



# FREESTYLE WRESTLING WORLD CUP LOS ANGELES | CA ★ 11/12 APRIL 2015 ★

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## *The 2015 Freestyle World Cup • From the Press Box (4 in a series)*

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## *Freestyle World Cup brings U.S., Cuba, Russia and Iran into hand-to-hand combat at The Forum on April 11-12*

LOS ANGELES, California, April 1 — Four of the world’s most iconic nations - Cuba, Iran, Russia and the United States – will join Eurasian powers Turkey, Mongolia, Belarus and Azerbaijan in hand-to-hand combat at The Forum to crown the world’s finest freestyle wrestling team.

This “war on the floor” will take place on 12-meter square mats (about 40 feet square) on Saturday and Sunday, April 11-12. The winner will claim wrestling’s first major international prize in this pre-Olympic year, just five months before the [World Championships](#) return to the United States in September in Las Vegas.



For the United States, which has won more Olympic medals in freestyle wrestling than any other nation, the opportunity to establish true “home mat advantage” is at hand. After a strong showing at the 2014 World Cup – also held at The Forum – where only the U.S. really challenged eventual winner Iran, the American team is healthy and well positioned to win back the World Cup for the first time since 2003.

“We know that the teams competing at the World Cup this year will use it as a test event for this year’s World Championships in Las Vegas,” notes USA Wrestling’s National Freestyle Coach Bruce Burnett. “They will be sending most of the athletes they expect to have at the World Championships.

“This gives our athletes an opportunity to see how the travel and acclimation affects their opponents. It will be a good gauge to see where we are against the best athletes in the world.”

Wrestling’s royalty will be on the mats, including American Olympic gold medalists Jake Varner (2012 gold at 97 kg/213 lbs.) and Jordan Burroughs (2012 gold at 74 kg/163 lbs.). Barring late injuries, the U.S. will field its top-ranked wrestler in each of the eight weight classes in each match. All together, the eight teams will be fielding more than two dozen wrestling Olympians for the World Cup.

Burnett is urging American fans to help the home team. “Home field ‘mat’ advantage is real,” he said, “and should give our athletes a boost. Hopefully our fans step up like the Seattle football fans do for the Seahawks. We can use a ninth-man for the teams that we will compete against.”

## ● *SCHEDULE AND TICKETS* ●

The U.S. will meet Cuba and Russia on Saturday, April 11 and Mongolia on Sunday, April 12, with the top-ranked team in Group A likely to face Iran for the World Cup title. The Iranians will grapple with Azerbaijan, Belarus and Turkey in Group B.

### Saturday, April 11

#### Session I

3:00 p.m. – USA vs. Cuba on Mat A, Iran vs. Belarus on Mat B

4:30 p.m. – Russia vs. Mongolia on Mat A, Azerbaijan vs. Turkey on Mat B

#### Session II

6:15 p.m. – Opening Ceremonies

6:30 p.m. – USA vs. Russia on Mat A, Iran vs. Turkey on Mat B

8:00 p.m. – Mongolia vs. Cuba on Mat A, Belarus vs. Azerbaijan on Mat B

### Sunday, April 12

#### Session III

11:00 a.m. – USA vs. Mongolia on Mat A, Turkey vs. Belarus on Mat B

12:30 p.m. – Azerbaijan vs. Iran on Mat A, Cuba vs. Russia on Mat B

2:00 p.m. – Fifth Place Dual on Mat A, Seventh Place Dual on Mat B

#### Session IV

4:15 p.m. – Third Place Dual on Mat A

5:45 p.m. – First Place Dual on Mat A

All-Session tickets are \$60 for General Admission and \$85 for Preferred Seating. Single-Day tickets, for either Saturday or Sunday, are \$35 for General Admission and \$55 for Preferred Seating, at The Forum box office or online at [www.Ticketmaster.com](http://www.Ticketmaster.com) (fees apply). [USA Wrestling members](#) can purchase discounted tickets.

## ● *NOTEBOOK* ●

=> [Iran](#) enters the 2015 World Cup as the three-time defending champion after wins in 2012 (in Baku, Azerbaijan), 2013 (in Tehran) and 2014 (at The Forum). Its squad will be led by 2011 and 2013 World Champion Reza Yazdani (97 kg/213 lbs.), 2013 World Champion Hassan Rahimi (57 kg/125 lbs.) and three other World Championships medalists.

The Iranian team will be boosted by the presence of enthusiastic Persian expatriates who came in large numbers in 2013 to wave the flag and cheer the wrestlers. Said Iranian technical manager Ali Reza Rezaie said after the opening matches last year, “Our countrymen are here. We’re not strangers. They encourage us. We’re really grateful.”

=> Although hard to imagine, [Russia](#) will be the underrated power at the World Cup. They cruised to the final of the 2014 World Cup, but fell to Iran in the final, 6-2. But the Russian squad won the team title at the 2014 Freestyle World Championships in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, winning five gold medals in eight weight classes. But their draw is a tough one, against Cuba, the U.S. and Mongolia in Group A. The Russian team is the only one not yet announced.

=> High enthusiasm will greet the team from **Cuba**, which may be the first Cuban national squad to appear in Los Angeles since 1983. Cuba’s resurgence on the mats led to a fifth-place team finish at last year’s World Championship, qualifying it for its first World Cup berth since 2009. Cuba won its only World Cup title in 2005.

=> The winner of the World Cup will take strong momentum into the [2015 World Championships](#) at the Orleans Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada from September 7-12. Olympic qualification slots will be allotted to the top six

nations finishing in each of the six weight classes in men's and women's Freestyle and men's Greco-Roman wrestling disciplines at the World Championships.

=> USA team member **Aaron Pico** is a 7th generation Californio and a direct descendent of Pio de Jesus Pico, who was the last Mexican Governor of California. Aaron's also the 2015 Cerro Pelado Int'l Senior Men Freestyle 65 kg Champion (Havana, Cuba).

=> [Dan Henderson](#) will serve as Team USA's honorary captain. Born in Downey, CA and attending Victor Valley High School, Dan was a 1992 and 1996 Olympic wrestler, and made his debut in Mixed Martial Arts in 1997 when he joined the Real American Wrestling team (RAW). He has been involved in MMA since then and is expected to face Tim Boetsch on June 6, 2015 at UFC Fight Night 68.

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Local media contact: Jan Fambro, [jfambro@speedworkslc.com](mailto:jfambro@speedworkslc.com), 310.826.2962

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## *Is Jake Varner the Missing Link?*

LOS ANGELES, California, March 17 — In the movies, the hero swoops in at the end to save the day. In the town where movies get made, defending Olympic champion [Jake Varner](#) could be the difference in an American victory story.

Unable to wrestle in the 2014 Freestyle World Cup due to injury, Varner couldn't help his teammates as the U.S. lost a tight, 5-3 decision to Iran that relegated the Americans to an eventual third-place finish. Now healthy and top-ranked among Americans at 97 kg (213 lbs.), the former Penn State All-American could be the catalyst at the [2015 World Cup](#) at The Forum in Inglewood on April 11-12.

The U.S. only needs a little help. Last year's World Cup match with Iran was the highlight of the tournament, and only the Americans won more than two matches from the eventual titlists.

Back for more in 2015 are last year's Iran-beaters [Jordan Burroughs](#) (the 2012 Olympic gold medalist at 74 kg/163 lbs. and [Brent Metcalf](#) at 65 kg/143 lbs. and two stars who lost on late 1-0 heart-breakers: [Nick Marable](#) at 70 kg/154 lbs. and 2014 World Championships bronze medalist [Tervel Dlagney](#) at 125 kg/275 lbs.

Varner will take his place at 97 kg, with fellow Penn State alum [Ed Ruth](#) at 86 kg/189 lbs. and new World Cup entries [Tony Ramos](#) at 57 kg/125.5 lbs. and [Coleman Scott](#) at 61 kg/134 lbs. It doesn't take too much imagination to see where this American team could succeed where last year's fell short.

But the road to meeting Iran will be tougher, as the U.S. must first get out of pool competition against Russia, which won the 2014 World Championships team title. But this is the U.S.'s opportunity to change perceptions ... which can change the reality of American wrestling fortunes.

“Our athletes train to win, to be the best,” said new U.S. national freestyle coach Bruce Burnett. “Not to have a good showing or be respectable,” he insisted, “we compete to win and anytime our athletes compete for the United States and represent the Red, White and Blue, it should be special and the stakes should be higher.”

A win over two days at The Forum would signal American wrestling is on the rise, right on time for the World Championships — on American soil in Las Vegas this September — with qualifying spots at stake for the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro.

For Varner, an American World Cup win in Los Angeles would be a special joy. The native of Bakersfield was a two-time California State wrestling champion and was named “Outstanding Wrestler” in 2005. A homecoming weekend that leads to the first U.S. World Cup title since 2003 would be sweet indeed.

- more -

## **FREESTYLE WRESTLING WORLD CUP SCHEDULE**

*(with dual meet pairings each session, )*

### Saturday, April 11

#### Session I

3:00 p.m. – USA vs. Cuba on Mat A, Iran vs. Belarus on Mat B

4:30 p.m. – Russia vs. Mongolia on Mat A, Azerbaijan vs. Turkey on Mat B

#### Session II

6:15 p.m. – Opening Ceremonies

6:30 p.m. – USA vs. Russia on Mat A, Iran vs. Turkey on Mat B

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2:00 p.m. – Fifth Place Dual on Mat A, Seventh Place Dual on Mat B

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## ***Cuban Wrestlers, Hotter than Havana Cigars, Making Rare Los Angeles Appearance for Wrestling World Cup***

LOS ANGELES, California, March 24 — Cuba is justly famous for cigars, rum, boxing and baseball. But today's Cuban wrestling squad might be more dangerous than all of them.

Long respected but not as celebrated as the United States, Russia or Iran on the mats, a resurgent Cuban team will return to the [United World Wrestling Freestyle World Cup](#) at The Forum in Los Angeles on April 11-12.

It's a rare Los Angeles appearance for a Cuban national team of any kind. In fact, it might be the first visit by a Cuban national team of any kind to the area since the FINA Men's Water Polo World Cup, held at Pepperdine University in Malibu in 1983. There, the Cubans finished eighth, but will shoot for a much higher finish on the mats at The Forum.

That's because Cuba climbed to fifth in the team standings at the 2014 United World Wrestling World Championships, winning four medals in the freestyle competition: silver medalist Reineris Salas (86 kg/189 lbs.), and bronze medal winners Yowlys Bonne (61 kg/134 lbs.), Livan Lopez (74 kg/163 lbs.) and Javier Cortina (97 kg/213 lbs.). All are expected to compete in Los Angeles.

The trip to Los Angeles will be the first appearance for Cuba in the World Cup since the 2011 matches in Makhachkala, Russia in 2011, where they finished fifth. But the Cubans are no stranger to World Cup success, having won the title in 2005 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, finished as runners-up in 2006 and 2008, and have been third seven times.

They've even had good success on U.S. soil in the World Cup, last competing in the event in the U.S. in Fairfax, Virginia in 2000, finishing fourth. In 12 total World Cup appearances in the U.S., the Cuban team has finished third six times, for a podium batting average of .500.

The highly-publicized thaw in political relations between the countries may mean that Cuban officials pack a few more cigars or mini-bottles of Havana Club rum to hand out as gifts at The Forum, but there will be no cordiality on the mats.

That's because the Cuban squad will face the United States, one of the tournament favorites, in the first match of the World Cup at 3 p.m. on Saturday, April 11.

Cuba will then wrestle Mongolia on Saturday evening before tangling with World Championship team winners Russia (second in last year's World Cup) on Sunday, April 12. The winner of Group A – Cuba, Mongolia, Russia and the U.S. – will face the Group B winner (possibly Iran) for the World Cup title on Sunday afternoon.

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Cuban Wrestlers, Hotter than Havana Cigars

There's no live television of the Saturday matches, so getting a good seat at Versailles, the celebrated home of Cuban cuisine in Los Angeles, won't be good enough. To see the Cubans and Americans battle on the mats, you'll have to be there in person.

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For all the "[From the Pressbox](#)" entries, visit the Freestyle Wrestling World Cup blog space.

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## ***Iran's Home Away from Home: Tehrangeles***

LOS ANGELES, California, March 31 — Iran is the three-time-defending [Freestyle Wrestling World Cup](#) champions, winning in three different cities in three different countries, but in front of hometown crowds in two of them: Tehran and Los Angeles.

That's because of the phenomenon known as "Tehrangeles," the concentration of Iranian expatriates in Los Angeles, especially in the Westwood area close to the UCLA campus.

A 2012 BBC feature<sup>1</sup> on the area noted population estimates of 300-500,000 people of Iranian heritage in Los Angeles, making it the largest concentration of Persians outside of Iran. Moreover, as many as a quarter of the residents of Beverly Hills are of Iranian descent.

Even the City of Los Angeles has noticed, formally recognizing the corner of Westwood Boulevard and Wilkins Avenue in Westwood as "Persian Square" in 2010, in honor of the first Persian business to be opened in the area, back in 1974.<sup>2</sup>

So it was no surprise when Iranian wrestlers at the 2014 World Cup, held at The Forum in Inglewood, were greeted with cheers from a heavily pro-Persian audience that made up the largest segment of the 3,500 spectators in attendance each day.

"It's been great," said Iranian technical manager Ali Reza Rezaie said after the opening matches last year. "Our countrymen are here. We're not strangers. They encourage us. We're really grateful."

Masoud Esmailpoor, a two-time World Championships medalist at 61 kg (134 lbs.) was equally pleased. "[This is] my first visit to L.A.," he said through an interpreter, after sweeping his fifth match of the World Cup. "I was so shocked on the first day when such a boisterous crowd showed up here."

More of the same is expected on April 11-12 when Iran's national team returns to The Forum, presented by CHASE, to defend its title, this time in a group which includes Turkey, Belarus and Azerbaijan, and possibly then a championship match against the top finisher in Pool A, which includes Russia and the United States.

For the Iranian team and their fans in Los Angeles and Iran, the World Cup is more than simply a series of matches. Sport psychologists Khosro Hamzeh and Peter Terry noted in a 2014 paper on wrestling in Iran that "Wrestling is viewed by many as more than just a sport, rather as an integral part of Iranian culture. Champion wrestlers are revered as national heroes who are seen as protectors of the poor and role models in society."<sup>3</sup>

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So Esmailpoor and his teammates will be looking forward to their return. “God willing, we’ll come back again,” he said at the end of the 2014 World Cup. “We love to face America and compete with America.

“I wish U.S. and Iran would have had the last match. The U.S. and Iran are close. We’ll see each other again.”

Iran will open its defense of its World Cup title in the opening session on Saturday, April 11 against Belarus, continue in the evening session vs. Turkey and face Azerbaijan on Sunday, April 12. If it wins Group B, it could face Russia or the U.S. on the evening session on Sunday.

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*Reference links:*

[1] <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-19751370>

[2] [http://cd5.lacity.org/stellent/groups/ElectedOfficials/@CD5\\_Contributor/documents/Contributor\\_Web\\_Content/LACITYP\\_012835.pdf](http://cd5.lacity.org/stellent/groups/ElectedOfficials/@CD5_Contributor/documents/Contributor_Web_Content/LACITYP_012835.pdf)

[3] [http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Peter\\_Terry3/publication/264972238\\_Wrestling\\_in\\_Iran\\_Where\\_Old\\_Meets\\_New\\_in\\_Sport\\_Psychology/links/53f7e2280cf2823e5bdb70b.pdf](http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Peter_Terry3/publication/264972238_Wrestling_in_Iran_Where_Old_Meets_New_in_Sport_Psychology/links/53f7e2280cf2823e5bdb70b.pdf)

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11:00 a.m. – USA vs. Mongolia on Mat A, Turkey vs. Belarus on Mat B

12:30 p.m. – Azerbaijan vs. Iran on Mat A, Cuba vs. Russia on Mat B

2:00 p.m. – 5th Place Dual on Mat A, 7th Place Dual on Mat B

#### **Session IV**

4:15 p.m. – 3rd Place Dual on Mat A

5:45 p.m. – 1st Place Dual on Mat A

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