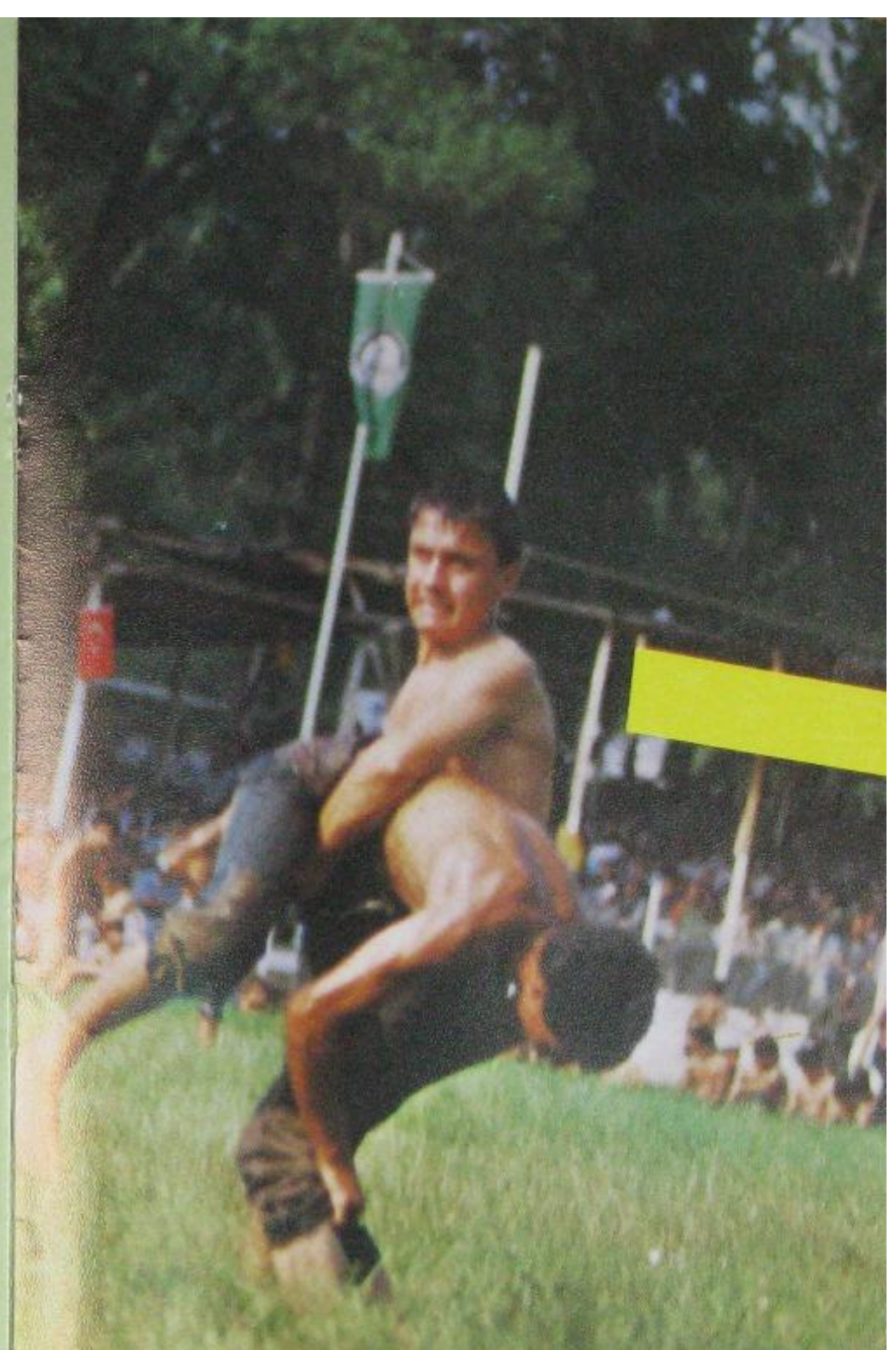
Davul/Zurna

Literally, the drum and clarinet. At *Kırkpınar*, the task of playing the davul and zurna is auctioned to certain groups. Pehlivan in a match are called to the clasp against the melodies emanating from the davul and zurna which excite both the spectators and the pehlivans.

Penalties in grease - wrestling

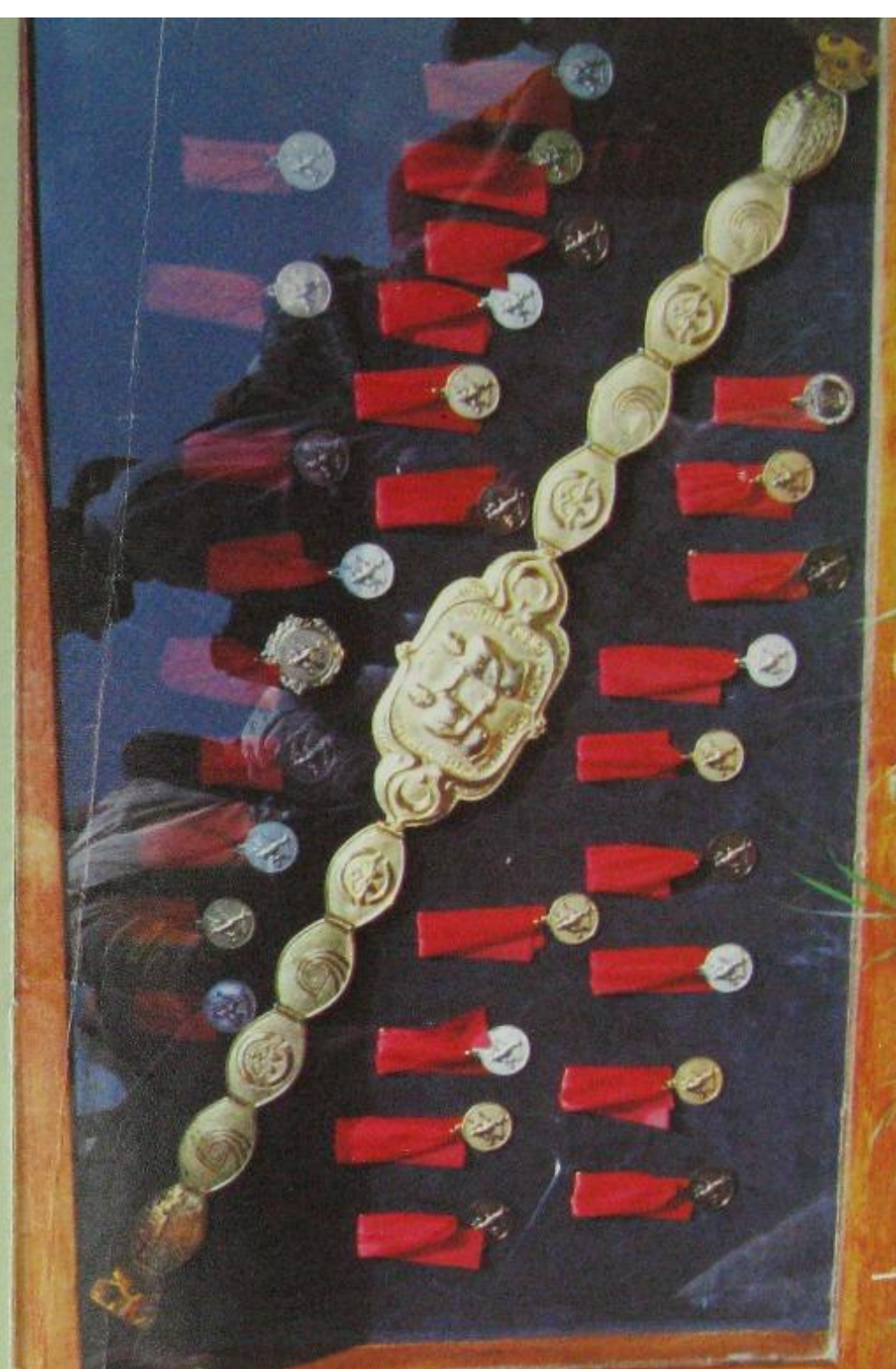
The following are subject to penalties:

1. Insulting the referee, the opponent or the spectators by words or gestures.
2. Talking or quarrelling with the opponent during the contest.
3. Not behaving seriously or entering into an agreement with the opponent. As the matches are organised on an elimination basis, the loser goes out of the match while the winners continue to take part.



FAMOUS TOP WRESTLERS AT KIRKPINAR

Kel Alio (holder of the first prize for 26 years)
Koca Yusuf
Adalı Halil Pehlivan
Gençkinlili Yusuf Pehlivan (the last top wrestler of the Original Kirkpinar)
Hergeleci İbrahim (trainer of Koca Yusuf)
Çömlek Köylü Kara Murat (trainer of Kara Emin)
Silivri Molla İzzet
Çatalca Nakkaş Eyüp
Yenici Mehmet
Kızılçıklı Mahmut
Çömlek Köylü Kara Emin
Kayıkçıoğlu Ahmet (trainer of Tekirdağlı Hüseyin and Hayrabolulu Süleyman)
Gerdellili Himmet Pehlivan
Tekirdağlı Hüseyin (held of the first prize at Kirkpinar and retired from wrestling without being beaten.)
Babaeskili İbrahim
Babaeskili Mustafa
Hasrabolulu Süleyman
Hasan Acar (1953–1957)
Hayrabolulu Süleyman
Hasan Acar (1953-1957)
İbrahim Karabacak (1954, 1956, 1959, 1960)
İrfan Atan (1955)
Adil Atan (1958)
Sezai Kanmaz (1963)
Mehmet Ali Yağcı (shared first prize with Kara Ali in 1961, 1962, 1964)
Kara Ali (1965)
Ordulu Mustafa Bük (winner of the gold belt in 1966, 1967, 1968)
Babaeskili Nazmi Uzun (1969)
No top wrestler (Aydın Demir and Kara Ali drew 1970)
Hasan Şahin (1971)
Arap Mustafa Yıldız (1972)
Ordulu Davut Yılmaz (1973)
Kara Ali Çelik (1974)
Kirkpinar wrestlings were interrupted (1975)
Aydın Demir (owner of the gold belt in 1976, 1977, 1978)
Sabri Acar (1979)
Mehmet Güçlü (1980)
Arap Mustafa Yıldız (1981)
Hüseyin Çökül (holder of the gold belt in 1982, 1983, 1984)
Sabri Acar (1985)





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