

CAN PUTIN'S SAMBO REACH OLYMPIC HEIGHTS?

It may have its roots in the Soviet Union of the 1920s but the martial art of sambo is enjoying a new lease of life thanks to the drive of Vasily Shestakov, president of the Federation Internationale Amateur de Sambo (FIAS) and close personal friend and judo partner of Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin

It was Putin who gave sambo a welcome shot in the arm when he revealed during one of his first interviews as Russian President in 2000 that he had practiced the sport as a child.

Putin's announcement had many scurrying to learn more about sambo and today, with Putin's childhood friend Shestakov at the helm of the FIAS, the sport has a bright future.

"Like many other sambists, I tried to gain experience in different martial arts, especially in judo," says Shestakov, a Master of Sports in sambo and a merited coach in Russia.

"To share expertise and knowledge, I wrote a number of books and manuals, including the most successful, which I co-wrote with Mr Putin. His personal contribution attracted a lot of young people to different combat sports.

"We have been friends since we met while practicing sambo at the same sports club. Our friendship was born through sport - in my opinion friendship is one of the most tangible values that sport brings to people and nations across the world."

Sambo - an abbreviation for the Russian term for "self-defence without weapons" - originated in the former Soviet Union as a martial art system for the army and Special Forces before becoming officially recognised in 1938.

There are two major sambo disciplines - sport sambo and



Vasily Shestakov is bringing his vision for the future of Sambo to SportAccord Convention.

combat sambo. Sport Sambo is stylistically similar to judo but with some differences in rules, protocol, and uniform, allowing some types of leg locks, while not allowing chokeholds and focuses on throwing, groundwork and submissions.

Combat Sambo resembles modern mixed martial arts,

including extensive forms of striking and grappling where (unlike Sport Sambo) choking is legal.

"Sambo brings together the best holds and techniques from the world of martial arts and is a truly international martial art," added Shestakov.

"Today the FIAS affiliates 81 national sambo federations from four continents and we have been successfully developing sambo worldwide for 25 years. We organise annual world and continental sport and combat championships for men, women, masters and juniors and youths as well as other events.

"The FIAS will also be part of the SportAccord World Games of Martial Arts in Beijing later this year, while the FISU has included the sport in the University Games for 2013."

One man also helping promote sambo is four-time World Combat Sambo Champion Fedor Emelianenko, the mixed martial arts heavyweight considered by many to be the greatest heavyweight fighter in the world and whose popularity in MMA circles is well-known thanks to the huge global popularity of the sport.

Shestakov added: "Our basic goal is to increase the number of National Federations affiliated to the FIAS and to facilitate their recognition by the National Olympic Committees of their respective countries. It is important to take into consideration the specific character of every particular region and country traditions and requirements.

"My vision is to promote sambo as an attractive system of physical activity and education, while we are also working on involving athletes with disabilities." ■

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