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ETHNOSPORT-STRONGMEN DISCIPLINE: ALFA AND OMEGA OF THE WORLD'S STRONGMEN MOVEMENT

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Annotation

The article discusses research of the world's strongmen movements genesis. The research covers historical aspects of creation and establishing of strongmen sport, as well as information about David Webster who personally contributed to the formation of strongmen. The article also contains comparative analysis of institutional forms of strongmen movement – IFSA, show «The World's Strongest Man», a yearly festival of Arnold Schwarzenegger «Arnold Sports Festival», world's series of the World Strongman Cup under the auspices of the World Strongman Cup Federation (Austria). Countries, holding strongmen sport most often are outlined. It is established, that in the genesis of strongmen sports, the continuation of traditional strongmen competitions, available in most of the world's cultures, is clearly shown. For now, World's strongmen movement, consists of scattered commercial companies and sports associations, and doesn't have any leading structure. Such a situation opens a window of opportunity for the World Strongmen Federation to become a leader of world's strongmen movement. Additional opportunities are offered by the fact, that strongman is very likely to become the recognized sport, because demonstrated by the high interest of athletes and the public towards such competitions, as well as a high and stable interest from TV stations. Diversification of the world's strongmen movement on the basis of strategic partnership between WSF and World Ethnosport expressed in the creation of a new discipline – ethnosport-strongmen, creates a key driver for sustainable development. The launch of joint project – The World Series of Ethnosport Challenge tournaments in 2018 demonstrated the exiting demand towards such projects around the world. The main advantage of joint development of ethnosport and strongmen sport is that joint actions help to solve problems. For example, non-existence of famous athletes in traditional games of ethnosport is compensated by "the strongest athletes". Additionally, typical strength exercises in strongmen add a unique aspect to traditional games.

Keywords: *Arnold classic, Ethnosport Challenge, strongmen, traditional sports and games, weightlifting.*



World strongmen movement: development and institutionalisation

Strongmen sport – is a sports discipline of speed power all-around, based on exercises of lifting and moving weights, done individually or in pair, measured by time or distance.

In 2003 Latvian NGO World Strongmen Federation (WSF) was organized and registered. The main objective of WSF is assistance in development of strongman sport. In the Federation 42 countries are represented. There are three main directions:

- Strongmen sport (for amateurs, from national to world championships in 4 weight categories);
- Strongmen show (tournaments for professionals, strongmen World Cups);
- Ethnosport-strongmen (traditional games, The World Series of Ethnosport Challenge tournaments).

WSF has introduced standards for exercises and equipment, weight and age categories, has developed and consistently improves strongmen sports training system «StrongFit». Alongside this diversification (as a growth strategy) in strongmen sport takes place in organization and condition of authentic traditional games. Historically weightlifting has been established in the traditional games, during popular celebrations and ceremonies¹. Traditional games always have a cultural nucleus in a form of main competitions – Laamb wrestling holiday in Senegal, wall fistfighting at Atmanov's Kulachki in Russia, Three Games of Men (wrestling, archery and horse raiding) at Nadom fest in Mongolia. Strongmen competitions are the core of Highland games in Scotland as well.²

Development of strongmen sports is closely connected with the history of other power sports, where we clearly see elements of basic human physical activities during ancient times. For many prehistoric tribes, the traditional test of manhood was the lifting of a special rock. Such manhood stones, some with the name of the first lifter incised, exist in Greece and in Scottish castles. The competitive lifting of stones still persists locally in Germany, Iceland³, Switzerland, the highlands of Montenegro, France and the Basque region of Spain. The consecutive number of lifts is used to declare a winner. Strongman competitions were always appealing to the public, and the strongmen themselves became "stars". That is now since the 18th and 19th centuries, people like Eugen Sandow (1867–1925) and Arthur Saxon (1878–1921) in Germany, George Hackenschmidt (1877–1968) in Russia and Louis Apollon (1862–1928) in France, who performed in circuses and theaters became famous⁴. An important factor in the genesis of modern strongmen sport was the appearance of the first specialized club in 1885 - the "circle of athletics fans" by Dr. Vladislav Krajewski (1841–1901) in St. Petersburg (Russia), which used equipment, which later became mandatory for training in this kind of sport: Uni dumbbells, Apollo axel, Calvert barbell, Windish dumbbells, etc.

¹ Kylasov, Alexey (2012) Ethnosport. The End of Decline (Sport: Kultur, Veränderung / Sport: Culture, Change). Published by LIT Verlag, 2015.

² Traditional Games. World Ethnosport website. March 23th 2019, retrieved from: <http://ethnosport.org/index/1.html>

The History of the Atlas Stones. The World Strongest Man website. March 23th 2019, retrieved from: <http://theworldstrongestman.com/history-atlas-stones/>

⁴ Weightlifting. Encyclopedia Britannica website. March 23th 2019, retrieved from: <https://www.britannica.com/sports/weightlifting#ref92272>



The first strongman competitions, similar in concept to the modern sport of strongmen, were recorded already in the 19th century. In March 28, 1891, the first world weight lifting championship was held in café “Monica”, in London, with the participation of 7 champions from Germany, England, Austria, Belgium and Italy. The three-day event consisted of repetitions and an alternate weight press of 25 kg or 38 kg in each arm. The first world champion was Edward Lawrence Levy (1851–1932) from England⁵. Weightlifting of this period was not very different from the modern strongmen sport, since there were no weight categories, and many disciplines and the press were performed with one or two hands. Weightlifting's competitions were included in the program of the first IOC Olympic Games 1896, 1900 and 1904, but then they were excluded until 1920. In the same year, the International Federation of Weightlifting (Fédération Haltérophile Internationale) was established by the International Olympic Committee. It is important to note that the press with one and two hands was practiced at the Olympic tournaments until 1928, then they decided to carry out only the usual grips with two hands in snatch, clean and jerk, clean and press⁶.

History of modern strongmen sport development

David Webster from Scotland is one of the strongmen sport true founding fathers. Webster has written approximately 1000 articles in over 50 publications as well as more than 30 books of strength kinds of sports and traditional games. In 1995 he was awarded the Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II, because of his wide-ranging and effective work in support of physical culture and sports of the UK and because of how that work had introduced people all over the world to the ancient sport known as the Highland Games⁷.



Figure 1. David Webster and graphic «Icons» in The Stark Center⁷.

⁵ Siegman, Joseph M. The International Jewish Sports Hall of Fame – SP Books, 1992. C. 181.

⁶ Weightlifting. Encyclopedia Britannica website. March 23th 2019, retrieved from:

<https://www.britannica.com/sports/weightlifting#ref92272>

⁷ Todd, Terry. Our Davie / The Stark Center. March 23th 2019, retrieved from:

<https://www.starkcenter.org/2010/03/our-davie-2/>



In 1950-s traditional strength games were organized quite often, for example rural basks games in Sen-Pale (France)⁸, «Unspunnenfest» festival (Switzerland), Highland games (UK, USA, Canada, Australia). In 1955 Webster is having organized the first televised strongmen competition, which featured the lifting and carrying of heavy stones. He also consulted with the developers of the first “The World’s Strongest Man” contest in 1977 and went on to serve that show for over two decades in contests all over the world⁹. Show «The World`s Strongest Man» till now is the most successful project in history of strongmen sport.

Institutionalization of strongman sport started in 1980-s. It is assumed, that David Webster was a central figure in the creation of the International Federation of Strength Athletes (IFSA). Together with Dr. Douglas Edmunds (sevenfold champion of Scotland in discus throw and twofold World champion in Highland games) he allegedly founded the abovementioned organization in Glasgow (Scotland) in 1995⁹. Nevertheless, our research has discovered the fact, that such organization never has been officially registered¹⁰.

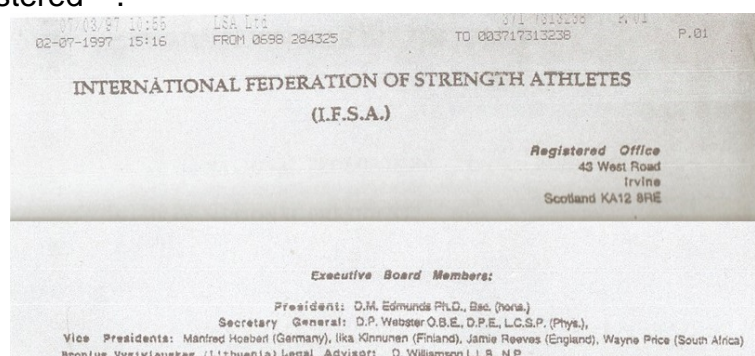


Figure 2. IFSA of Dr. Douglas Edmunds (из архива автора)

Undoubtedly David Webster was a leader in creating and establishing strongmen sport in 1989-1990-s, when together with Douglas Edmunds they established two companies – FISA Consultants Limited (existed from 1989 till 2000) and Strength Games'90 Limited (existed from 1990 till 2000)¹⁰. But with the establishing of IFSA there was an incident: there were two companies registered under the same name - in the UK (president Edmunds, general secretary Webster, Fig.2) and in Denmark (president Peter Anker, Fig.3). Standoff lasted some years and possibly the authority and experience of David Webster helped Edmunds to succeed in worldwide promotion of strongmen sport by uniting well - known athletes and organizers in the council (fictitious federation) IFSA.

⁸ Basque Culture Institute website. March 23th 2019, retrieved from: <https://www.eke.eus/>

⁹ Todd, Terry. Our Davie / The Stark Center. March 23th 2019, retrieved from: <https://www.starkcenter.org/2010/03/our-davie-2/>

¹⁰ Database of British Companies. March 23th 2019, retrieved from: <https://companycheck.co.uk/>

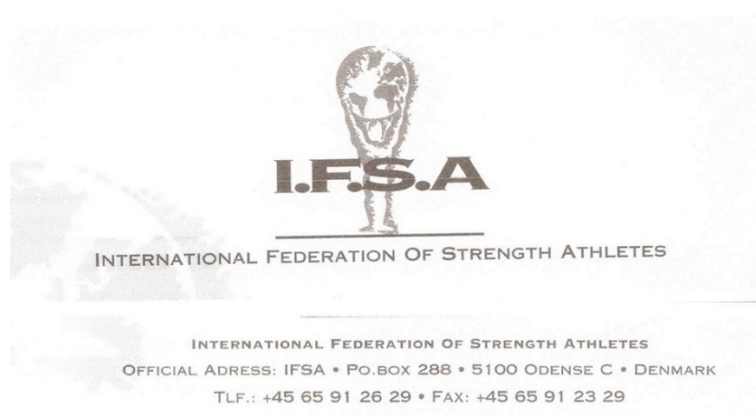


Figure 3. IFSA of Peter Anker (from authors archives)

In 1997, Manfred Hoerberl (Germany), one of the members of the IFSA board created the American Federation of Strength Athletes and held a number of tournaments (Figure 4)¹¹. But after the conflict with Edmunds in 1999 (possibly due to IFSA licensing fees and non-transparent selection for The World's Strongest Man tournament)¹², invited the world's leading athletes (Magnus Ver Magnusson, Riku Kiri, Flemming Rasmussen, Heinz Olesch, Derek Boyer, Wayne Price, Bill Lyndon) and held the «World Full Strength Challenge» in Dubai (United Arab Emirates)¹³. This led to the collapse of the IFSA executive board. But the contract with TWI¹⁴, for the technical conduct of the show «The World's Strongest Man», allowed Edmunds to remain the leader in the sport of strongmen. In 2000, he registered two companies with different founders IFSA International Limited (2000–2007) and IFSA Projects Limited (2000–2004)¹⁵.

¹¹ Manfred Hoerberl Personal Website Archive. March 23th 2019, retrieved from: https://web.archive.org/web/19990224041503fw_/http://www.manfred.com/afsa/about/pressrel.htm

¹² In the oldest website of strong men of the USA: Samson-Power. March 23th 2019, retrieved from: <http://www.samson-power.com/PB/pbwafsa.html>

¹³ Strossen, Randall J. Dubai: Day One... Iron Mind Enterprises. March 23th 2019, retrieved from: <http://www.ironmind.com/news/Dubai-Day-One.../>

¹⁴ Owner of brand «The World's Strongest Man».

¹⁵ Database of British Companies. March 23th 2019, retrieved from: <https://companycheck.co.uk/>



Figure 4. Manfred Hoerberl and Arnold ¹⁶

IFSA held Grand Prix competitions in 1995–2001 as a TWI partner in organizing «The World's Strongest Man» show. In 2001, IFSA entered an agreement (2001–2004) with company World Class Events, headed by Ulf Bengtsson, on running the Strongman Super Series, which had as its mission «awarding the only strongman World Championship title», still in cooperation with TWI. Besides, the Strongman Super Series was the way to qualify for the show «The World's Strongest Man» for winners of the tournaments¹⁷.

The annual Arnold Sports Festival in the USA, founded by Hollywood "star", actor and bodybuilder Arnold Schwarzenegger in 1989, became an important stage in the development of modern strongmen sport. In the early 1990s Jim Lorimer and Arnold Schwarzenegger invited Terry Todd to create and conduct a strongmen contest. Todd, in turn, asked for help from Webster (Fig.5). This is how the new Arnold Classic Strongman tournament (Arnold Strongman Classic), which was first held in 2002 in Ohio (USA), appeared. Webster spent the first ten years as a project manager. The feature of the tournament was and remains very heavyweight equipment and a large prize fund¹⁸.

¹⁶ Viking Strength. March 23th 2019, retrieved from:

<http://vikingstrength.com/2012/01/18/manfred-hoerberls-25-inch-guns-bodybuilder-strongman-1990s/>

¹⁷ Strossen, Randall J. IFSA, WCE, TWI, WSM, ESPN: Who's On First and How Do I Get To World's Strongest Man? IronMind Enterprises. March 23th 2019, retrieved from:

<http://www.ironmind.com/news/IFSA-WCE-TWI-WSM-ESPN-Whos-On-First-and-How-Do-I-Get-To-Worlds-Strongest-Man/>

¹⁸ Todd, Terry. Our Davie / The Stark Center. March 23th 2019, retrieved from:

<https://www.starkcenter.org/2010/03/our-davie-2/>



Figure 5. David Webster, Bill Kazmaier, and Terry Todd at the 2003 Arnold Strongman Classic in Columbus, Ohio.¹⁸

2004 was a landmark for the development of sports strongmen in the world. IFSA managed to attract an investor — Invest Group Sports Management, which allowed developing a sports package of documents (standards of disciplines and equipment, rules, doping control, marketing research, etc.). As a result, IFSA has become the world's leader in strongman sport. At the same time, IFSA was registered as a commercial company¹⁹, which created deep contradictions to the legal practice of the world sports system, in which international sports federations (associations, confederations, unions) should be exclusively non-profit public organizations. However, IFSA collapsed for another reason, this was promoted by a conflict of interest with TWI, which owned the brand The World's Strongest Man. The termination of the contract with TWI led to the bankruptcy and liquidation of IFSA in 2004²⁰.

In the same year, the World Series of the World Strongman Cup started under the auspices of the World Strongman Cup Federation, registered in Austria. Organization of eight stages of the World Cup strongman per year and the worldwide television distribution attracted many famous athletes, such as Mariusz Pudzianowsky, Vasily Virastyuk, Elbrus Nigmatullin, Brian Shaw, Glenn Ross, Mikhail Koklyaev, Raivis Widzis, Tarmo Mitt, Terry Hollands and others. The series successfully existed until 2007, and then the World strongmen Cup was held under the control of the World strongmen federation (WSF)²¹.

In 2007, financial problems arose at IFSA, which led to the collapse of the company (Figure 6). The world championship of strongmen in Korea was held without

¹⁹ IFSA Strongman Limited existed since 2004 till 2007. Source: Database of British Companies. March 23th 2019, retrieved from: <https://companycheck.co.uk/>

²⁰ Strossen, Randall J. IFSA, WCE, TWI, WSM, ESPN: Who's On First and How Do I Get To World's Strongest Man? IronMind Enterprises. March 23th 2019, retrieved from: <http://www.ironmind.com/news/IFSA-WCE-TWI-WSM-ESPN-Whos-On-First-and-How-Do-I-Get-To-Worlds-Strongest-Man/>

²¹ Strossen, Randall J. He's Back: Vlad Redkin Launches WSF. March 23th 2019, retrieved from: <http://www.ironmind.com/news/Hes-Back-Vlad-Redkin-Launches-WSF/>

paying prizes to athletes and unpaid debts for transporting the equipment from ABX Logistics. IFSA equipment, was sold by auction²².

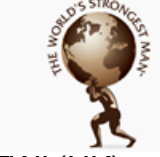


Figure 6. Collapse of IFSA «Now, it's fire sale time»²².

In 2008, two of the founders of IFSA - Ilkka Kinnunen and Marcel Mostert created the Strongman Champions League and continued to work with IFSA promoters in the world. Gradually, the residual influence of IFSA decreased, which led to the destruction of barriers between various parallel organizations and athletes were able to compete in more than one series. As a result, the organizers of the show “The Strongest Man of the World” in 2009 declared that they were gathering the best of the best.²³

The diversity of series and legal forms of registration in the world of strongmen is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Strongman industry participants (compiled by the author)

Trade mark/ Name/ Logo/ Owner/ Legal forms of registration / Website	Specification of tournament's organization
<p>“The World’s Strongest Man”</p>  <p>TWI (UK) – organizer of WSM – the event company of IMG http://www.theworldsstrongestman.com</p>	<p>One world championship per year, in absolute weight category. 30 athletes in 5 groups, with 6 disciplines for each group. Two best athletes from each group participate in final of WSM.</p>
<p>“Giants Live”</p>	<p>The main form of tournaments – series of Grand Prix, with 10–14 athletes in absolute weight category. Three best</p>



²² Strossen, Randall J. IFSA: Going, Going... March 23th 2019, retrieved from: <http://www.ironmind.com/news/IFSA-Going-Going-.../>

²³ Strossen, Randall J. World’s Strongest Man 2009: More on the Competitors. March 23th 2019, retrieved from: <http://www.ironmind.com/news/Worlds-Strongest-Man-2009-More-on-the-Competitors/>



 <p>Power Productions, Ltd (UK) Giants Live Limited Giants Merchandising Ltd Official Strongman Worldwide Ltd http://www.giants-live.com/ http://www.officialstrongman.com/</p>	<p>athletes from each GP receive the qualification to «The World's Strongest Man».</p>
<p>“Arnold Strongman Classic”</p>  <p>Classic Productions Inc www.arnoldsportsfestival.com www.arnoldstrongmanclassic.com</p>	<p>Untill 2013 – one tournament per year. Untill 2015 – 2 times per year. Since 2016 a serie with 6 tournaments in the World, with 10 athletes in absolute weight category, with 6 disciplines in each tournament.</p>
<p>“Strongman Champions League”</p>  <p>SCL Finland Oy http://www.strongmancl.com</p>	<p>10–18 tournaments Grand Prix per year. 10–14 athletes (absolute weight category) and 6 events in each GP. SCL has world championships in some weights categories.</p>
<p>“Strongman Corporation”</p>  <p>North American Strongman, Inc., USA https://strongmancorporation.com</p>	<p>For US – 2 divisions: amateur (with weight categories) and professional. In world – absolute weight category.</p>
<p>“Ultimate Strongman”</p>  <p>Daddy Promotions Ltd (UK) www.ultimatestrongman.tv</p>	<p>3 kinds of Grand Prix per year in World: - Masters - Juniors - Team Other activities in the UK. 2 weights categories: U105 and absolute.</p>
<p>«World Strongmen»</p>  <p>World Strongmen Federation Public sport organization (Latvia) https://strongmansport.org</p>	<p>3 directions of development: - amateur – pyramid of tournaments (nationals, sub-continental, contental, world championship in 4 weight categories); - professional, 6-8 World Cups per year, with 8–16 athletes of absolute weight category, with 5-7 disciplines in each cup; - ethnosport-strongmen – World Ethnosport Challenge tournaments serie with 8 athletes of absolute category, with 5 strongmen discipline in ethnostyle.</p>
<p>"World's Ultimate Strongman”</p>	<p>One tournament of strongman champions in absolute weight category</p>



 WUS, Inc. UAE www.worldsultimatestrongman.com	(since 2016) with prizes 150 000 USD per year.
 "GOLDEN GATE 2000" Inc. Hungary www.wnsf.world	One world championship per year, in absolute weight category, in Hungary.

Today strongmen mean various shows with a wide geography, and it can be easily explained – the tradition of strongmen competitions is represented in most cultures. Strongmen has good chances to become sports discipline because it with confidence demonstrates high interest of athletes and public towards such competitions. During the last 10 years, strongmen has become increasingly popular because of television. But, despite its history of 40 years, strongmen movement still consists of scattered commercial companies and sports associations. Growing dynamics of strongmen sport development (Fig.7) allows hoping that leading organization may appear, since no organization has established itself as a leading one up until now.

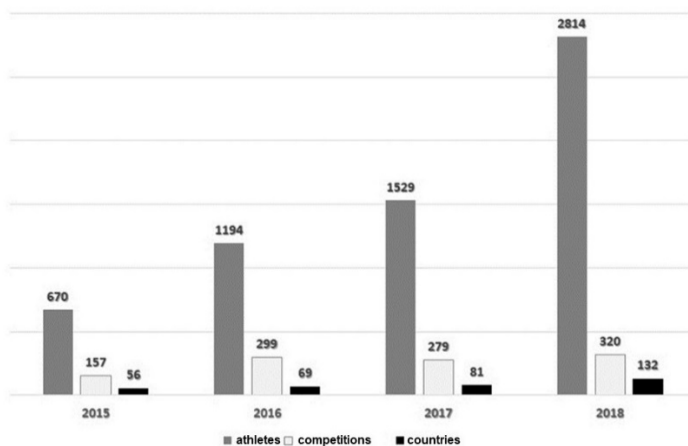


Figure 7. Growing dynamics of strongmen sport development in World²⁴.

Tournaments of Ethnosport Challenge and «ethnosport-strongmen» discipline

The World Strongmen Federation (WSF), being one of the key participants in the world's strongmen movement, in its striving for leadership, establishes partnerships with various sports organizations, including the International Association «Sport for All» (TAFISA), the General Association of Asia-Pacific Sports Federations (GAAPSF) and others. One of the most significant agreements was the Memorandum of Cooperation (2016) with the World Ethnosport. As a result of the signing of this document, the

²⁴ Compiled by the author according to statistics of strongmen sport, researcher Stef Mattens.



discipline «ethnosport-strongmen» appeared in the WSF statute. Moreover, President of World Ethnosport Alexey Kylasov joined the WSF board as Vice President, and Chairman of WSF Vladislav Redkin became Vice President of World Ethnosport.

Together with World Ethnosport, specifically for the World Series of Tournaments Ethnosport Challenge, the ethnosport-strongmen discipline was developed and introduced, which is a competition of 1.5-2 hours outdoors on the grass or sand. The minimum required area for competitions is 10x15 m, with barriers and sound equipment.

In competitions on the discipline of ethnosport-strongmen 5 exercises using the local tradition of strength playing are included (Figure 8). Tournament rules are easy to understand, there is only one winner in each exercise. The absolute winner is the athlete with the most wins in 5 exercises. With the same number of victories, additional exercise is appointed to identify the strongest. The final result in the team standing is calculated by the numbers of team representatives wins.



Figure 8. Ethnosport Challenge. Sample of disciplines.

Presented photos show the first competition in ethnosport-strongmen discipline, which took place on May 1, 2018, in the Luzhniki Olympic Sports Complex in Moscow, where the Ethnosport Federation of Russia held a test tournament of Ethnosport Challenge with 16 athletes. Artyom Kabanov (Moscow) won this tournament. The first international tournament of the World Series Ethnosport Challenge was held in Atmanov Ugol in Tambov region as a part of Russian traditional games Atmanov Kulachki. The absolute winner of the First Ethnosport Challenge was Vladimir Bulgakov (Russia) from the city of Kursk.

After the Russian tournament Kulachki Ethnosport Challenge, the World Series Ethnosport Challenge continued: Badang Ethnosport Challenge in Malaysia, Ilhabela Ethnosport Challenge in Brazil and Vilnius Ethnosport Challenge in Lithuania.

The concept of Ethnosport Challenge tournaments is unchanged for all competitions: four (eight) athletes or teams representing the Host Country team, against four (eight) athletes or teams from other countries representing the World Ethnosport team. The initial draw is held on the principle of challenge: the athletes of the host countries team choose their opponents from the World Ethnosport team, then



the knockout principle is used. The final result in the team competition is considered by the number of victories of representatives of the teams, in addition, the winner of the tournament in each type of competition is revealed.²⁵

Interestingly, the main idea of visualization was the ethnic images of the strongmen, made in a characteristic style for the author. The graphical decision of Andrey Lublinsky allows creating ethnocultural images of the strongmen in an endless sequence²⁶.



Figure 9. Visualization of the Ethnosport Challenge project ²⁶

Conclusion

In the genesis of strongmen sport worldwide tradition of strongmen tournaments presents itself clearly. It has been present in most of world's cultures. Strongmen movement still consists of scattered commercial companies and sports associations and has no leading organization. Such a situation opens a window of opportunity for the World Strongmen Federation (WSF) to become a leader of the world's strongmen movement. Additional opportunities are offered by the fact, that strongmen movement is very likely to become sport discipline because it with confidence demonstrates high interest of bodybuilding, weightlifting and powerlifting athletes, television and audience.

But for sportization of strongmen additional drivers of its development needs to be find and ethnosport can become one of them. Diversification of the strongmen world's movement based on the strategic partnership of WSF and World Ethnosport is expressed as the creation of ethnosport - strongmen discipline, which secures sustainable development and at the same time secures the preservation of traditional strength games and competitions as part of intangible cultural heritage.

The launch of the joint innovative project - The World Series of Ethnosport Challenge tournaments in 2018 demonstrated the worldwide demand towards such events. Brasilia, India, China and Russia have become growth spots of strongmen sports. The fast growth of economies in these BRICS²⁷ countries support additional expectations.

²⁵ Kylasov, Alexey (2018) Marketing support of the Ethnosport Challenge World Series of tournaments // Uchenye zapiski Rossijskoj akademii predprinimatel'stva. Nauchno-prakticheskoe izdanie. T. 17, № 4. M: Rossijskaya akademiya predprinimatel'stva; Agentstvo pechati «Nauka i obrazovanie», 2018. S. 145–152.

²⁶ Visualization of the Ethnosport Challenge project. World Ethnosport website. March 23th 2019, retrieved from: <http://ethnosport.org/news/90.htm>

²⁷ According to the first letters of the names of the countries, which also include South Africa, indicated by the last letter of the English name of the country – South Africa.



The most important advantage of joint development of ethnosport and strongmen sport is that joint actions help to solve problems, arising for them separately. For example, non - existence of famous athletes in ethnosport traditional games is compensated by «the strongest athletes». Additionally, typical strength exercises of strongmen sport receive a unique aspect of traditional games.

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