

# Out of Darkness

**The Hold Taken - Catch Around the World**

**Ruslan Pashayev**

## **Part 3**

**The name is Boers Folk Wrestling, the place is  
South Africa**



**Ruslan Pashayev**

*My name is Ruslan Pashayev and I am a professional wrestling fan from Delaware, Ohio (USA). Besides that I am a professional ballroom dancer, choreographer, and coach. As a hobby I have researched the history of professional wrestling since 2005.*

### **History**

The Boers or Afrikaners are South Africans of Dutch, Flemish, German and French (Huguenot) descent. Usually the Boers folk wrestling matches along with other rustic sports like climbing the slippery pole, foot racing, and leaping were played on the annual Farmers' Day (Boerendag).

A 1902 newspaper article spoke of the Boers wrestling: *"Amongst the young Boers wrestling is exceedingly popular. The champion wrestler of a district is as much thought of as is his confrere in the North of England. Such a man can always have the pick of the prettiest girls in the district for a wife."*

In his memoirs Boer military commander General Ben Bouwer (1875-1938) mentioned the popularity of wrestling as a pastime amongst the Boer officers. He gives an account of his success in a wrestling match against a local strongman and wrestling champion, General Manie Maritz (1876-1940). A horse was at stake in that contest. The famous South African pro wrestling champion Manie Maritz (1925-2018) was the son of that military of the same name.

Wrestling customs of the Boers were of Dutch/Flemish origin. By the beginning of the XX century traditional folk wrestling styles were long forgotten in the Netherlands and Flanders, but



*"An elegant crowd watching men wrestling."*

*Unknown, Flanders XVII century.*

they were still actively practiced by the Boers in the XVIII and XIX centuries.

It appears that organised pro wrestling wasn't as common in Netherlands and Flanders as in England. The most popular wrestling style of local farmers' (boers) was freestyle wrestling called *Stoeijen* (to touse, to tangle, to scuffle, to handle roughly). It was practiced in the form of fun wrestling games (*joks-worstelen*) which along with other wrestling styles and cudgels were played during various folk and religious festivals such as *Kermis van Sint Joris/Kermis of St. George* (Patron of Military and Martial Arts).

The wrestling styles of Dutch and Flemish people existed in two modes, the standing wrestling and the up and down wrestling.

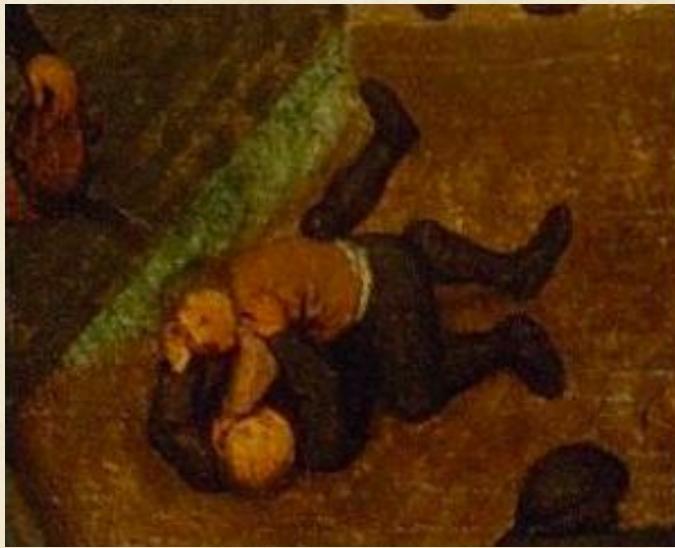
### **Description**

Amongst techniques used in *Stoeijen* were *aanklampen* (catching holds) and *vasthaken* (hooking legs). Both of those skills are shown on a XVII century painting called *"An elegant crowd watching men wrestling in a landscape."* *Plukharen* (grasping hair) as well as any other non-wrestling or deliberately brutal acts were strictly prohibited during the wrestling contests.

Before the match the two farmers negotiated the wrestling conditions of the match, whether it'll be *Lyfvat*, *Neergooi* or *Ondergooi*.

*Lyfvat* (*Lijfvat*) was an equal above and under grip around the body/waist (German *Bauern-Griff*, Peasants Grip). Historically it was a fixed hold archaic trial of strength. The objective of the original *Lyfvat* match was to unbalance the opponent without using any wrestling techniques and take him down. In that game the physical strength was a decisive factor.

In the Late Middle Ages the Peasants' Grip or *Lyfvat* Hug became a common opening clinch hold in wrestling matches. After taking that hold wrestlers were allowed to break and switch holds anyway they wanted and as often as they pleased. Sometimes the catch-holds were restricted either to the "torso holds only" (similar to the German *Old Ringen*) or to the "catch-holds above the waist only" (similar to the French *Huguenots* wrestling "above the waist" of *Lutte Provencales*). If there were no limitations regarding the catch-holds then it was *Stoeijen* freestyle wrestling.



*"Childrens Games"  
Up and Down Wrestling  
Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1560*

Neergooi and Ondergooi were two distinctive modes of Stoeijen freestyle wrestling. In Stoeijen wrestlers started the match either at a distance from each other or with an opening hold (the referee hold) the Lyvat Hug.

Neergooi (throwing someone down, wrestling for a throw/fall) was a standing Stoeijen which required unbalancing or taking opponent off his feet using various holds and wrestling techniques and throwing him down, with or without the attacker falling himself. Back falls as well as falls on any part of the body (foils) except hands, knees and feet counted. In this style only flying falls were legal.

Ondergooi (throwing someone down and keeping him underneath) was an up and down Stoeijen which required throwing the adversary down, preferably flat on his back with the attacker landing on top, or taking him down and placing him on his back during the struggle on the ground, and then keeping him immovable in the undermost position for the previously agreed amount of time, or making him admit his defeat verbally or by raising his hand. In this style only pinning falls signified the victory.

A painting by the Dutch and Flemish Renaissance genius artist Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525-1569) in 1560 titled "Children's Games" depicts the Ondergooi wrestling among other games popular in Netherlands and Flanders during the Middle Ages. It shows two men grappling with each other on the ground, one trying to achieve a basic pro wrestling pin the Cover (lateral or cross press).

Besides the Ondergooi wrestling mode there was also a game for boys of the same name. The description of that game was given by Ernst Jacobus du Plessis in his book called "Gister Keer Terug" (Return of Yesterday), 1994 and it also appeared in "Tydskrif vir volkskunde en Volkstaal" (Journal of Folklore and Vernacular), Volumes 46-49, 1990. *"Ondergooi is a game which is also played by two boys. They grasp each other from the front around the body (opening hold aka Peasants Grip) and one tries to throw the other on his back underneath himself. In that stage feinting manoeuvres (deceptive or distracting movement) play an important role, a player faking movement to the right but quickly changing direction throws his opponent to the left, or vice-versa. If a player succeeded in throwing his opponent to the ground, he must hold him down underneath his own body (captured) for as long as possible. His opponent*

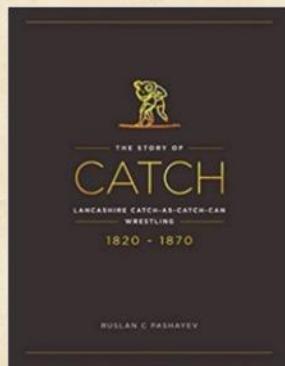


*"Two Peasants Fighting" Master of the Housebook, Germany, c 1475/1480*

## **The Story of Catch: The Story of Lancashire Catch-as-catch-can Wrestling.**

**FIRST FIFTY YEARS 1820-1870.** by Ruslan C Pashayev

The Birth and Evolution of Catch-as-Catch-Can Pro-Wrestling in East Lancashire, England. "The Story of Catch" covers the most forgotten stages of Lancashire's Catch Wrestling history, including its origin, its fast growth and evolution during first fifty years of Catch, introduction of professionalism and its Golden Era, as well as introduction and popularization of it in the United States. This story has many heroes who affected Catch in its early stages and remained in history as true symbols of Lancashire Wrestling. But the whole story is dedicated to the memory of Adam Ridings of Bury, Lancs (1819-1894), who was also known under the nickname of "Dockum of Bury" a pioneer of Catch Wrestling, and the most prominent and popular wrestler of Lancashire in the 1840's-1850's. For anyone with a serious interest in history of professional wrestling "The Story of Catch" is a must.



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*will be on his back and he will be lying on top of him. A good technique is to continuously push forward to prevent opponent from escaping from under you."*

The Neergooi and Ondergooi styles of Stoeijen corresponded to the "Half" (Halber) and "Full" (Ganzer) modes of German folk freestyle wrestling Ringen respectively.

In contemporary British sources it was mentioned that Boers were not familiar with the scientific wrestling. That is understandable since in its core Dutch/Flemish folk wrestling significantly differed from English folk styles because it allowed holds of any part of the person's body as well as wrestling on the ground. This was unacceptable in English wrestling styles. Also, the traditional English concept of scientific wrestling assumed proficiency in the noble art of tripping. In both the Cumberland/Westmorland Back Hold and the Cornish/Devon jackets style that particular skill was a decisive factor for winning a match.

In the Dutch/Flemish Stoeijen the use of legs and feet for throwing was practiced as well but it wasn't favoured since most of the throws were given from the catch-holds. "Lift and Throw" technique dominated Stoeijen wrestling. A famous painting by the Dutch and Flemish Renaissance artist Jan Gossaert (1478-1532), the 1523 "Hercules wrestling with Antaeus", shows the most classic pro wrestling Crotch Hold and Bodyslam. Notably, the original old Lancashire catch wrestling which originated from the Dutch/Flemish Stoeijen didn't require much knowledge in the tripping discipline either; instead fast catching of an advantageous hold of opponent's body and take down was the main focus of wrestlers.

### **Current status**

The folk wrestling styles of Boers were very popular in the XVIII-XIX centuries but they slowly became extinct after the introduction of traditional British wrestling styles (namely Cumberland and Westmorland Back-hold, Cornish wrestling and Catch-as-catch-can) in South Africa in the early 1900s.

Nowadays the International/Olympic styles of wrestling (namely Graeco-Roman and Freestyle) are the only wrestling styles practiced in South Africa.